

Take Command of Your Writing

A comprehensive guide to
more effective writing



Jill Meryl Levy
Firebelle Productions

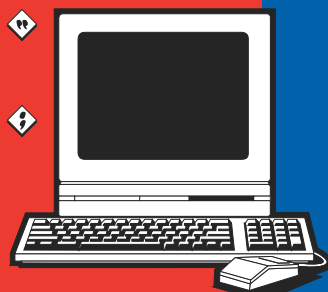
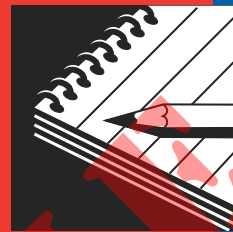


Table of Contents

The following is an overview of the various chapters. A detailed list of topics starts on the next page.

Punctuation

Chapter 1	Commas	23
Chapter 2	Other Marks of Punctuation	73

The Parts of Speech

Chapter 3	Parts of Speech	135
Chapter 4	Subject-Verb Agreement	165
Chapter 5	More on Verbs	193
Chapter 6	Adjectives and Adverbs	211
Chapter 7	Pronouns and Antecedents	235

Words

Chapter 8	Spelling	267
Chapter 9	Compound Words	293
Chapter 10	Finding the Right Word	335

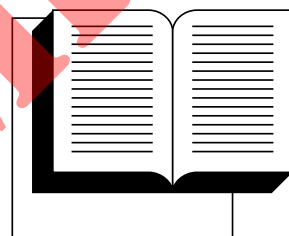
Mechanics

Chapter 11	Capitalization	381
Chapter 12	Abbreviations and Acronyms	415
Chapter 13	Numbers	445

Beyond the Basics

Chapter 14	More Effective Writing	471
Chapter 15	Writing for Special Applications	519
Chapter 16	In the Eye of the Beholder	563
Chapter 17	Glossary	611
	Bibliography	633
	Index	639

**Take Command
of Your Writing
is organized into
17 informative
chapters.**



**The following
pages provide
a detailed
breakdown of
the contents of
each chapter.**

Table of Contents

**Chapter 1
addresses the
rules for using
commas.**



**Commas are
often used to
join main
clauses.**

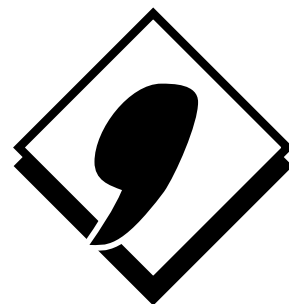
**Commas are
used to set off
nonessential
elements.**

Chapter 1 • Commas (,)	23
Introduction	24
An Overview of the Rules	24
When in Doubt: Guidelines to Fall Back On	26
Between Main Clauses	28
Linking Main Clauses	28
Positioning Commas Correctly	29
Beginning with a Coordinating Conjunction	30
Using Semicolons in Place of Commas	31
After Introductory Words, Phrases, and Clauses	32
Yes, No, and Mild Interjections	32
Transitional Expressions, Independent Comments	33
Introductory Phrases	33
Introductory Dependent (or Subordinate) Clauses	34
Exceptions and Special Circumstances	35
With Transitional Expressions and Independent Comments	38
Transitional Expressions Defined	38
Independent Comments Defined	39
At the Beginning of a Sentence or Clause	39
At the End of a Sentence	41
Within the Sentence	41
The Word <i>Too</i>	42
With Nonessential Elements	43
Adjective Phrases and Clauses	43
Adverb Phrases and Clauses	44
Appositives	45
Parenthetical Elements	47
Absolute Phrases	47
With Additional Considerations	48
Nonessential Phrases	48
Phrases That Interrupt the Flow	48
To Express Contrast	49
Phrases That Express Contrast	49
Where It Gets a Little Tricky	50
Between Items in a Series	51
Two Items in a Series	51
Three or More Items in a Series	51
Conjunctions Versus Commas	53
Paired Items	53
Commas and Semicolons Combined	53

Table of Contents

To Set Off Examples	54
Introductory Expressions	54
Closing Expressions	54
Essential Examples	54
Nonessential (Parenthetical) Examples	55
Elements Introduced by <i>e.g.</i> or <i>i.e.</i>	56
Between Adjectives	57
When to Use Commas Between Adjectives	57
When to Omit Commas Between Adjectives	57
To Indicate Omitted Words	59
With Parallel Thoughts Joined by a Semicolon	59
With the Omission of <i>That</i>	59
To Separate Words for Drama or Clarity	60
To Create Drama	60
To Separate Identical or Similar Words	60
With Names and Titles	61
Names and Words of Address	61
Professional and Job Titles	61
Individual and Company Names	61
To Open and Close a Letter	62
The Salutation	62
The Closing	62
With Addresses and Locations	63
Two or More Location Elements on the Same Line	63
With Dates	64
Three or More Date Elements	64
One or Two Date Elements	64
Dates as Introductory Elements	65
With Long Numbers	66
When to Use Commas	66
When to Omit Commas	66
With Quotation Marks	67
To Set Off Direct Quotations	67
Once Again, For Clarity	68
To Prevent Misreading	68

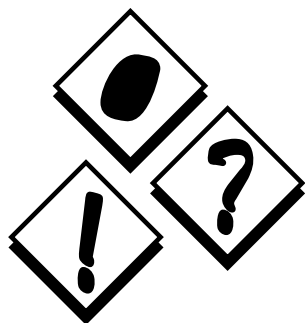
Commas are used to separate words for clarity.



Commas are used in several other specific situations.

Table of Contents

**Chapter 2 covers
the rest of
punctuation.**



**It begins with
the major marks
of punctuation
used to end a
sentence.**

Where to Avoid Using Commas	69
Between Subject and Verb	69
Between Verb and Object	69
Between Parts of a Compound Subject	70
Between Parts of a Compound Object	70
Between Parts of a Compound Predicate	71
After the Last Item in a Series	71
Chapter 2 • Other Marks of Punctuation	73
Periods (.)	74
To End a Sentence	74
To End an Indirect Question	74
To End a Polite Request	74
To End Elliptical Expressions	75
To Punctuate Some Abbreviations	76
To Separate Initials in a Name	76
To Separate Some Numbers	76
To Punctuate an Outline or Displayed List	76
To Punctuate Run-In Headings	77
Periods Used with Quotation Marks	77
Question Marks (?)	78
To End a Direct Question	78
To End a Rhetorical Question	78
To End a Sentence Spoken with Rising Intonation	79
To End Elliptical Questions or Questions in Series	79
To Punctuate Questions Within Other Sentences	79
To Indicate Doubt or Uncertainty	81
Question Marks with Quotation Marks	81
Exclamation Points (!)	82
To End Emphatic Interjections or Statements	82
To End Emphatic Commands	82
Exclamation Points in Place of Question Marks	83
Exclamation Points with Quotation Marks	83
Exclamation Points in Moderation	83
Semicolons (;)	84
To Join Two Closely Related Sentences	84
To Separate Items in a Series	86
Colons (:	87
To Introduce a List	87
To Introduce Statements, Quotations, and So On	88
To Introduce an Explanation	91
To Punctuate Elements in Correspondence	92
To Separate Other Items	92

Apostrophes (')	93
To Form Contractions	93
To Show Possession - Basic Principles	95
Possessive Personal Pronouns: No Apostrophe	98
Possessive Phrases with the Word <i>Of</i>	98
Possessives Before <i>-ing</i> Verbs Serving as Nouns	99
Don't Confuse Possessives with Ordinary Plurals	99
Descriptive Versus Possessive: No Apostrophe	99
Special Problems in Forming Possessives	101
To Form Some Plurals	102
Quotation Marks (" ") or (' ')	104
To Enclose Quotations	104
To Enclose Dialogue	107
To Emphasize Particular Words or Phrases	107
To Enclose Titles	110
Quotation Marks with Other Punctuation Marks	111
Dashes (—)	114
To Show a Sudden Change in Thought or Tone	114
To Show an Interrupted or Incomplete Sentence	114
To Set Off Parenthetical Elements	115
To Set Off an Appositive	115
To Emphasize a Single Word	115
To Replace Offensive Words	116
To Show Hesitation or Faltering Speech	116
To Set Off Series or Explanations	116
To Identify the Source of a Quote	116
Ellipses (. . .)	117
To Indicate Omission	117
To Leave Something Unfinished	118
To Show Faltering Speech	119
Ellipses with Other Punctuation Marks	119
Alternative Ellipses Marks	119
Hyphens (-)	120
To Divide Words from One Line to the Next	120
To Communicate Some Numbers	124
To Tie Elements Together (Suspending Hyphens)	125
To Show Hesitation or Stuttering	125
To Identify Prefixes and Suffixes	125
Slashes (/)	126
To Indicate Options	126
To Indicate Two Functions	126
To Report Numbers	127
To Punctuate Some Abbreviations	127

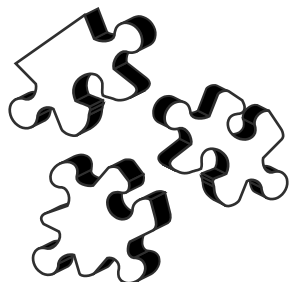
The chapter continues with other punctuation marks (like these) . . .



. . . that help guide readers through a sentence.

Table of Contents

**Chapter 3
provides an
overview of the
eight parts of
speech and how
they function
with one
another.**



Parentheses ()	128
To Set Aside Parenthetical Elements	128
To Introduce an Acronym or Abbreviation	128
To Introduce Another Name	129
To Confirm a Number	129
To Identify Items in a Series	129
To Provide Reference or Direction	129
To Clarify a Date or Location	130
Parentheses with Other Punctuation Marks	130
Brackets []	132
To Enclose a Notation or Explanation	132
To Acknowledge or Correct an Error	132
To Identify Other Alterations	133
To Act as a Second Set of Parentheses	133
To Supplement Information in a Transcript	133
Chapter 3 - Parts of Speech	135
Introduction	136
For More Information	136
Nouns	137
What Is a Noun?	137
Types of Nouns	137
Additional Clues for Recognizing Nouns	139
Functions of a Noun	140
Pronouns	142
What Is a Pronoun?	142
Types of Pronouns	142
Functions of a Pronoun	143
For More Information	145
Verbs	146
What Is a Verb?	146
Types of Verbs	146
Verb Tenses: An Overview	149
For More Information	149
Adjectives	150
What Is an Adjective?	150
Types of Adjectives	150
Comparative and Superlative Adjectives	151
How Other Parts of Speech Serve as Adjectives	151
Placement of Adjectives	152
The Order of Adjectives	153
For More Information	153

Adverbs	154
What Is an Adverb?	154
How Adverbs Modify Other Words	154
Comparative and Superlative Adverbs	155
How Other Parts of Speech Serve as Adverbs	155
Positioning Adverbs	156
For More Information	156
Prepositions	157
What Is a Preposition?	157
Object of the Preposition	157
Prepositional Phrases	158
Placement of Prepositions	158
Unnecessary Prepositions	159
Conjunctions	160
What Is a Conjunction?	160
Types of Conjunctions	160
Interjections	163
What Are Interjections?	163
Strong Interjections Versus Mild Interjections	163
Chapter 4 - Subject-Verb Agreement	165
Introduction	166
Grammatical Number and Person	166
Basic Subject-Verb Agreement	166
Compound (or Multiple) Subjects	168
Subjects Joined by <i>And</i>	168
Two Subjects <i>That Act as One</i>	168
Subjects with <i>Supplemental Information</i>	168
Subjects Modified by <i>Each, Every, or Many A</i>	169
Subjects Joined by <i>Or</i> or Similar Words	170
Indefinite Pronouns	172
Singular Indefinite Pronouns	172
Plural Indefinite Pronouns	173
Indefinite Pronouns That May Be Singular or Plural	174
Phrases with <i>One Of . . .</i>	175
Relative Pronouns	176
Collective Nouns	177
The Group as One Unit - Singular	177
The Group as Separate Individuals - Plural	177

**Chapter 4
covers
subject-verb
agreement.**

**There are two
grammatical
numbers
(singular and
plural) and three
grammatical
persons (first,
second, and
third).**



**Subjects and
verbs must
agree in number
and person.**

Table of Contents

**Chapter 5
provides more
information on
verbs—words
that express
action or a
state of being.**

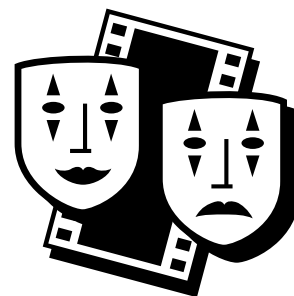


**This chapter
covers the
basics: regular
and irregular
verbs, verb
tense, and mood.**

Numbers and Quantities	179
Time, Money, and Quantity	179
“A Number,” “The Number”	180
Nouns Ending in S	181
Nouns That Are Singular in Meaning	181
Nouns That Are Plural in Meaning	181
Nouns That May Be Singular or Plural	182
Two-Part Objects	182
Nouns Ending in ICS	183
Nouns of Foreign Origin	184
Miscellaneous Names and Words	186
Company Names	186
Geographic Names	186
Words Being Defined or Described	187
Titles	187
Phrases or Clauses Serving as Subjects	188
Phrases and Clauses in General	188
Clauses Beginning with <i>What</i>	188
Sentences Beginning with <i>There</i> , <i>Here</i> , or <i>It</i>	189
Sentences Beginning with <i>There</i> or <i>Here</i>	189
Sentences Beginning with <i>It</i>	190
More Effective Sentences	190
Sentences with Inverted Word Order	191
Miscellaneous Rules	192
Linking Verbs	192
Positive and Negative Subjects	192
Exceptions and Special Circumstances	192
Chapter 5 - More on Verbs	193
Recognizing Regular and Irregular Verbs	194
Regular Verbs	194
Irregular Verbs	194
Using a Dictionary to Identify Regular and Irregular Verbs	198
Using the Correct Verb Tense	199
Verb Tenses: An Overview	199
The Present Tense	200
The Past Tense	200
The Future Tense	201
The Present Perfect Tense	201

The Past Perfect Tense	201
The Future Perfect Tense	202
The Present Progressive Tense	203
The Past Progressive Tense	203
The Future Progressive Tense	204
The Present Perfect Progressive Tense	204
The Past Perfect Progressive Tense	204
The Future Perfect Progressive Tense	205
Using the Correct Mood	206
The Three Moods	206
More on the Subjunctive Mood	207
Chapter 6 - Adjectives and Adverbs	211
Recognizing Adjectives and Adverbs	212
Adjectives Defined	212
Adverbs Defined	212
The Relation Between Adjectives and Adverbs	213
Choosing Between Adjectives and Adverbs	216
What Are You Trying to Modify?	216
Can You Substitute Some Form of <i>Be</i> ?	216
Can You Substitute <i>in a . . . Manner</i> ?	217
Using Comparative and Superlative Modifiers	218
Recognize the Comparative and Superlative Forms	218
Use the Correct Form	219
Compare Like Things	220
Avoid Confusing Comparisons	220
Avoid Double Comparisons	221
Avoid Illogical Comparisons	221
Positioning Adjectives and Adverbs	222
Position Based on Type of Modifier	222
Position Based on Meaning	223
Position Based on Emphasis	224
Position Based on Ease of Reading	224
Fixing Misplaced Modifiers	227
Place Modifiers Close to the Words They Modify	227
Avoid Squinting Modifiers	228
Fixing Dangling Modifiers	229
Recognize Dangling Modifiers	229
Eliminate Dangling Modifiers	229
Don't Fix What Isn't Broken	233

Chapter 6
is about
adjectives and
adverbs—words
that modify or
describe other
words.



Adjectives
modify nouns
and pronouns.

Adverbs
modify verbs,
adjectives, and
other adverbs.

Table of Contents

**Chapter 7
is about the
correct use of
pronouns.**



**Pronouns are
words used in
place of nouns.**

Chapter 7 - Pronouns and Antecedents	235
Pronouns and Antecedents Defined	236
Pronouns	236
Antecedents	237
Pronouns Used as Adjectives	237
Agreement in Number	238
One Noun or Pronoun	238
Indefinite Pronouns	238
Two Nouns or Pronouns Joined by <i>And</i>	240
Nouns Joined by <i>Or</i> or <i>Nor</i>	240
A Compound Noun After <i>Each</i> or <i>Every</i>	241
Collective Nouns	241
Agreement with Gender	242
When One Gender Is Clearly Appropriate	242
Options for Dealing with Gender Problems	242
Agreement with Person	245
Make Pronouns and Antecedents Agree in Person	245
Avoid Shifts in Person	245
The Correct Pronoun Based on Case	246
An Overview of the Three Cases	246
The Nominative (or Subjective) Case	246
The Objective Case	247
The Possessive Case	248
Other Case Studies	250
Compound Personal Pronouns	252
Correct Use of Compound Personal Pronouns	252
Misuse of Compound Personal Pronouns	252
Interrogative and Relative Pronouns	253
Interrogative Pronouns	253
Relative Pronouns	253
<i>Who</i> or <i>Whom</i> ? (<i>Whoever</i> or <i>Whomever</i> ?)	253
<i>Whose</i> or <i>Who's</i> ?	255
<i>Who</i> , <i>Which</i> , or <i>That</i> ?	255
Demonstrative and Reciprocal Pronouns	257
Demonstrative Pronouns	257
Reciprocal Pronouns	257

Faulty Pronoun Reference	258
What Is Faulty Pronoun Reference?	258
When There Are Multiple Antecedents	258
When the Pronoun Is Too Far from the Antecedent	260
When the Antecedent Is Only Implied	261
When <i>It</i> , <i>They</i> , and <i>You</i> Are Used Without Reference	262
The Appropriate Pronouns for Companies or Organizations	264
Company Names Are Generally Singular	264
Plural Pronouns Can Be Used When Appropriate	264
Chapter 8 - Spelling	267
Introduction	268
How Spelling Errors Can Hurt You	268
The Purpose of This Chapter	268
Techniques to Improve Your Spelling	269
Use Spell Checkers	269
Pronounce Words Properly	269
Be Familiar with Frequently Confused Words	270
Spell Carefully	270
Proofread Carefully	270
Use Memory Devices (Mnemonics)	271
Make Your Own List of Troublesome Words	272
Use a Bad Speller's Dictionary	272
Ask People How to Spell Their Names	272
Basic Spelling Guidelines	273
<i>EI</i> or <i>IE</i>	273
<i>AR</i> , <i>ER</i> , or <i>OR</i>	274
<i>ARY</i> , <i>ERY</i> , or <i>ORY</i>	275
<i>EL</i> or <i>ELL</i>	275
<i>IZE</i> , <i>ISE</i> , or <i>YZE</i>	276
<i>EFY</i> or <i>IFY</i>	276
<i>CEDE</i> , <i>CEED</i> , or <i>SEDE</i>	277
American Versus British Spellings	277
Different Spellings for Different Forms	277
Words with Diacritical Marks	277
Adding Prefixes	278
Don't Change the Spelling of the Original Word	278
Use the Correct Prefix	278
Adding Suffixes	279
Doubling a Consonant Before Adding a Suffix	279
Dropping the Final Silent <i>E</i>	282
Changing the Final <i>Y</i> to <i>I</i>	283
Words Ending in <i>ABLE</i> or <i>IBLE</i>	284

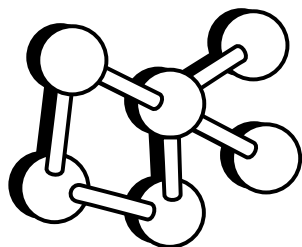
Chapter 8 starts with techniques you can use to improve your spelling.



The chapter continues with guidelines to help you determine how to spell specific words.

Table of Contents

**Chapter 9
covers
compound
words—two
or more words
used together
to express a
single idea.**



**The emphasis is
on determining
how compounds
should be
formed: open,
closed, or
hyphenated.**

Words Ending in <i>ANT, ENT, ANCE</i> , or <i>ENCE</i>	285
Words Ending in <i>LY</i> or <i>ALLY</i>	286
Words Ending in <i>FUL</i>	287
Words Ending in <i>C</i>	287
Forming Plurals	288
Most Words	288
Nouns That End in <i>S, X, Z, CH</i> , or <i>SH</i>	288
Nouns That End in <i>Y</i>	288
Nouns That End in <i>O</i>	288
Nouns That End in <i>F, FE</i> , or <i>FF</i>	289
Nouns That Have Irregular Plurals	289
Words That Don't Change Spelling	290
Proper Names	290
Nouns of Foreign Origin	290
Compound Nouns	291
Chapter 9 – Compound Words	293
Introduction	294
Warning: The Experts Don't Always Agree!	294
A Good Dictionary Is Essential	294
Definitions	295
Compound Words by Form	295
Compound Words by Function	295
Compound Words by Duration	296
Basic Concepts	297
Compounds May Be Closed, Open, or Hyphenated	297
There Is a Trend Toward Closed Compounds	298
Some Words May Have More Than One Spelling	298
Compounds May or May Not Change Form	298
Suspending Hyphens Serve as Placeholders	299
Compound Nouns	300
Introduction	300
General Guidelines	300
Noun + Present Participle	301
Verb + Adverb	301
Compound with a Letter	302
Phrases as Compounds	302
Possessive Noun + Noun	303
Names and Titles	303
Scientific and Technical Terms	304
Compound Verbs	306
General Guidelines	306
Verb-Adverb Compounds	306

Compound Adverbs	307
General Guidelines	307
Compound Adverbs Containing Prepositions	307
Compound Adjectives: Basic Concepts	308
Clarity Is the Ultimate Goal	308
Hyphens Often Make Relations Clear	309
The Old Familiar Rule Can Be Misleading	310
Compound Adjectives: The Advanced Course	312
Introduction	312
Adjective + Noun	313
Compound Nouns	314
Noun + Adjective	315
Noun + Participle	316
Adjective + Participle	317
Adjective + Noun + <i>ed</i>	318
Adverb + Participle	319
Adverb + Adjective	321
Participle + Adverb	321
Adjective + Adjective	322
Verb + Verb	324
Verb + Adverb	325
Verb + Noun	326
Phrases as Compounds	327
Compounds with Numbers	329
Compounds with Letters	331
Proper Nouns	331
Compounds Formed with Foreign Expressions	331
Prefixes, Suffixes, and Combining Forms	332
The Trend Is Toward Closed Compounds	332
Sometimes Hyphens Are Needed	332
Chapter 10 - Finding the Right Words	335
Words and Expressions That Are Often Confused	336
Chapter 11 - Capitalization	381
Introduction	382
Avoid Full Caps Whenever Possible	382
Sentences and Quotations	383
Sentences	383
Questions	385
Quotations	387
Information That Follows Colons	389

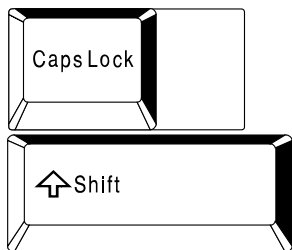
**Chapter 10
is called
"Finding the
Right Words."**



**This chapter
is designed
to help you
distinguish
between two
or more similar
words.**

Table of Contents

Chapter 11 addresses capitalization concerns.



Under what circumstances should you capitalize?

Titles and Headings	391
General Guidelines	391
Exceptions and Special Situations	392
Proper Nouns and Adjectives	394
Proper Nouns Versus Common Nouns	394
Proper Adjectives	395
Names and Titles	396
Personal Names	396
Family Titles	396
Professional Titles	397
Titles Under the Incident Command System	399
Government and Other Organizations	401
Official Government Offices	401
Organizations and Institutions	403
Other Capitalization Concerns	404
Places and Locations	404
Compass Directions	405
Stars and Planets	405
Days, Dates, and Times	406
Laws and Legal Materials	407
Medical and Scientific Terms	408
Signs and Notices	408
Military Terms	409
Awards and Honors	409
People and Their Languages	409
Religious References	410
Trademarks and Brand Names	411
Numbers and Letters Combined with Words	411
Educational Programs	412
Mottoes and Slogans	413
Sports	413
The Opening and Closing of a Letter	413
The Pronoun <i>I</i>	414
Forms and Programs	414
Personifications	414
Poetry	414
Abbreviations and Acronyms	414
Chapter 12 - Abbreviations and Acronyms	415
Abbreviation or Acronym?	416
Abbreviations Defined	416
Acronyms Defined	417
Words That Fit Neither Category	417

General Guidelines	418
Recognize the Advantages	418
Limit Abbreviations in Ordinary Writing	418
Properly Introduce New Abbreviations or Acronyms	419
Use or Omit Periods as Appropriate	419
Use Only One Period at the End of a Sentence	422
Use or Omit Spaces as Appropriate	423
Form Plurals with s or 's as Appropriate	423
Use an Apostrophe to Form the Possessive	424
Use Articles (<i>a</i> , <i>an</i> , and <i>the</i>) as Appropriate	424
Don't Start Sentences with Some Abbreviations	425
Use Abbreviations Rather Than Contractions	425
Names and Titles	426
Proper Names	426
General Forms of Address	427
Medical or Academic Degrees	428
Military and Civil Titles	429
Titles of the Clergy	429
Places and Locations	430
Addresses	430
State Names	431
Country Names	433
Names of Organizations	434
Company Names in Ordinary Writing	434
Official Abbreviations or Acronyms	434
Dates and Times	435
General Guidelines	435
Day and Month Abbreviations	436
Abbreviations of Time	436
Units of Measure	438
In Ordinary Writing	438
In Technical and Scientific Writing	438
With or Without Periods	439
Other Guidelines	439
Latin Expressions	441
Using the Latin Abbreviations	441
Miscellaneous Abbreviations	442
Chemical Names and Symbols	442
Colleges and Courses of Instruction	442
References	443

**Chapter 12
contains
guidelines
for using
abbreviations,
acronyms, and
symbols.**

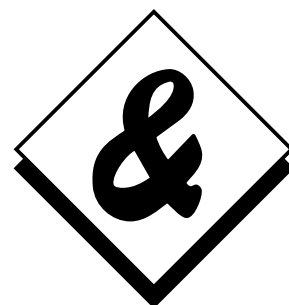
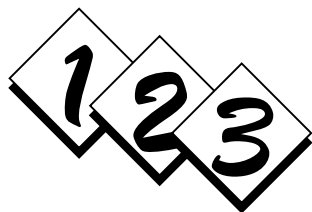


Table of Contents

**Chapter 13 is
about numbers.**



**This chapter
focuses on
determining
whether to
express numbers
with figures or
words.**

Chapter 13 – Numbers	445
General Guidelines for Choosing Between Figures and Words	446
Consider the Type of Writing	446
Use Words for Small Numbers, Figures for Big Ones	447
Treat Ordinal Numbers as You Do Cardinal Numbers	449
Use Figures with Abbreviations and Symbols	450
Use Figures with Numbers in Series	450
Don't Begin a Sentence with a Figure	450
Be Consistent with Numbers in the Same Sentence	451
Use Different Formats for Adjacent Numbers	452
Follow an Organization's Preference	452
Specific Topics	453
Dates and Times	453
Ages and Anniversaries	456
Units of Measure	457
Money	458
Roads and Addresses	459
Telephone Numbers	460
Percentages	461
Fractions	462
Decimals	463
Ratios	463
Scores and Voting Results	463
Indefinite Numbers and Amounts	464
Numbers Referred to as Numbers	464
Using No. or #	464
Chemical Names and Formulas	464
Names of Organizations	465
Parts of Books	465
Family Names	465
Roman Numerals	466
Forming Plurals	467
Guidelines for Punctuating Numbers	468
Hyphenate Numbers from 21 to 99	468
Hyphenate Numbers Used in Compound Adjectives	468
Hyphenate Numbers in Series as Appropriate	469
Use Commas to Separate Numbers as Appropriate	470
Chapter 14 - More Effective Writing	471
Using the Appropriate Voice	472
Recognizing the Active and Passive Voices	472
Using the Appropriate Voice	472

Avoiding Needless Shifts	474
Shifts in Tense	474
Shifts in Number	474
Shifts in Person	475
Shifts in Voice	476
Shifts in Mood	476
Shifts in Discourse	477
Shifts in Point of View	477
Using Parallel Structure	478
Parallelism in Coordinate Elements	478
Parallelism in Correlative Pairs	479
Parallelism in Elements Being Compared	480
Parallelism in Lists	481
Avoiding Mixed Sentences	482
Avoid Mixed Constructions	482
Make Logical Connections	482
Avoid Faulty Definitions	483
Avoiding Sentence Fragments	484
Sentence Fragments Defined	484
Fragments with a Missing Subject	484
Fragments with a Missing Verb	485
Fragmented Phrases and Clauses	485
Intentional Fragments	486
Avoiding Run-Ons and Comma Splices	487
Recognizing Run-Ons and Comma Splices	487
Making Separate Sentences	487
Using a Comma and a Coordinating Conjunction	488
Using a Semicolon	488
Making One Clause Subordinate to Another	489
Being Concise	490
Avoid Unnecessary Repetition	490
Omit Unnecessary Words	491
Keep It Simple and Direct	495
Use Pronouns	498
Use Elliptical Constructions	499
Consolidate Where Possible	499
Retaining Needed Words	
Words Needed to Prevent Misreading	500
Words Needed to Complete Compound Structures	500
Words Needed for Logical and Complete Comparisons	501

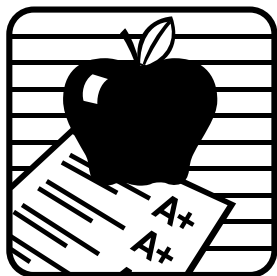
**Chapter 14 is
about more
effective writing.**



**It begins
with simple
guidelines
related to
sentence
structure.**

Table of Contents

Chapter 14
continues with
other guidelines
to help you
improve your
writing.



Choosing Your Words Wisely	502
Avoid Sexist Language	502
Avoid Biased Language	503
Use Jargon with Care	503
Avoid Pretentious Language	504
Minimize the Use of Euphemisms	504
Use Slang Only When Appropriate	504
Avoid Nonstandard Language	505
Avoid Worn-Out Clichés	505
Avoid Doubletalk (or Weasel Words)	506
Use Regionalisms Only When Appropriate	506
Use the Correct Words	507
Be Concrete and Specific	507
Use Colloquial Language Only When Appropriate	508
Avoid Obsolete and Archaic Words or Meanings	508
Use Neologisms (Invented Words) with Care	509
Use Figures of Speech with Care	509
Using Coordination and Subordination Appropriately	511
Use Coordination for Equal Emphasis	511
Use Subordination for Unequal Emphasis	512
Avoid Excessive Coordination and Subordination	513
Do Not Subordinate Major Ideas	513
Make Logical Connections	514
Putting Variety into Your Sentences	515
Vary Sentence Length and Structure	515
Vary Sentence Openings	515
Invert Sentences Occasionally	516
Use Different Types of Sentences Occasionally	517
Chapter 15 - Writing for Special Applications	519
Writing Letters and Memos	520
Make Your Purpose Clear	520
Be Concise, Thorough, and Accurate	520
Be Organized	522
Use an Appropriate Tone	522
Use Appropriate Language	524
Use an Appropriate Salutation	524
Use E-Mail Effectively	525
Writing Reports	526
The Importance of Well-Written Reports	526
Characteristics of a Good Report	526

Writing Tests	532
Don't Write Another "Typical State Test"	532
Know Key Terms and Definitions	532
Keep Questions Current	533
Make Questions Relevant and Interesting	533
Avoid Trivia Questions	535
Don't Give Away the Answers	536
Avoid Vocabulary Questions	540
Test to the Appropriate Level	541
Minimize the Use of Negative Premises	543
Quote Specific Sources as Needed	544
Write Complete Premises	544
Avoid Overlapping Alternatives	545
Make the Correct Answer the Clear Choice	545
Distribute the Answers Evenly	546
Review Your Tests to Ensure Quality and Fairness	546
Writing Lists	548
Horizontal (Run-In) Lists	548
Vertical (Display) Lists	549
Lists Used for Multiple-Choice Test Questions	555
Outlines	556
Parallelism in Lists	557
Writing as Part of a Team	558
Plan It Well, but Don't Plan It to Death	558
Be Honest About Your Level of Commitment	559
Set Realistic Deadlines	559
Choose Your Experts Wisely	560
Anticipate Problems and Plan Accordingly	560
Chapter 16 - In the Eye of the Beholder	563
Introduction	564
If It Doesn't Look Good, It Isn't Worth Reading!	564
Adding Emphasis	565
Using Type for Emphasis	565
Using Other Tricks with Type	566
Combining Type with Graphic Elements	569
Choosing a Typeface	571
Serif Versus Sans Serif	571
Readability	572
Personality	572
Variety	575
Size	576
Other Considerations	577

Chapter 15
is about writing
for special
applications:
letters and
memos, reports,
tests, and lists.



It also
provides simple
guidelines for
writing as part
of a team.

Table of Contents

**Chapter 16 is
called “In the
Eye of the
Beholder.”**

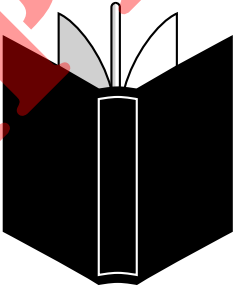


**If your message
is important
enough to put
in writing, it's
worth making
it look good.**

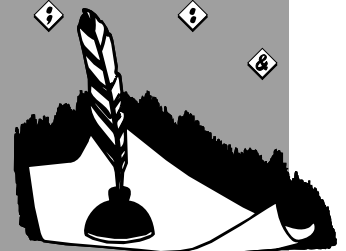
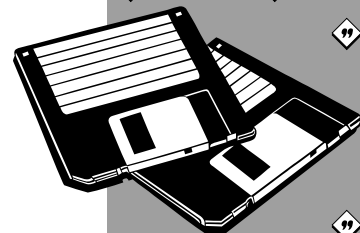
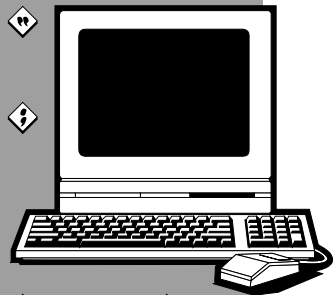
Aligning Text	578
The Four Basic Options	578
Choosing Between Justified and Flush Left	578
Handling Bullets	580
Formatting Text When Using Bullets	580
Using Creative Bullets	581
Using Space Effectively	583
Spacing Between Characters (Tracking)	583
Spacing Between Sentences	583
Spacing Between Lines (Leading)	584
Spacing Between Paragraphs	585
Margins	586
Columns	586
Widows and Orphans	588
White Space	588
Using Headers and Footers	590
Formatting Headers and Footers	590
Working with Color	591
Basic Thoughts About Color	591
Colored Paper	592
Colored Inks	592
Choosing Your Paper Stock	594
Factors to Consider	594
Varying the Size and Format	596
General Guidelines	596
Using Illustrations and Photographs	597
General Guidelines	597
Using Photographs	601
Using Charts, Graphs, and Diagrams	604
Sources of Great Graphics	605
Select Desktop Publishing Techniques	608
Text Wrapping	608
Styles	609
Find and Replace	610

Chapter 17 - Glossary	611
How to Use This Section	612
Glossary of Grammatical Terms	613
Bibliography	633
Index	639

Chapter 17
is a glossary of
grammatical
terms.

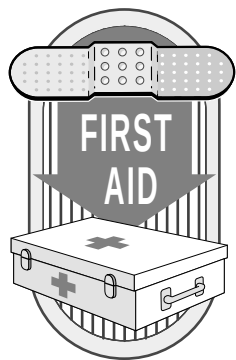


Chapter 1: Commas



Use a comma between two independent clauses separated by a coordinating conjunction.

Bring me the first aid kit, and have someone call 911.



Use a comma after most introductory words, phrases, and clauses.

Luckily, I've been trained in first aid and CPR.

Introduction

No other punctuation mark causes more confusion than the comma. This is partly because there are more rules about commas than about any other punctuation mark and partly because there are times when the use of commas is a matter of personal preference.

An Overview of the Rules

The following overview of the primary rules will give you a basic understanding of when to use or omit commas. Each of the rules is explained in greater detail on the pages indicated in parentheses.

Use a comma between two independent clauses separated by a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, or, nor, for, so, and yet*). Do not use a comma between parts of a compound predicate. (28-31)

Comma: I called 911, and Tim began evacuating the area.
No comma: I called 911 and began evacuating the area.

Use a comma after most introductory words, phrases, and clauses. However, commas are not necessary after ordinary adverbs that tell *when* or *how often*. Commas are optional after short prepositional phrases as long as the meaning remains clear. (32-37)

Comma: Just as you thought, it was a wildland fire.
No comma: Sometimes we have wildland fires.
Optional: In the morning, we had a wildland fire.

Use commas to set off transitional expressions and independent comments. (38-42)

Her injuries are not serious, *fortunately*.

Use commas to set off nonessential elements. Do not use commas with elements that are essential to the meaning or structural completeness of the sentence. (43-47)

Nonessential: We learned that Kim, *the woman who started the fire*, has a history of mental illness.
Essential: We learned that *the woman who started the fire* has a history of mental illness.

Use commas to set off additional considerations. Commas may be omitted, however, if the phrase flows smoothly into the sentence and the meaning remains clear. (48)

Comma: Everyone, including the chief, is worried
No comma: The chief is worried along with the rest of us.

Use commas to set off phrases that express contrast. However, commas can be omitted around a short contrasting phrase that fits smoothly into the sentence. (49-50)

Comma: The sooner we get her to the hospital, the better her chance of survival.
No comma: She is in serious but stable condition.

Use commas between three or more items in series. Omit commas when there are only two items. (51-53)

Three or more: He was shot in the head, chest, and arm.
Two: He was shot in the head and chest.

Use commas to set off nonessential examples. Omit commas when the examples are essential to the meaning of the sentence. (54-56)

Nonessential: I am allergic to shellfish, especially shrimp and crab.
Essential: I am allergic to foods such as shrimp and crab.

Use commas between adjectives that equally modify the same word (*coordinate adjectives*), but not between adjectives where the one closest to the noun or pronoun is more closely related to the noun or pronoun in meaning. (57-58)

Comma: Carter is an honest, thoughtful man.
No comma: Carter is a tall black man.

Use commas to indicate omitted words. (59)

Remember [that], the suspect is armed and dangerous.

Use commas to separate words for drama or clarity. (60)

Your plan is dangerous, very dangerous.

Use commas to set aside names and other words used as a form of address. (61)

Name: Brad, what can I do to help?
Other word: Captain, what can I do to help?

Use commas to set off the salutation in an informal letter, as well as the closing in any letter, formal or informal. (62)

**Use commas
to set off
nonessential
elements.**

**We think
that Robert,
the director,
is having a
heart attack.**



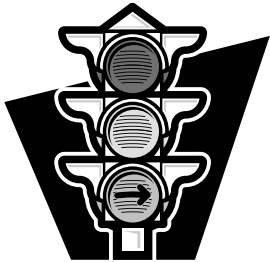
**Use commas
between
coordinate
adjectives.**

**Robert is
complaining of a
dull, squeezing
pressure in
the chest.**

Commas

Use commas to set off direct quotations used as dialogue.

“Someone is going to get killed,” she protested, “if the city doesn’t install a traffic light.”



Use commas to prevent misreading.

Soon after, a child was killed by a hit-and-run driver.

Salutation: Dear Lori,
Closing: Sincerely,

Use commas to separate adjacent location elements, such as city and state or state and country. Omit the comma if location elements are separated by a preposition. (63)

Comma: She was kidnapped from a shopping center in Los Gatos, California.

No comma: She was kidnapped from Old Town in Los Gatos.

Use commas to set off dates written in order by month, day, and year. Omit the comma when only two date elements are provided. (64-65)

Comma: Officer Greenly was killed on January 7, 1998.

No comma: Officer Greenly was killed in January 1998.

Use commas to separate long numbers. However, the comma is optional if the number contains just four digits. (66)

Required: They stole \$50,000.

Optional: They stole \$5000. (or \$5,000)

Use commas to set off direct quotations used as dialogue. Do not use commas with indirect quotations. (67)

Direct: She said, “My neck hurts.”

Indirect: She said that her neck hurts.

Use commas to prevent misreading. (68)

Confusing: Not long after we left.

Clear: Not long after, we left.

When in Doubt: Guidelines to Fall Back On

Emergency responders like having fallback options they can count on when all else fails: *When in doubt, evacuate. When in doubt, provide oxygen.* The following are some simple guidelines to fall back on when the rules become too confusing. You will see examples of how to apply these guidelines throughout this chapter.

Examine the meaning of the sentence

Ask yourself whether the inclusion or omission of a comma changes the meaning of the sentence. If it does, you must then determine whether it makes more sense to use the comma or to leave it out.

Ensure clarity

Determine whether or not a comma is needed for clarity. If the sentence either is unclear without one or would be more clear if you added a comma, then you should use a comma.

Provide a pause if appropriate

Look to see if a comma is needed to provide a pause. When we speak, we use pauses to provide emphasis or clarity. Readers need pauses too. Consider, for example, the last time you read a sentence that was so long that you lost track of what it was saying before you reached the end. Sometimes commas can provide just enough of a pause to allow readers to gather their thoughts before moving on. Too many commas, on the other hand, make a sentence difficult to read. You must be able to strike a good balance.

Keep in mind that every comma signals a pause, but not every pause requires a comma. Putting a comma in the wrong location just to provide a pause can make your sentence unclear.

Read the sentence aloud and listen to your vocal inflection

Read the sentence aloud if you are still unclear about whether or not to use commas. This is particularly helpful when trying to distinguish between essential and nonessential elements. The inflection of your voice will often give away the answer. Let's look at two examples to see how this works:

Nonessential: This fire, *no doubt*, is the work of an arsonist.

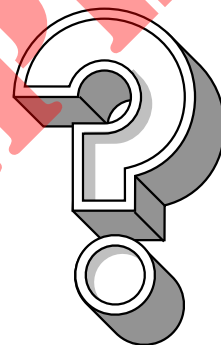
Essential: This fire is *no doubt* the work of an arsonist.

Read each of the previous sentences aloud, and listen to your vocal inflection as you say the words *no doubt*. If the expression is non-essential, your voice will tend to drop. However, if the expression is essential, your voice will tend to rise. Notice that these two sentences are almost identical. The only difference, other than the commas, is the order in which the words are written.

If necessary, reword the sentence

Finally, if you are still having trouble, look to see if there might be a better way to write the sentence. There is a very appropriate quotation by Claire Kehrwald Cook: "When you have trouble getting the commas right, chances are you're trying to patch up a poorly structured sentence." Sometimes it is easier to rewrite the sentence than it is to determine if and where to use commas.

**When in doubt,
ask yourself
the following
questions.**



**Does a comma
change the
meaning of the
sentence?**

**Is a comma
needed to ensure
clarity or to
provide a pause?**

**What happens
to your vocal
inflection?**

**Is there a better
way to write the
sentence?**

Use a comma and a coordinating conjunction to link sentences (main clauses).



We warned him that it was dangerous to go diving there, but he wouldn't listen to us.

Between Main Clauses

Commas may be used to join sentences if done properly.

Linking Main Clauses

Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, or, nor, for, so, and yet*) that joins *main clauses* (sentences). A *main* (or *independent*) *clause* has both a subject and a predicate and makes a complete statement.

Clause 1: The victim [subject] was not breathing. [predicate].

Clause 2: She [subject] still had a pulse. [predicate].

Joined: The victim was not breathing, but she still had a pulse.

Here are three more examples of clauses properly joined.

The fire raged out of control, and dozens of homes were damaged or destroyed.

The caller was unfamiliar with the area, so he was unable to give us the exact location of the accident.

Sergeant Allen was careful not to disturb the scene, for there were indications that foul play was involved.

If the clauses are imperative (they are in the form of a command or request) and the subject is implied (it is understood to be *you*), treat the sentence the same way—use a comma between clauses.

Please take this salvage cover inside to Captain Werner, and ask him if he still needs the smoke ejector.

Optional with short, closely related clauses

The comma may be omitted when one or both clauses are short and closely related in meaning. The important thing is to make sure the resulting sentence is clear. When in doubt, use a comma; you cannot go wrong.

The bomb exploded but no one was injured.

We can evacuate or we can shelter in place.

Let's see how bad the damage is and then we'll decide.

Positioning Commas Correctly

The comma almost always goes before the conjunction, not after.

Wrong: We managed to subdue the suspect *but*, it took all four of us to do it.

Right: We managed to subdue the suspect, *but* it took all four of us to do it.

However, when nonessential elements are incorporated into the sentence and are positioned between the two clauses, only one comma should be used next to the conjunction. An extra comma, as in the sentence below, is superfluous.

Wrong: Doug may bid Shannon Station, *or, quite possibly*, may stay at El Monte.

Placement of the comma depends on whether you have a *compound predicate* (no subject in the second part of the sentence) or a *compound sentence* (subjects in both parts). The following sentence contains a compound predicate; there is only one subject (*Doug*). The comma goes after the word *or*.

Right: Doug may bid Shannon Station *or, quite possibly*, may stay at El Monte.

The following example contains a *compound sentence*. Each clause includes a subject: *Doug* in the first, *he* in the second. The comma goes before the word *or*.

Right: Doug may bid Shannon Station, *or quite possibly*, he may stay at El Monte.

Avoid separating compound predicates

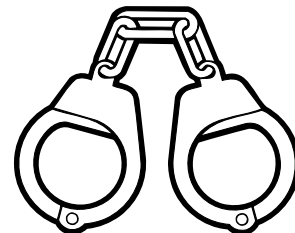
Do not use a comma if there is no full clause (subject + predicate) after the conjunction. In the following examples, two predicates share the same subject, forming a *compound predicate*. It is easy to recognize a compound predicate because the text that follows the conjunction cannot stand alone as a complete sentence.

Chris grabbed the nozzle and *proceeded up the stairs*.

Gary removed his SCBA and *placed it on the tailboard*.

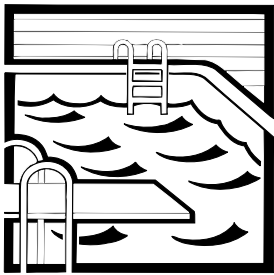
The paramedics placed her on the gurney and *loaded her into the ambulance*.

Do not use a comma when two predicates share the same subject.



We cuffed the suspect and read him his rights.

It is occasionally acceptable to start a sentence with a coordinating conjunction if it follows a related sentence.



. . . under water for so long. But the water was cold enough to prevent any brain damage.

Avoid comma splices (or comma faults)

There are very few times when you can get away with using only a comma to separate short and closely related sentences: *Men sweat, women perspire*. Punctuating consecutive sentences with only a comma between them creates what is called a *comma splice* or *comma fault*. The comma splice is grammatically incorrect and can cause confusion for the reader. You can easily correct a comma splice by adding a coordinating conjunction, using a semicolon instead, or making one clause subordinate to the other.

- Wrong:* The baby stopped breathing, the parents were hysterical. (*comma splice*)
- Right:* The baby stopped breathing, and the parents were hysterical. (*comma and coordinating conjunction*)
- Right:* The baby stopped breathing; the parents were hysterical. (*semicolon*)
- Right:* The parents were hysterical because the baby stopped breathing. (*subordination*)

Beginning with a Coordinating Conjunction

For years, it was considered unacceptable to start a sentence with a coordinating conjunction. This is no longer the case. You can occasionally use a coordinating conjunction at the beginning of a sentence either for special emphasis or to provide a smoother transition in a series of sentences. However, make sure there is a logical connection between the sentences, and use this technique in moderation so that it doesn't become a distraction to your readers.

We'll let it go this time. *But* if I ever catch you shoplifting again, I will call the police.

Is there a chance they are still alive under all that rubble? *Or* is this just going to be a body recovery operation?

We expected the child would have serious brain damage after being submerged under water for so long. *But* the water was cold enough that it slowed his metabolism and prevented any brain damage.

Do not use a comma after the coordinating conjunction unless it is immediately followed by a nonessential (or parenthetical) element.

I was sure the computer was hopelessly damaged by the fire. *But, much to my surprise,* the technician was able to recover most of the files.

Using Semicolons in Place of Commas

If either of the independent clauses is long and already contains commas, it may be better to use a semicolon rather than a comma to separate the clauses. This can help eliminate confusion.

We searched under the bed, in the closet, behind the dresser, and any place else a child might hide; *yet* we were unable to locate the boy.

A person experiencing a heart attack will likely complain of chest pain, difficulty breathing, nausea, weakness, and a feeling of impending doom; *but* it is possible to have a heart attack without any of these symptoms.

Do not use a comma after the coordinating conjunction unless it is immediately followed by a nonessential (or parenthetical) element.

A person experiencing a heart attack will likely complain of chest pain, difficulty breathing, nausea, weakness, and a feeling of impending doom; *but, as you are probably aware,* it is possible to have a heart attack without any of these symptoms.

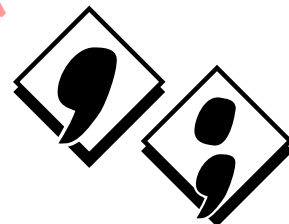
Note: Transitional expressions are preferred

Many experts frown on using the coordinating conjunctions *and* or *but* when joining two independent clauses with a semicolon, as in the last two examples above. Transitional expressions, such as *however*, are generally preferred. Alternately, you can write two separate sentences. This is often the best solution.

A person experiencing a heart attack . . . and a feeling of impending doom; *however*, it is possible to have a heart attack without any of these symptoms.

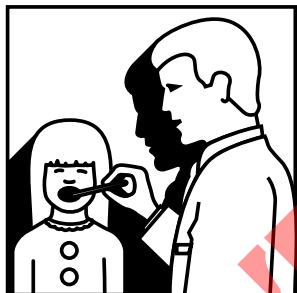
A person experiencing a heart attack . . . and a feeling of impending doom. *However*, it is possible to have a heart attack without any of these symptoms.

Long clauses that already contain commas may need to be separated by semicolons.



Most introductory words, phrases, and clauses are set off by commas.

Before we can properly treat her, we need to know what she ingested.



The comma signals readers that the introductory part is over and the main part of the sentence is about to begin.

After Introductory Words, Phrases, and Clauses

Most introductory words, phrases, and clauses are set off by commas. The comma signals readers that the introductory part is over and the main part of the sentence is about to begin. In each of the examples below, *you saved my life* is the main part of the sentence. Everything else is introductory matter.

Unafraid, you saved my life.

Two years ago, you saved my life.

In spite of everything, you saved my life.

Even though you didn't have to, you saved my life.

Not all introductory elements will be found at the beginning of the sentence. Some will be sandwiched between two independent clauses separated by a comma or a semicolon. Regardless of position, the introductory elements are usually set off by commas.

Paramedics responded quickly, but *knowing that the woman had been shot by her husband*, they staged a block away until Campbell police secured the scene.

She *had* the stove turned up too high; *consequently*, the oil ignited and started a kitchen fire.

We will start by looking at how to set off specific types of words, phrases, and clauses. Then we'll look at those situations where the comma is either optional or not appropriate.

Yes, No, and Mild Interjections

Use a comma after the words *yes* or *no* and after *mild* interjections at the beginning of a sentence.

Yes, I checked for a pulse before starting CPR.

Well, what did you expect?

Why, no one can survive a fall like that!

Transitional Expressions, Independent Comments

Use a comma after transitional expressions or independent comments that introduce a sentence. (Refer to pages 38-42 for more information.)

Fortunately, the gun wasn't loaded.

We believe the driver was intoxicated. *However*, we can't confirm it until we get the results of the blood test.

Introductory Phrases

There are several different types of introductory phrases. You do not need to remember the names. You need only to be able to recognize introductory phrases and punctuate them properly.

Participial (or participle) phrases

Participial (or *participle*) *phrases* are phrases that show continued or completed action. They are derived from verbs and are used as adjectives to provide information about a noun elsewhere in the sentence.

Hampered by gloves that didn't fit properly, Jill had trouble raising and lowering the ladder.

Knowing that my mother was afraid of hospitals, I was reluctant to suggest calling for an ambulance.

Infinitive phrases

Infinitive phrases are phrases that are introduced with the word *to* followed by a verb.

To ventilate the victim effectively, you need to pinch the nose.

To make sure we don't have a rekindle, we'll leave an engine here on fire watch throughout the night.

Prepositional phrases

Prepositional phrases are phrases that are introduced by a preposition. Most introductory prepositional phrases are set off by commas.

After the fire, all I want is a hot shower and a warm bed.

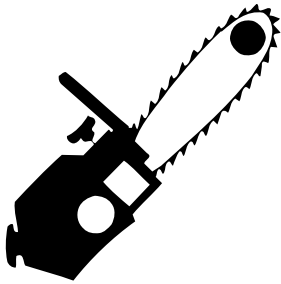
There are several types of introductory phrases. Most are set off by commas.

Having heard about other children who were injured, I became concerned.
(participial phrase)



To be safe, you should inspect the candy before allowing your children to eat it.
(infinitive phrase)

Use a comma to set off introductory dependent clauses.



Before you put the chain saw away, make sure you check it for damage.

In response to our community's concern about the increase in gang violence, we are implementing several programs aimed at getting teenagers involved in after-school activities.

Absolute phrases

Absolute phrases are phrases that modify a whole sentence, rather than a particular word or group of words. Absolute phrases are set off by commas.

Our escape route cut off, we were forced to take refuge in our tent shelters.

Considering what the car looked like, it's amazing that anyone survived the crash.

Introductory Dependent (or Subordinate) Clauses

Use a comma to set off introductory dependent clauses. A *dependent* (or *subordinate*) *clause* provides information about *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, or *how*.

Before we can stop CPR, we need to see a signed DNR form.

Although I can't prove it, I firmly believe that Sam is the arsonist.

Dependent clauses contain both a subject and a verb, but cannot stand alone as a complete sentence. Notice that the italicized clauses in the examples above are incomplete thoughts. They must be attached to main (or independent) clauses.

Dependent clauses with key words omitted

The following are also examples of dependent clauses, though some of the key words have been omitted. In the first example, the clause was shortened for simplicity; in the second, for effect. The dependent clause should be set off with a comma.

Whenever possible, we put all our equipment back in service before leaving the scene. (Whenever it is possible, . . .)

Desperate, he jumped from the third-story window to the alley below. (Because he was desperate, . . .)

Dependent clauses containing the word that

The first example below begins with an infinitive phrase (*to get*). The revised version begins with a dependent clause containing the word *that*. Like any other introductory dependent clause, it must be set off with a comma.

- Original:* To get a Class 2 ISO rating, we must upgrade our communications system.
- Revised:* The chief believes that for us to get a Class 2 ISO rating, we must upgrade our communications system.

Exceptions and Special Circumstances

Although commas are used to set off most introductory words, phrases, and clauses, there are some exceptions and special circumstances. If you do not understand these concepts, you may find yourself either putting commas where they don't belong or omitting commas where they are needed.

Phrases used as the subject of the sentence

Watch out for phrases that look like introductory phrases, but which actually serve as the subject of the sentence. Do not use a comma in these situations. Compare the following examples.

- Comma:* Having been arrested twice before, you should be familiar with the process.
- No comma:* Having been arrested twice before is nothing to be proud of.
- Comma:* Knowing that the woman had been shot by her husband, the paramedics staged a block away until Campbell police secured the scene.
- No comma:* Knowing that the woman had been shot by her husband made the paramedics wary.

Ordinary introductory adverbs

Though some writers will use commas after ordinary introductory adverbs that tell *when* or *how often*, commas are not necessary.

- Sometimes* we have difficulty determining the origin of a fire.
- Last week* one of my neighbors was arrested.

Watch out for phrases that look like introductory phrases, but which actually serve as the subject of the sentence.



Don't use commas with these phrases.

To convince all twelve members of the jury is not going to be easy.

Commas

Commas are not necessary after ordinary introductory adverbs that tell *when* or *how often*.

Recently I bought a gun for self-protection.



You can omit the comma after a short prepositional phrase if the meaning remains clear.

In the afternoon I want to go to the gun range.

Tomorrow we'll get a search warrant.

Occasionally I feel pain in my chest.

Short prepositional phrases

You can often omit the comma after a short prepositional phrase. However, you must make certain that doing so will not create confusion or be grammatically incorrect. When in doubt, use the comma; you cannot go wrong.

In July we start our new budget year.

In the morning we will transfer him to the county jail.

By nine o'clock we had already run three EMS calls.

A sentence must be easily understood as the reader is reading it (from left to right). In the following examples, a comma provides just enough of a pause to keep the readers from running words together when they shouldn't be run together. An alternate solution is to rewrite the sentence.

Unclear: *Inside* the smoke was thick.
(What was inside the smoke?)

Clear: *Inside*, the smoke was thick.

Clear: The smoke was thick inside.

Unclear: *After eating* the firefighters felt much better.
(Who ate the firefighters?)

Clear: *After eating*, the firefighters felt much better.

Clear: The firefighters felt much better after eating.

Unclear: *In 1996* 135 people were treated for bee stings.
(When? How many people?)

Clear: *In 1996*, 135 people were treated for bee stings.

Clear: One hundred and thirty five people were treated for bee stings in 1996.

Do not omit the comma if the prepositional phrase contains any form of a verb.

By backing out now, we stand a better chance of reaching the safety zone without having to deploy our fire shelters.

After working all day to rescue three children trapped inside the collapsed building, the USAR team was ready for a break.

Inverted sentences

Omit the comma if the normal word order is inverted.

From deep within the wreckage came a faint cry for help.
(Normal word order: *A faint cry for help came from deep within the wreckage.*)

Compound-complex sentences

Compound-complex sentences are a little trickier to punctuate. These are sentences that contain two independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses.

The examples below contain *one dependent clause* followed by *two independent clauses* that are joined by the coordinating conjunction *and*. (The dependent clause is in italics.) A comma *is needed* to set off the introductory clause. However, if the introductory dependent clause applies equally to both of the independent clauses, do not put a comma between the independent clauses.

After they've taken a break, Engine 7's crew *will overhaul* the second floor and Truck 1's crew will check the attic.

In an attempt to reduce the number of deaths caused by drunk drivers this holiday season, we are *arranging* for free taxi rides for anyone who needs *them* and *we are* increasing the number of sobriety checkpoints throughout the city.

The following sentence contains *two dependent clauses* and *two independent clauses*. (The dependent clauses are in italics.) Each introductory dependent clause *is set off by a comma*.

Before we lay a supply line, let's have Engine 9 check the attic, and *if the fire hasn't extended into the attic*, we should be able to handle it with tank water.

The easiest way to determine where the commas go is to break the sentence into two parts and consider each part separately.

Part 1: *Before we lay a supply line*, let's have Engine 9 check the attic.

Part 2: *If the fire hasn't extended into the attic*, we should be able to handle it with tank water.

When the two parts are combined once more, a comma and a coordinating conjunction (for example, *and*) are inserted between them, just as you saw in the original sentence.

If the introductory dependent clause applies equally to two independent clauses, do not put a comma between the independent clauses.



To reduce the number of accidents this holiday season, we are arranging for free taxi rides and we are increasing the number of sobriety checkpoints.

Transitional expressions introduce a sentence and help move the reader to a new idea.

Be that as it may, if you are riding on city streets, you need to be wearing a helmet.



After all, we don't want you to be injured.

With Transitional Expressions and Independent Comments

Transitional Expressions Defined

Transitional expressions help move a reader from one idea to the next. The following are some transitional expressions:

accordingly	in conclusion
additionally	in essence
after all	in general
afterward	in other words
all in all	in short
all things considered	instead
also	in summary
anyway	in the final analysis
as a result	in the first place
as a rule	in the long run
as usual	in time
at any rate	in turn
at first	later on
at the same time	likewise
besides	meanwhile
be that as it may	moreover
briefly	namely
by and large	nevertheless
by contrast	next
by the same token	on one hand
by the way	on the contrary
consequently	on the other hand
conversely	on the whole
even so	ordinarily
finally	otherwise
first	rather
first of all	second
for example	similarly
for instance	so
for now	still
for one thing	that is
for the most part	that is to say
for the time being	then
furthermore	therefore
generally	this fact notwithstanding
generally speaking	thus
hence	to begin with
however	to sum up

in addition	too
in any case	usually
in any event	what is more
in brief	yet
incidentally	

Sometimes the coordinating conjunctions *and*, *but*, *or*, and *nor* are used as transitional expressions also.

Independent Comments Defined

Independent comments are words added by the writer to qualify the sentence. These comments generally provide some insight as to the writer's attitude or feeling toward the meaning of the sentence. The following are some independent comments:

according to [. . .]	indeed
actually	in fact
alas	in my opinion
apparently	in reality
as a matter of fact	literally
as I see it	naturally
as it happens	needless to say
as you know	obviously
believe it or not	of course
by all means	perhaps
certainly	personally
clearly	presumably
doubtless	regrettably
fortunately	strictly speaking
frankly	theoretically
happily	to be honest
hopefully	to say the least
ideally	to tell the truth
if necessary	unfortunately
if possible	without doubt

At the Beginning of a Sentence or Clause

In general, use a comma after transitional expressions and independent comments at the beginning of a sentence.

Nevertheless, we need to treat this like a crime scene.

In my opinion, the man should be charged with first-degree murder.

**Independent
comments
generally provide
some insight as
to the writer's
attitude.**

***To tell the truth,
I'm surprised we
didn't see more
cases of heat
exhaustion
today.***



***Fortunately,
most people took
it easy in the
hot weather.***

Commas

In general, use a comma after transitional expressions and independent comments at the beginning of a sentence or a clause.

**Unfortunately,
Terry is in the
hospital.**



**He didn't set
the ladder on a
solid surface;
as a result, the
ladder slipped
and Terry was
injured.**

Not all transitional expressions and independent comments will be found at the beginning of the sentence. Some will be sandwiched between two independent clauses that are separated by a comma and a coordinating conjunction. (Note: Place the first comma before the conjunction and the second comma after the transitional expression or independent comment. Do not use a comma both before and after the coordinating conjunction.)

Paramedic training was a lot of work, but *in the long run*, I'm glad I stuck with it. (not , but,)

He says he is innocent, but *to be honest with you*, I don't trust a word he says. (not , but,)

Other transitional expressions and independent comments will be sandwiched between two independent clauses separated by a semicolon.

The accident occurred because a drunk driver fell asleep at the wheel; *however*, a median barrier may have prevented him from crossing into oncoming traffic and killing two innocent people.

We were told there may be explosives on site; *therefore*, we evacuated the area for one-half mile in every direction and let the fire burn.

You can generally omit the comma after *hence*, *then*, *thus*, or *yet* if there is no risk of misreading the sentence or if no special pause is desired. This is true whether the word comes at the beginning of a sentence or it is sandwiched between two independent clauses.

Thus you should be using universal precautions any time there is a possibility of coming in contact with a victim's blood or bodily fluids.

Our witness was unable to identify the suspect; *hence* we had to let the suspect go.

Omit the comma after a transitional expression or independent comment incorporated into the flow of the sentence without pause.

Perhaps we should construct our fireline along the ridge.

No doubt she thought she could get away with it.

Do not confuse transitional expressions and independent comments with words or expressions that are essential to the meaning of the sentence. Commas are not used to set off essential elements.

Nonessential: *However*, they managed to break in without tripping the alarm.

Essential: *However* they broke in, they managed to do it without tripping the alarm.

Nonessential: *Obviously*, Tami was shaken by the threat and was afraid to talk to the police.

Essential: *Obviously* shaken by the threat, Tami was afraid to talk to the police. (*Obviously* modifies *shaken*, not the sentence as a whole).

At the End of a Sentence

Use commas to set off nonessential transitional expressions or independent comments at the end of a sentence.

Paramedics were unable to save the driver, *however*.

Our witness did not get a good look at the robber's face, *unfortunately*.

However, do not use a comma if the expression is essential to the meaning of the sentence.

We'll leave an engine company here all night *if necessary*.

I'd like to keep her in protective custody *for the time being*.

Within the Sentence

If a nonessential transitional expression or independent comment falls within the sentence, set it off with commas.

The passenger, *believe it or not*, only had minor injuries.

This fire, *on the other hand*, was definitely arson.

However, omit the commas with expressions that are essential to the meaning of the sentence.

We are counting on you *to tell the truth* in court tomorrow.

Paul did everything *according to* the book.

Use commas to set off nonessential expressions at the end of a sentence.

The cause of the fire was arson, after all.

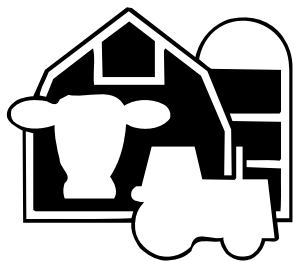


Use commas to set off nonessential expressions within a sentence.

The arsonist, as it turns out, is one of their former employees.

It is generally not necessary to use a comma before the word *too* at the end of a clause or sentence.

There may be chemicals in the barn too.



If *too* is used elsewhere in the sentence, set it off with one comma before and another one after.

You, too, should be familiar with the hazards of these common agricultural chemicals.

If you are unsure whether an expression is essential or nonessential, read the sentence aloud and listen to your vocal inflection. If the expression functions as a nonessential element, your voice will tend to *drop*. On the other hand, if the expression functions as an essential element, your voice will tend to *rise*.

Nonessential: It is critical, *therefore*, that we monitor the atmosphere before sending anyone *into the structure*.

Essential: It is *therefore* critical that we monitor the atmosphere before sending anyone into the structure.

Nonessential: You are fortunate, *indeed*, that no one was injured.

Essential: You are *indeed* fortunate that no one was injured.

Notice that each pair in the previous examples is almost identical. The only difference is the order in which the words are written.

The Word *Too*

The word *too* deserves special mention because it can be confusing. When *too* is used to mean “excessive,” it never needs commas.

It is *too* dangerous to go in there.

Too is sometimes used to mean “also.” It is generally not necessary to use a comma before the word *too* at the end of a clause or the end of a sentence, though some experts prefer to do so. However, if *too* is used elsewhere in the sentence, set it off with a comma before and another one after.

If you think you have been exposed *too*, we need you to fill out an Injury/Exposure Report Form.

Mike is taking the Confined Space Rescue class *too*.

You, *too*, should be well-versed in the Incident Command System.

Note: Most of the time, the reader will understand what *too* refers to based on the context of the entire paragraph. However, if the meaning is not clear, you may need to rewrite your sentence: *Mike and I are both taking the Confined Space Rescue class* or *Mike is taking the Confined Space Rescue class in addition to this one*.

With Nonessential Elements

Being able to identify whether an element is essential or nonessential is the key to determining whether you need to use commas. A *nonessential* element is one that can be deleted without changing the meaning of the sentence or leaving the sentence structurally incomplete. A nonessential element is set off by commas. An *essential* element, on the other hand, cannot be deleted from the sentence. An essential element is not set off by commas.

The examples below illustrate the difference between essential and nonessential elements. In the first sentence, the clause *who was pregnant with twins* is necessary to identify which woman was killed in the accident. In the second sentence, although the clause *who was pregnant with twins* provides meaningful information about Barbara, it is not essential for identifying which woman was killed.

Essential: A woman *who was pregnant with twins* was killed in the accident.

Nonessential: Barbara, *who was pregnant with twins*, was killed in the accident.

Note: Other terms you may see are *restrictive* and *nonrestrictive*. A restrictive (essential) element restricts the meaning of the sentence. A nonrestrictive (nonessential) element does not.

Adjective Phrases and Clauses

Phrases and clauses used as adjectives modify a noun or pronoun by identifying *what kind*, *which one*, or *how many*. Nonessential phrases and clauses are set off by commas; essential ones are not.

You saw an example of an adjective clause above. Now let's look at an adjective phrase. The phrase *caught carry weapons* is essential in the first example below because it identifies which students. We are not going to suspend any student, just those caught carry weapons. In the second sentence, the words *these three* identify which students, so the phrase *caught carrying weapons* becomes nonessential.

Essential: Any students *caught carrying weapons* will be suspended from school.

Nonessential: These three students, *caught carrying weapons*, will be suspended from school.

A nonessential element is set off by commas.

Rebecca, who suffered major head trauma after colliding with a tree, died last night at the hospital.



An essential element is not set off by commas.

The girl who suffered major head trauma after colliding with a tree died last night at the hospital.

Commas

Nonessential phrases need commas; essential ones do not.

We think the package delivered while you were at lunch contains a bomb.
(essential)



We think this package, delivered while you were at lunch, contains a bomb.
(nonessential)

Another way to determine if a phrase or clause is essential or non-essential is to separate the sentence into two independent clauses. A sentence containing an essential phrase or clause can't be split, whereas one with a nonessential phrase or clause can.

Essential: The man *who was accused of murder last week* has been released on bail.
Nonessential: Slade, *who was accused of murder last week*, has been released on bail.
Test version: Slade was accused of murder last week. He has been released on bail.

Usually the meaning of the sentence determines whether or not you need commas. However, sometimes it is the use of commas that determines the meaning of the sentence. Because it does not contain commas, the first sentence below implies that I wrote more than one book on the subject of hazardous materials emergency response. The commas in the second sentence, on the other hand, imply that my subsequent books were on other topics.

Essential: My first book on hazardous materials emergency response is in its third printing.
Nonessential: My first book, on hazardous materials emergency response, is in its third printing.

Adverb Phrases and Clauses

Phrases and clauses serving as adverbs modify a verb, an adjective, or another adverb. They answer such questions as *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, or *how*. Nonessential adverb phrases and clauses are set off by commas; essential ones are not.

The phrase *after the accident* is nonessential in the second example below because *last year* tells when Adam began wearing his seat belt.

Essential: Adam began wearing his seat belt *after the accident*.
Nonessential: Adam began wearing his seat belt *last year*, *after the accident*.

The clause *as though she is under the influence of drugs* is nonessential in the second example below because the word *irrationally* identifies how Jennifer is behaving.

Essential: Jennifer is behaving *as though she is under the influence of drugs*.
Nonessential: Jennifer is behaving *irrationally*, *as though she is under influence of drugs*.

Appositives

An *appositive* is a noun or noun phrase that defines, explains, or renames another noun before it. Nonessential appositives are set off with commas; essential ones are not.

Appositives that provide an alternate name for clarification purposes are nonessential. They are often introduced by the word *or* or the phrase *that is*. (Note: There is an extra comma after *that is*.)

Hypoglycemia, *that is, low blood sugar*, can sometimes be a life-threatening emergency.

Psychogenic shock, *or fainting*, is usually not serious.

In the first sentence below, the words *fireman* and *firefighter* are essential to the meaning of the sentence, so no commas are used. However, the word *firefighter* can be deleted from the second sentence; therefore, it is nonessential and must be set off with commas.

Essential: The word *fireman* is considered sexist. You should replace it with the word *firefighter*.

Nonessential: You misspelled my title, *firefighter*, on the business card.

In the first sentence below, the title of the book is essential to identify which book because I have published more than one. In the second sentence, the word *first* identifies which book, so the title is nonessential.

Essential: My book *The First Responder's Pocket Guide to Hazardous Materials Emergency Response* was published in 1996.

Nonessential: My first book, *The First Responder's Pocket Guide to Hazardous Materials Emergency Response*, was published in 1996.

Sometimes other punctuation marks are less confusing than commas. In the following example, does *my captain* refer to *Kyle*, or were there three people on the line? Parentheses work better than commas in this sentence.

Confusing: Kyle, my captain, and I took the first line through the front door.

Clear: Kyle (my captain) and I took the first line through the front door.

An *appositive* is a noun or noun phrase that defines, explains, or renames another noun before it.

Nonessential appositives are set off with commas.



All candidates, male and female, were given the same consideration.

Commas may or may not be needed around a person's name.

My brother, Jack, videotaped the incident.

(implies that I have only one brother)



My brother Jack videotaped the incident.

(implies that Jack is one of two or more brothers)

In the first sentence below, how many categories of neglect are there? It would be easy for a reader to miss the word *two*, but remember seeing the word *neglect* three times. A colon would be more effective than a comma in this sentence.

Confusing: California law on child abuse defines two categories of physical neglect, “severe neglect” and “general neglect.”

Clear: California law on child abuse defines two categories of physical neglect: “severe neglect” and “general neglect.”

Names used as appositives

Use commas to set off names that are **not essential** to the meaning of the sentence. Do not use commas if the **name** is essential.

Essential: The actress *Melissa Gilbert* once played the role of an attorney who had been sexually abused by her father when she was a baby.

Nonessential: My favorite actress, *Melissa Gilbert*, once played the role of an attorney who had been sexually abused by her father when she was a baby.

Names of **family members** may be considered either essential or nonessential. When first and last names are provided, the name is considered nonessential and must be set off with commas.

My brother, *Jack Levy*, videotaped the incident.

However, the experts do not agree on what to do when only the first name is provided. If I use commas, it implies I have only one brother. *My brother* identifies who; *Jack* is considered nonessential.

My brother, *Jack*, videotaped the incident.

If I do not use commas, it implies that I have more than one brother and that Jack is the brother I am referring to. In this case, *Jack* is essential to identify which brother.

My brother *Jack* videotaped the incident.

However, some experts believe it is acceptable to omit the commas even if Jack is my only brother because the entire expression (*my brother Jack*) is read as one unit.

Parenthetical Elements

Parenthetical elements are nonessential words or groups of words that either interrupt the flow of a sentence or have been added as afterthoughts. They are called *parenthetical* because they can (and sometimes do) appear in parentheses. However, you can set them off with commas or dashes instead.

Every fire essentially is, *or may be considered*, a haz mat incident.

Driving Code 3 can be dangerous, *particularly during peak traffic hours*.

Words or phrases that interrupt the flow of a sentence sometimes make the sentence choppy or hard to read. You may want to explore different options to see what flows smoothly, *what is the clearest*, and what provides the emphasis you want.

Option 1: Heavy drinking, *whether you realize it or not*, can cause permanent brain damage.

Option 2: Heavy drinking can cause permanent brain damage, *whether you realize it or not*.

Option 3: *Whether you realize it or not*, heavy drinking can cause permanent brain damage.

When punctuating sentences *that have an interrupting expression* in the middle, be sure to put *your commas* in the right places. When in doubt, try removing the words between the commas to see if the sentence makes sense. If it doesn't, you need to move a comma.

Wrong: It may be the safest, though not the fastest way, to stop the leak.

Wrong: It may be the safest to stop the leak.

Right: It may be the safest way to stop the leak.

Thus: It may be the safest, though not the fastest, way to stop the leak.

Absolute Phrases

Absolute phrases are phrases that modify the sentence as a whole. Absolute phrases need to be set off by commas.

The critical patients transported, we turned our attention to the walking wounded.

I had only about an hour's sleep last night, *the fire having come in a little before midnight*.

Use commas to set off parenthetical elements that interrupt the flow of the sentence.

We'll find a meth lab, if I'm not mistaken, when we search the house.



Use a comma to set off words added as afterthoughts.

There may be other illegal activities going on in that house, if you catch my drift.

Commas are often needed for clarity.

A sentence must be easily understood as the reader is reading it.

**Soon after the fire was brought under control.
(confusing)**



**Soon after, the fire was brought under control.
(clear)**

Once Again, For Clarity

A sentence must be easily understood *as the reader is reading it*—that is, from left to right. If the reader has to reread the sentence to clarify what wasn't clear the first time, you have not *done* your job as a writer.

To Prevent Misreading

In the following examples, the comma is needed to provide a pause. Try reading the first sentence in each set without the pause, and you will see how it becomes confusing.

Confusing: Soon after the roof collapsed.

Clear: Soon after, the roof collapsed.

Confusing: To Glenn Michael was a hero.

Clear: To Glenn, Michael was a hero.

Confusing: Though tired firefighters continued to search through the debris.

Clear: Though tired, firefighters continued to search through the debris.

It is sometimes acceptable to omit the comma between two main clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction (*and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, *for*, *so*, or *yet*) if the resulting sentence is clear. However, the comma is often needed to prevent misreading.

I photographed the crime scene, and Kevin dusted for prints.

Let's cut the seat belt, or the victim will have difficulty breathing.

We never searched the house, for the homeowner told us everyone was out.

Remember, the sentence must be clear *as the reader is reading it*—from left to right. Without the commas, readers may initially think that I photographed the crime scene *and Kevin*, that I'm willing to cut the seat belt *or the victim*, and that we never searched the house *for the homeowner*.

Where to Avoid Using Commas

Let's take a final look at where to avoid using commas.

Between Subject and Verb

Do not put a comma between subject and verb (or verb phrase).

Wrong: *Victims of a knife murder who attempt to fight off their attackers, will often have defense wounds on their hands and wrists.*

Right: *Victims of a knife murder who attempt to fight off their attackers will often have defense wounds on their hands and wrists.*

If you feel compelled to use a comma to provide a pause because the subject and verb are too far apart, rewrite the sentence.

Better: *Victims of a knife murder will often have defense wounds on their hands and wrists if they attempted to fight off their attackers.*

Between Verb and Object

Do not put a comma between verb and object. (The object is the person or thing that receives the action. It may be a word, a phrase, or a clause.)

Wrong: *The district chief revealed during the post-fire analysis, that cleanup crews discovered asbestos in the building.*

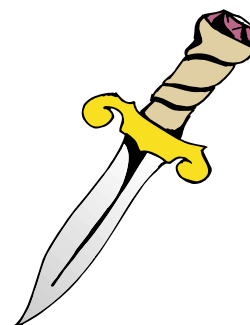
Right: *The district chief revealed during the post-fire analysis that cleanup crews discovered asbestos in the building.*

If you want to treat a phrase or clause as nonessential, set it off with a pair of commas.

Right: *The district chief revealed, during the post-fire analysis, that cleanup crews discovered asbestos in the building.*

Do not put a comma between subject and verb.

Victims of a knife murder who attempt to fight off their attackers, will often have defense wounds. . . .
(wrong)



If necessary, bring subject and verb closer together.

Victims of a knife murder will often have defense wounds. . . .
(right)

Do not separate parts of a compound object.

**We seized a briefcase containing 50 dime bags of heroin, and a .357 Magnum revolver.
(wrong)**



Remember, however, you must also be technically accurate.

Omitting the comma implies that both the gun and the drugs were contained within the briefcase.

Between Parts of a Compound Subject

Do not separate parts of a compound subject.

Wrong: The little *girl* who saved her mother by dialing 911, and the *dispatcher* who answered her call will have a chance to meet this afternoon at police headquarters.

Right: The little *girl* who saved her mother by dialing 911 and the *dispatcher* who answered her call will have a chance to meet this afternoon at police headquarters.

Between Parts of a Compound Object

Do not separate parts of a compound object.

Wrong: We seized a briefcase containing 50 dime bags of heroin, and a .357 Magnum revolver.

Although using a comma between parts of a compound object is grammatically incorrect, you can run into other problems if you simply remove the comma without considering the consequences. You can use the following sentence if both the gun and the drugs were contained within the briefcase.

Right: We seized a briefcase containing 50 dime bags of heroin and a .357 Magnum revolver.

If the gun was *not* inside the briefcase, use the sentence below. Both sentences are grammatically correct, but they mean different things. And, unfortunately, simple little errors like this can come back to haunt a police officer (or anyone in the emergency response field) years later in court. A clever defense attorney may attempt to undermine an officer's credibility by arguing that there are discrepancies between the report and the officer's testimony.

Right: We seized a .357 Magnum revolver and a briefcase containing 50 dime bags of heroin.

One more option is to repeat the subject and verb, resulting in two main clauses separated by a comma and a coordinating conjunction. This option is not as concise as the ones above, but it is grammatically correct.

Right: We seized a briefcase containing 50 dime bags of heroin, and we seized a .357 Magnum revolver.

Between Parts of a Compound Predicate

Do not separate parts of a compound predicate.

Wrong: We pulled the victim from his car, and started CPR after checking his pulse.

While some experts say it is permissible to put a comma between parts of a compound predicate to avoid misreading, most believe it is better to rewrite the sentence. If you want to make it clear that the phrase *after checking his pulse* applies only to starting CPR, you can substitute *then* for *and* to clarify the sequence of events.

Right: We pulled the victim from his car, then started CPR after checking his pulse.

You can also repeat the subject, resulting in two main clauses separated by a comma and a coordinating conjunction.

Right: We pulled the victim from his car, and we started CPR after checking his pulse.

Commas are acceptable in the following sentence because there are three predicates, not two. This is treated like items in a series.

Right: We pulled the victim from his car, checked his pulse, and started CPR.

Alternately, if the pulse was checked before the victim was removed from his car, use something like the following.

Right: After determining that the victim had no pulse, we pulled him from the car and started CPR.

After the Last Item in a Series

Do not use a comma after the last item in a series.

Wrong: I took a pike pole, an axe, and a salvage cover, from Engine 1.

Right: I took a pike pole, an axe, and a salvage cover from Engine 1.

Wrong: Look, listen, and feel for breathing, for five to ten seconds.

Right: Look, listen, and feel for breathing for five to ten seconds.

**Do not
separate parts
of a compound
predicate.**

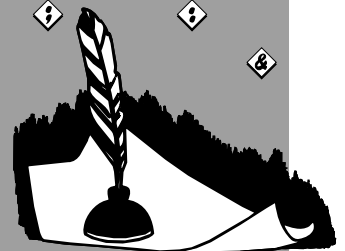
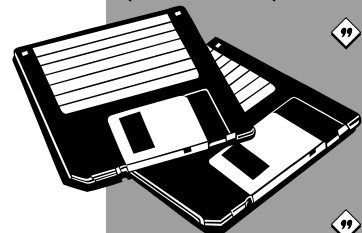
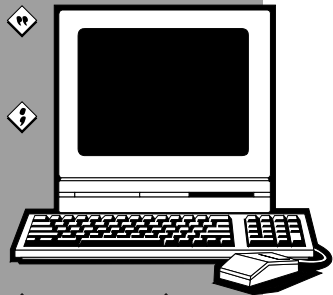
**We pulled
the victim from
his car, and
started CPR
after checking
his pulse.
(wrong)**



**Try rewriting
the sentence
instead.**

**We pulled
the victim from
his car, then
started CPR
after checking
his pulse.
(right)**

Chapter 2: Other Marks of Punctuation



Use a period at the end of a sentence.

Smoking is not allowed in this area.



Use a period at the end of an indirect question.

He asked if he could smoke in the room.

Periods (.)

The primary use for a period is to provide a break at the end of a sentence. However, it has a few other uses too.

To End a Sentence

Use a period at the end of a *declarative sentence*—one that makes a statement.

We were able to confine the fire to the room of origin.

She may have a punctured lung.

Use a period at the end of an *imperative sentence*—one that directs someone to do something. Do not use an exclamation point unless there is a need for extra emphasis.

Grab the rescue rope and follow me.

Put the gun down, and nobody will get hurt.

To End an Indirect Question

Use a period at the end of an *indirect question*—one that reports a question instead of asking it directly.

She asked if the injuries were serious.

We want to know how someone could break in without being noticed.

To End a Polite Request

Use a period at the end of a request or command that is phrased like a question out of politeness. In the following examples, the reader is expected to act on the request, not respond with a yes-or-no answer. Therefore, the sentence is punctuated with a period.

Would you please forward a copy of my report to the chief.

Will you let me know when he regains consciousness.

Although this seems like a simple rule, it is often difficult to determine the correct way to punctuate sentences such as these. Are these truly requests or are they questions? Consider the reader's perspective as well: Am I expected to do something or do I have a choice to say no? If the intent is not clear, you may not get the results you want. When in doubt, rewrite the sentence so that it is clearly a question or a request.

As a question: May I ask a favor of you? Will you call me when he regains consciousness?

As a request: Please let me know when he regains consciousness.

To End Elliptical Expressions

Put a period at the end of an *elliptical expression*—a condensed expression representing a more complete statement or command.

Careful. (*Be careful in there.*)

Whatever you say. (*Whatever you say is fine by me.*)

Put a period at the end of an elliptical expression used in response to a question.

Did the victim make it? Yes.

Where do you want the ladder? *Over there, near the door.*

Put a period at the end of a simple greeting or mild exclamation.

Good morning.

Darn.

Note: An elliptical expression is different from a sentence fragment. A sentence fragment is a phrase or clause that has been incorrectly separated from another sentence. It is a grammatical error. Refer to pages 484-486 for more information.

Fragment: We'll be available on scene. As soon as we finish loading the five-inch hose.

Revised: We'll be available on scene as soon as we finish loading the five-inch hose.

**In general,
use a period at
the end of a
polite request
phrased like a
question.**

***Will you
bring me the
first aid kit.***



**Use a period
at the end of
an elliptical
expression.**

Thanks.

Other Marks of Punctuation

Use periods with abbreviations as appropriate.

See if you can raise Dr. Smith on the radio.



Use periods as decimal points in numbers.

Our radio frequency is 154.250 MHz.

To Punctuate Some Abbreviations

Periods are used with some abbreviations (for example, *Mr.*, *Mrs.*, *a.m.*, and *p.m.*). However, there are a number of abbreviations that do not use periods. Refer to Chapter 12 for more information.

When an abbreviation comes at the end of a sentence, do not add an extra period. The final period in the abbreviation also serves as the period at the end of the sentence.

Wrong: The drill will begin promptly at 9:00 a.m..

Right: The drill will begin promptly at 9:00 a.m.

To Separate Initials in a Name

Periods are used after initials in a proper name, for example, *Jill M. Levy*. However, they are generally not used after initials that identify a prominent person, such as *JFK* and *FDR*.

To Separate Some Numbers

Periods are used as decimal points in numbers that are not whole. They are also used to separate dollars and cents.

The earthquake measured 7.1 on the Richter scale.

He stole a watch priced at \$89.95, then sold it to buy drugs.

To Punctuate an Outline or Displayed List

Periods are used after numbers and letters in an outline, unless those numbers and letters are enclosed in parentheses instead.

- I. Make Robbery Risky
 - A. The robbery problem in our community
 - B. Ways to discourage robbery
 - C. If a robbery happens
 - D. After a robbery

Refer to pages 549-556 for a more in-depth discussion of how to punctuate lists and outlines.

To Punctuate Run-In Headings

Periods may be used with run-in headings. These are headings that appear at the beginning of a paragraph and are immediately followed by other text. (Note: Dashes or colons are sometimes used instead of periods.)

Several environmental factors contribute to extreme fire behavior on a wildland fire:

- **Available fuel.** The fire needs fuel to generate the heat intensity. . . .
- **Wind.** Winds capable of producing extreme fire behavior can be the result. . . .
- **Low atmospheric moisture content.** Dry air means drier fuels. The drier the fuels. . . .

Do not use periods with main headings. However, do use question marks, exclamation points, and colons as appropriate.

Handling Pediatric Emergencies *(no punctuation required)*

Gang Violence in the '90s *(no punctuation required)*

Did Police Use Excessive Force? *(question mark required)*

Arsonist Strikes Again! *(exclamation point required)*

Anaphylactic Shock: A Life-Threatening Emergency *(colon required)*

Periods Used with Quotation Marks

In the United States, periods and commas go inside the quotation marks. (See pages 111-113 for more information on using quotation marks with other punctuation marks.)

"Well," he sighed, "Looks like the boys in Vice were right."

In general, do not use periods with headings.

Gang Violence in the '90s



However, do use other marks of punctuation in headings as appropriate.

When Will the Violence End?

Use a question mark after a direct question.

Is anybody injured?



However, use a period after an indirect question.

The dispatcher asked if anyone was injured.

Question Marks (?)

Question marks, as the name implies, are used to signify questions.

To End a Direct Question

Use a question mark after a *direct* question—one that asks a question directly. Do not use a question mark, however, after an *indirect* question—one that merely reports a question.

Direct: How many people are injured?

Indirect: The dispatcher asked how many people were injured.

Direct: Do they have him in custody yet?

Indirect: I asked if they had him in custody yet.

Direct: Why did they delay reporting the fire?

Indirect: We wondered why they delayed reporting the fire.

Note: A polite request phrased like a question is often punctuated with a period rather than a question mark. Refer to page 74 for more information.

To End a Rhetorical Question

A rhetorical question is one that does not require an answer. The reader is merely expected to agree with the idea. Rhetorical questions are usually punctuated with a question mark.

Who wouldn't be scared in a situation like that?

Why would anyone try to commit suicide that way?

Rhetorical questions are sometimes punctuated with an exclamation point instead of a question mark for emphasis.

Isn't it incredible that anyone could survive that crash!

To End a Sentence Spoken with Rising Intonation

A sentence phrased like a statement, but spoken with the rising intonation of a question, is punctuated with a question mark.

You think I killed her?

Angelo raised the 35-foot extension ladder by himself?

To End Elliptical Questions or Questions in Series

An *elliptical* (condensed) question is a word or phrase that is understood to represent a more complete question. Punctuate an elliptical question with a question mark.

The chief says you plan to retire. When? (*When do you plan to retire?*)

Was there really an earthquake this morning? What time?
How strong? (*What time did it occur? How strong was it?*)

Questions in series are another form of elliptical question. However, unlike the examples given above, questions in series can be combined into one question. (Questions in series may start with either a capital letter or a lowercase letter. Many experts consider both options acceptable.)

A series: Is the pain sharp? dull? crushing?

One question: Is the pain sharp, dull, or crushing?

To Punctuate Questions Within Other Sentences

When questions are incorporated into other sentences, it can be a little more difficult to determine the appropriate punctuation.

Short direct questions

There are two scenarios we need to look at. The first scenario involves a short direct question that falls either *within the sentence* or *at the end of the sentence*. The question is set off from the rest of the sentence by commas. A question mark is placed at the end of the sentence, regardless of where the short question is positioned.

John is going to be all right, *isn't he?*

You do know who the killer is, *don't you?*

Use a question mark after a rhetorical question.

Who wouldn't be scared?



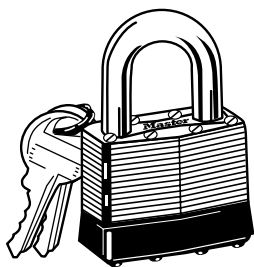
Use a question mark after a sentence spoken with the rising intonation of a question.

You know who the intruder is?

Other Marks of Punctuation

When short direct questions are incorporated into a sentence, punctuate the sentence with a question mark.

You did remember to lock up the evidence, didn't you?



When longer direct questions are incorporated into a sentence, there may be several ways to punctuate the sentence.

You are going to wait until Bill charges the line, *aren't you*, before you go in?

I'll have another chance to be tested on ladders, *won't I*, before the end of probation?

Longer direct questions

The second scenario involves a longer direct question incorporated into a sentence. Punctuation is more confusing with these types of sentences, so let's look at some examples first, then review the rules.

Version 1: The question is, How are we going to reach the victim?

Version 2: Here is the question: How are we going to reach the victim?

Version 3: We are faced with the question of how we are going to reach the victim.

In each of the three examples above, the question of reaching the victim is positioned at the *end* of the sentence. Yet, each example is punctuated differently. In version 1, a comma is used to set off the question because *The question is* does not form a complete sentence. Yet *Here is the question*, in version 2, does form a complete sentence, so it is set off with a colon. Both version 1 and version 2 end with a question mark because they are direct questions. Version 3 is an indirect question rather than a direct question, so the sentence is punctuated with a period instead. Note, also, the way the questions are capitalized in the first two examples.

Version 4: How are we going to reach the victim? is the question.

Version 5: How are we going to reach the victim, is the question.

Version 6: How we are going to reach the victim is the question.

In the last three versions, the question of reaching the victim is positioned at the beginning of the sentence. Most experts say it is acceptable to use either a question mark (version 4) or a comma (version 5) to set off the direct question in this position. Version 6 is an indirect question, so it is punctuated with a period.

If you look at all six versions, you can see that there is one factor that distinguishes the direct questions from the indirect questions. In the *direct* questions, the verb precedes the subject (*are we*). In the *indirect* questions, the subject precedes the verb (*we are*).

To Indicate Doubt or Uncertainty

Question marks are sometimes used to indicate doubt or uncertainty. When they are used in this capacity, they are enclosed in parentheses.

It was in 1980 (?) that we hired our first female firefighter.

The accident was in the southbound (?) lanes, about one block north of the freeway.

This technique should be used sparingly, particularly when writing reports or other documents that may be used in court someday. You need to be as accurate as possible in your writing. If you are truly uncertain about a particular detail, you may either need to leave it out of your document or rephrase the sentence: *I believe it was in 1980 that we hired our first female firefighter.* This sentence is far less likely to hurt your credibility than the previous version.

Question Marks with Quotation Marks

Placement of the question mark relative to quotation marks depends on how the question mark is used. If the question mark is part of the quoted material, it goes inside the quotation marks. If not, it goes outside.

“Do you remember what happened?” the paramedic asked.

She grabbed my hand and asked, “Am I going to die?”

Did you hear who said, “I know who the rapist is”?

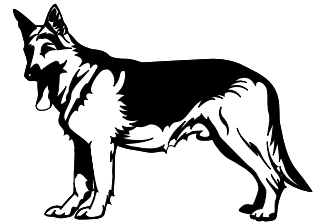
Is it true that she said, “I’m going to kill him”?

Refer to pages 111-113 for more information on how to use quotation marks with other punctuation marks.

If the question mark is part of the quoted material, it goes inside the quotation marks.

If not, it goes outside.

***They asked,
“Do you have a
canine unit?”***



***Who said,
“I want to pet
the dog”?***

Apostrophes (')

The apostrophe has three main functions: to indicate letters or numbers that have been omitted in the forming of contractions, to show possession, and to form some plurals.

To Form Contractions

Contractions may be used for ease of reading, for effect, or simply to squeeze more information into a limited space.

Contractions formed by condensing two words

Most contractions are formed by condensing two words into one. One or more letters are removed from the original words, and an apostrophe is added to take their place. The following are some common contractions.

I'd	you'd	they'd	he'd	here's	isn't	couldn't
I'll	you'll	they'll	he'll	there's	aren't	shouldn't
I'm	you're	they're	he's	where's	don't	wouldn't
I've	you've	they've	she'd	what's	doesn't	won't
it'll	we'd	we're	she'll	who'll	didn't	weren't
it's	we'll	we've	she's	who's	can't	let's

Many experts say contractions are appropriate only for informal writing and speech, not for formal writing. However, if words such as *it is*, *do not*, or *let us* make a sentence stiff, overly formal, or difficult to read, it may be appropriate to substitute *it's*, *don't*, or *let's*. Used in moderation, contractions can be an effective tool.

Avoid nonstandard contractions. The first example below is confusing because most readers will anticipate that *dog's* is being used in the possessive sense and will be expecting you to say something about the dog's injured nose, paw, or whatever.

Confusing: The *dog's* injured.

Clear: The *dog* is injured.

Do not confuse contractions and possessive pronouns.

Contraction

it's
they're
who's
you're

Possessive Pronoun

its
their
whose
your

Apostrophes are used to form contractions.

You've had too much to drink. You shouldn't be driving.



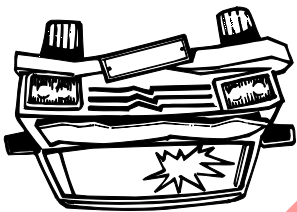
We'll take you home.

Other Marks of Punctuation

One of the most common mistakes writers make is to confuse *its* and *it's*.

***Its* is the possessive form.**

The car landed on its roof.



***It's* is the contraction of *it is*.**

It's (it is) going to be difficult to extricate the victim.

Its and *it's* are often confusing because adding 's usually indicates the possessive form of a word. The opposite is true with the word *it*. *Its* is the possessive form of *it*, whereas *it's* is the contraction of *it is*. One of the most frequent mistakes made in writing is to confuse *its* for *it's* and vice versa. However, ~~its~~ it's easy to determine which word is correct by substituting *it is* into your sentence. If *it is* makes sense, use *it's*. If not, use *its*.

Possessive: The car landed on *its* roof.

Contraction: *It's* (it is) going to be difficult to extricate her.

Contractions formed by condensing a single word

Sometimes contractions are formed by omitting a letter or letters from a single word. This may be done to indicate slang or dialect. Once again, the apostrophe takes the place of the missing letter(s).

<u>Original Word</u>	<u>Contraction</u>
Madam	Ma'am
never	ne'er
doing	doin'
because	'cause

Do not use an apostrophe with words that are in common use: *chute* (parachute), *con* (convict) *copter* (helicopter), *phone* (telephone), *photo* (photograph), *exam* (examination). These are considered words in their own right.

The word *ain't*

The word *ain't* is used most often to mean *am not*, *are not*, or *is not*. Nonstandard uses of the word also include *have not*, *has not*, *do not*, *does not*, and *did not*. Experts recommend against using the word *ain't* in formal writing. However, it's a colorful word that can sometimes add flavor or emphasis to informal writing.

Ain't that the truth!

Tell me it ain't so.

Contractions with numbers

Contractions are sometimes used with numbers (usually dates).

The Quake of '89 was centered less than 30 miles from here.

He was our chief from '80 to '92.

To Show Possession - Basic Principles

An apostrophe is used to show possession with all but the personal pronouns. The trick is determining whether to add just an apostrophe (') or an apostrophe plus s ('s).

Indefinite pronouns

Add an apostrophe plus s ('s) to indicate the possessive form of the indefinite pronouns.

Everyone's blood tests came back normal.

We need to look out for *each other's* safety.

Singular and plural nouns not ending in s

When singular or plural nouns (including acronyms) do not end in s, add an apostrophe plus s ('s).

The *man's* chest is bruised.

Adam's gun was stolen.

What is *OSHA's* phone number?

The *children's* father got them out of the house safely.

Exceptions are sometimes made for words ending in an s sound, particularly when followed by a word that begins with the letter s: *for convenience' sake, for appearance' sake*. These words are often written with an apostrophe only.

Plural nouns ending in s

Plural nouns ending in s require only an apostrophe (') at the end to indicate possession.

The jury was convinced by the *witnesses'* testimony.

We were able to revive the *Andersons'* baby.

The *girls'* parents have to be notified of the accident. (*refers to two or more girls*)

The *pilots'* quick thinking prevented a midair collision. (*refers to two pilots*)

Add an apostrophe plus s ('s) to indefinite pronouns and to singular or plural nouns that do not end in s.

Only one suspect's fingerprints were found on the murder weapon.



Add only an apostrophe to plural nouns ending in s.

Both suspects' fingerprints were found in the room.

Other Marks of Punctuation

The experts are divided on whether to use an apostrophe plus s ('s) or an apostrophe alone (') after singular nouns ending in s.

Pick the style that works best for you.

The bus's brakes failed.



The bus' brakes failed.

Singular nouns ending in s

The experts are very much divided on whether to use an apostrophe plus s ('s) or an apostrophe alone (') after *singular nouns* that end in s.

The magnifying *glass's* (or *glass'*) handle was broken.

The crash occurred when the *bus's* (or *bus'*) brakes failed.

Charles's (or *Charles'*) breathing was very shallow.

There seem to be three schools of thought on this issue. Some experts prefer adding just an apostrophe (') to eliminate the awkward s's or ss's at the end of a word. Others insist that an apostrophe plus s ('s) is correct in all situations except when the addition of an 's produces an awkward sound or a visually odd spelling. Thus you would write *bus's brakes* and *Charles's breathing*, but *Achilles' heel* and *for old times' sake* (not *Achilles's* or *times's*).

Lastly, some experts say that you should punctuate the words the way you pronounce them. For example, if you were talking about the testimony provided by one witness, the possessive form of *witness* would be pronounced as three syllables; hence you would write *the witness's testimony* rather than *the witness' testimony*.

Once again, decide which system works for you and use it consistently. Remember that the bottom line is to make sure your readers will understand what you are trying to say.

Inanimate objects

Some experts insist that because inanimate objects can't possess anything, you should not use a possessive form when referring to inanimate objects. Most, however, argue that the alternative results in unnecessary wordiness. In reality, you need to determine what makes the most sense in any given sentence. It will vary depending on the situation.

Awkward: We need to reload *the hose of Engine 3*.

Better: We need to reload *Engine 3's hose*.

Awkward: It took several hours to rescue the child from *the well's bottom*.

Better: It took several hours to rescue the child from *the bottom of the well*.

Words expressing time and distance

Sometimes there is no actual possession or ownership involved, but the expression still requires the possessive form of a noun.

Try to keep him at *arm's length*.

We'll have this case wrapped up in *two week's time*.

He had *fifteen years' experience* as a captain. (or *fifteen years of experience*)

Compound words

When you have a compound word, add the apostrophe plus s ('s) to the last word only.

My *sister-in-law's* father is a police officer.

The *jack-o'-lantern's* candle nearly ignited her costume.

Two or more—individual ownership

When two or more people have individual ownership, add the apostrophe plus s ('s) to each name.

Carol's and *Sally's* condos were robbed by the same man.

The *driver's* and the *passenger's* injuries were not serious.

Two or more—joint ownership or association

When two or more people or things share ownership or association, add the apostrophe plus s ('s) to the last name only.

Brad and Rick's assignment was to search the remaining apartments for victims.

Drug and alcohol's effects can be quite deadly.

When you use a possessive expression, such as *your proposal*, add an apostrophe plus s to the noun (*chief's*) also. This construction can be awkward, however. It is often better to rewrite the sentence.

Awkward: The *chief's* and *your proposal* is a sound one.

Better: Your proposal is a sound one.

Or: The proposal I received from you and your chief is a sound one.

Individual ownership:
add 's to each name.

Stacy's and Bonnie's apartments were robbed last week.



Joint ownership:
add 's to the last name only.

Stacy and Bonnie's apartment was robbed last week.

Other Marks of Punctuation

Referring to the possessive of a possessive can create awkward sentences.

A friend of my brother's house burned down when we were younger.
(awkward)



My brother's friend's house burned down when we were younger.
(awkward)

My brother had a friend whose house burned down when we were younger.
(better)

Possessive Personal Pronouns: No Apostrophe

Do not use an apostrophe with the possessive form of personal pronouns. They already indicate possession.

Whose helmet is this?

This is *my* badge. *Yours* is in *your* locker.

Possessive Phrases with the Word *Of*

Follow the guidelines already presented with possessive phrases formed with the word *of*.

The gun belongs to a friend of *Greg's*. (*apostrophe*)

The gun belongs to a friend of *his*. (*no apostrophe*)

Caution: Watch out for awkward sentences

When you refer to the possessive of a possessive, be careful not to create an awkward sentence. Look at the following example.

A friend of my brother's house burned down years ago.

One might misread this sentence to mean that my brother's house had a friend and it was the friend that burned down. Of course, that doesn't make sense. However, the sentence is awkward enough to momentarily confuse readers, forcing them to reread the sentence. Let's see what we can do to improve it.

My brother's friend's house burned down years ago.

This sentence is better, but experts frown on double possessives because they can also be confusing. Let's try something else.

The house of one of my brother's friends burned down years ago.

I don't care for that one either. Let's try one more.

My brother had a friend whose house burned down years ago.

Sometimes you need to rewrite a sentence several times before you find what works best.

Possessives Before *-ing* Verbs Serving as Nouns

An *-ing* verb that serves as a noun is called a *gerund*. A possessive noun placed before a gerund should also be punctuated with an apostrophe.

The *child's crying* made the situation more tense.

Neil's report writing has improved over the last year.

Kim was concerned about her *husband's drinking*.

If this creates an awkward sentence, try rewording it.

Awkward: We just heard about Steve's having been arrested for stealing.

Better: We just heard that Steve had been arrested for stealing.

Don't Confuse Possessives with Ordinary Plurals

Don't confuse the possessive form with ordinary plurals. Ordinary plurals do not have apostrophes.

Plural: The *Smiths* were not injured.

Possessive: The *Smiths'* car was damaged, however.

Plural: The *boys* were caught shoplifting.

Possessive: We found the stolen merchandise in the *boys'* backpacks.

Descriptive Versus Possessive: No Apostrophe

Do not use an apostrophe when a word is used in a descriptive sense rather than a possessive sense. Distinguishing between the two can be difficult, and even the experts do not always agree. However, the following are some guidelines that may help.

Descriptive words ending in s

Many words ending in *s* are adjectives, not possessives; they describe *what type*. A *news release* describes what kind of press release. A *savings account* describes what type of bank account.

Don't confuse possessives with ordinary plurals. Possessive nouns need apostrophes; plural nouns do not.

The boys were stealing.
(plural)



We found the merchandise in the boys' backpacks.
(possessive)

Other Marks of Punctuation

Use an apostrophe if the word is used in the possessive sense.

Sheriff's Department is possessive.



Do not use an apostrophe if the word is used in a descriptive sense.

Ladies Auxiliary is descriptive.

Unfortunately, you cannot apply this logic to every situation. You may need a good dictionary to determine whether or not an apostrophe is required. Even then, conventions are constantly changing. For example, *traveler's checks* is commonly written with an apostrophe. Yet some people consider it to be descriptive because it describes what kind of check; therefore, they write it as *travelers checks* instead. When in doubt, check your dictionary.

Names of organizations

Names of organizations can also be confusing. If you are lucky, you may be able to find the answer in your dictionary. For example, a standard dictionary lists *Ladies Auxiliary*. Yet it has no listing for things like *County Chiefs Association* or *Battered Women's Shelter*.

In general, you should add an apostrophe plus s ('s) if the term is either a singular possessive noun or an irregular plural noun (one that is not formed by adding s or es as most plurals are).

State Fire Marshal's Office (*singular possessive*)
County Sheriff's Department (*singular possessive*)
Battered Women's Shelter (*irregular plural*)
Children's Hospital (*irregular plural*)

In general, you should not use an apostrophe if the term is a regular plural noun.

County Chiefs Association (*regular plural*)
Ladies Auxiliary (*regular plural*)

One way to help remember this is to reverse the order of the words. You would refer to a *shelter for battered women* (not *womens*), so when you do add the s, you need to add an apostrophe as well. On the other hand, an *association for county chiefs* already contains an s; therefore, it is used in the descriptive sense rather than the possessive sense. The apostrophe is not required.

Remember, however, that these are guidelines, not hard and fast rules. People do have some flexibility in determining how they will name their organizations or even the products that they produce. Some names will conform with the guidelines: *Chemical Manufacturers Association*, *Underwriters Laboratories Inc.*, *California Men's Colony*. Other names may not; I have seen *County Fire Chiefs' Association* before. Follow the organization's preference if you know it. When in doubt, ask.

Special Problems in Forming Possessives

This page addresses other special problems not yet covered.

Names

Be careful when forming the possessive of names ending in s. Make sure you place the apostrophe in the right location.

Captain *Winters*' badge belongs to Captain *Winters*.

Captain *Winter*'s badge belongs to Captain *Winter*.

If a name ends with an abbreviation or a number, add the apostrophe plus s ('s) to the end of the complete name.

When is Howard Hoff Jr.'s retirement party?

What was Joe Williams III's hire date?

Abbreviations

The possessives of abbreviations are formed according to the same basic rules for forming the possessive of singular and plural nouns. Add an apostrophe plus s ('s) to singular abbreviations. Add only an apostrophe (') to plural abbreviations.

We awaited the *M.D.*'s *diagnosis* / *M.D.s*' *diagnoses*.

Holidays

There is a lot of variety when it comes to holidays. Some are singular possessive, some are plural possessive, and others are merely plural. When in doubt, consult a good dictionary or calendar.

Mother's Day	Presidents' Day	Veterans Day
New Year's Day	April Fools' Day	Armed Forces Day

Words or phrases that are italicized or underlined

An apostrophe plus s ('s) is not considered part of a word or phrase that is italicized, underlined, or enclosed in quotation marks.

The *1996 North American Emergency Response Guidebook*'s primary purpose. . . .

The 1996 North American Emergency Response Guidebook's primary purpose. . . .

**Be careful
when forming
the possessive of
names ending
in s.**

**Make sure
you place the
apostrophe in
the right
location.**

***Captain Winters'
badge belongs to
Captain Winters.***



***Captain Winter's
badge belongs to
Captain Winter.***

Other Marks of Punctuation

The experts are often divided on using apostrophes to form plurals of capital letters, acronyms, and abbreviations. However, the bottom line must be clarity.



Either EMTs or EMT's may be acceptable. However, EMT's may be confused with the possessive.

To Form Some Plurals

Unfortunately, there is considerable disagreement among the experts when it comes to using apostrophes to form the plurals of letters, numbers, and acronyms.

Plurals of individual letters and acronyms

Most experts agree that you should use an apostrophe plus *s* (*'s*) to form the plurals of uncapitalized letters and abbreviations.

We need to make sure we dot all our *i's* and cross all our *t's* on this contract.

You had better mind your *p's* and *q's*.

However, the experts do not agree on how to form the plurals of capital letters, acronyms, and abbreviations. Some maintain that you should always use an apostrophe to prevent misreading. Others say that the apostrophe is functionally unnecessary and that you should omit the apostrophe, except in situations that might otherwise be confusing.

He got *As* (or *A's*) on all his quizzes in the academy. (*Since the meaning is clear both with or without the apostrophe, you could choose either option.*)

If the victim is unconscious, check for *ABCs* (or *ABC's*). (*Since the meaning is clear both with or without the apostrophe, you could choose either option.*)

The Loma Prieta earthquake is the one that postponed Game 3 of the World Series between the San Francisco Giants and the Oakland *A's*. (*An apostrophe is needed in this situation because this is the team's name.*)

Realize that the apostrophe itself can sometimes cause confusion. An apostrophe generally signals the reader that the word is possessive (providing, of course, that it's not a contraction) and that the possession will be named next. By omitting the apostrophe from the plural form, you avoid giving the reader mixed signals.

Plural: The *EMTs* want more hands-on training.
Possessive: The *EMT's* quick thinking saved her life.

Plural: The *BLEVEs* occurred shortly after our arrival.
Possessive: The *BLEVE's* impact could be felt for miles.

Some abbreviations may be written either with or without periods

(for example, *M.D.* or *MD*). Given that the experts do not agree on the use of periods or apostrophes, you could conceivably write *M.D.s*, *M.D.'s*, *MDs* or *MD's*. Once again, be consistent which the style you choose.

Plurals of words and numbers

The experts also do not agree on whether apostrophes are needed to form the plurals of words and numbers. The majority favor omitting the apostrophe because it is functionally unnecessary. However, others insist on using apostrophes.

Count off by *threes* (or *three's*).

Let's evaluate the *pros and cons* (or *pro's and con's*) first.

I don't want to hear any *ifs, ands, or buts* (or *if's, and's, or but's*) about it.

Figure 8s (or *Figure 8's*) are strong knots.

We worked several protests in the *1960s* (or *1960's*).

Most experts agree that you should *use* an *apostrophe* if adding the *s* alone may cause misreading or *create* a word that is unfamiliar. However, if you have difficulty *determining* whether the word would be better understood with the *apostrophe* or without it, you should probably rewrite the sentence.

Acceptable: I keep getting my *whichs* and *thats* mixed up.

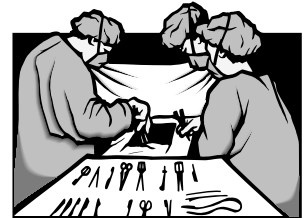
Acceptable: I keep getting my *which's* and *that's* mixed up.

Better: I have difficulty remembering when to use *which* and when to use *that*.

The plurals of *do* and *don't*

The plural of *don't* is *don'ts*; that one is easy. The plural of *do* can be written either as *do's* or as *dos*. Pick the form that works for you, and use it consistently.

Most experts favor omitting the apostrophe in plurals of words and numbers because the apostrophe is functionally unnecessary.



I weighed all the pros and cons before deciding on surgery.

Use parentheses to set aside information.

The child (a six-month-old boy) was abducted by his father.



Parentheses tend to de-emphasize the information, whereas commas and dashes provide greater emphasis in comparison.

Parentheses ()

Parentheses are used to set aside supplemental information.

To Set Aside Parenthetical Elements

Parenthetical elements are words or groups of words that are not essential to the meaning of the sentence and that generally interrupt the main flow of thought. They may be set off in one of three ways. *Dashes* are used for maximum emphasis; they call attention to the parenthetical element more so than commas or parentheses do. *Commas* are used to set the information aside without emphasizing it. *Parentheses*, on the other hand, tend to de-emphasize the word or words they enclose.

Check the carotid pulse (at the neck) for five to ten seconds to determine if the victim has a pulse.

Our structural firefighting clothing is bulky and heavy (as one might expect).

When a parenthetical element contains one or more commas of its own, enclosing it in parentheses will be less confusing than setting it off with commas.

We found several chemicals (flammable and combustible liquids, corrosive liquids, oxidizers, and compressed gases) stored improperly in the warehouse.

To Introduce an Acronym or Abbreviation

Parentheses are used to either introduce or explain acronyms and abbreviations that readers might not be familiar with. Once an acronym or abbreviation is introduced this way, it can be written alone in subsequent uses.

Direct flame impingement on a pressure vessel may result in a Boiling Liquid Expanding Vapor Explosion (BLEVE).

Decontamination (decon) is done as needed to prevent the spread of contamination and to reduce the harmful effects of exposure to contaminated individuals.

Someone who is high on PCP (phencyclidine) is likely to be very combative.

To Introduce Another Name

Parentheses are used to introduce another name by which a person prefers to be called. Nicknames, on the other hand, are more commonly enclosed in quotation marks.

Leonard (Len) Williams owns several antique fire engines.

To Confirm a Number

Sometimes when numbers are spelled out in a document, they are immediately repeated in numeric form enclosed in parentheses. However, this format should be reserved for times when you need to draw attention to the numbers to prevent misreading.

The code requires you to maintain at least thirty-six (36) inches of clearance in front of the electrical panel.

To Identify Items in a Series

Using numbers or letters in parentheses helps distinguish items in a series better than using commas alone does. This format is sometimes used as an alternative to a vertical list when the list is short.

Before we can issue you an occupancy permit, you must (1) make sure every exit sign is properly lit, (2) install a fire extinguisher near the main exit, and (3) post evacuation maps in each of the locations specified on the attached map.

To Provide Reference or Direction

Parentheses are used to enclose directions that refer readers to an illustration, chart, or other supplemental information. The reference may be placed either within the sentence or after the sentence.

Use the acronym PQIRST (see page 21) to help you assess the patient's complaint of pain.

MC-306 cargo tanks transport flammable and combustible liquids, such as gasoline and diesel fuel (Figure 4.24).

Never be fooled into thinking that a routine traffic stop can't escalate into a life-and-death situation. (Figure 6.1)

Numbers or letters in parentheses can help distinguish items in a series.



***Please
(1) make sure
the exit sign is
lit, (2) install an
extinguisher,
and (3) post
evacuation
maps.***

Other Marks of Punctuation

While it is acceptable to put a complete sentence within another sentence, it is generally better to write two separate sentences.

The boy brought alcohol (can you believe it?) to school. (acceptable)



The boy brought alcohol to school. Can you believe it? (better)

To Clarify a Date or Location

Dates and locations are sometimes enclosed in parentheses to reference a specific event. In the example below, the year 1980 is set off in parentheses as if it were a nonessential element. However, it is included to provide clarification so that readers don't have to question whether the writer is referring to this fire or another fire.

It was the MGM Grand Hotel Fire in Las Vegas (1980) that inspired me to choose a career in fire safety education.

Parentheses with Other Punctuation Marks

How to punctuate sentences containing parentheses depends on how the parenthetical material is used.

With periods

A complete sentence that falls between other complete sentences is capitalized and punctuated like any ordinary sentence.

He wasn't out of prison for more than a week before he was back on the streets selling cocaine. (But we knew that would happen.) It was inevitable that he would be arrested again.

However, when any parenthetical element falls within a sentence, do not capitalize the first word unless it is a proper noun, a proper adjective, or the pronoun *I*. Do not use a period at the end of the parenthetical element unless needed for an abbreviation.

It turns out that the reason I've been so cranky lately is that I have hypoglycemia (low blood sugar).

According to the last fire weather report (given at 6:28 p.m.), the burn index is 37 and the dispatch level is medium.

Note: While it is acceptable to put a complete sentence within another sentence, it is generally better to write two separate sentences.

Acceptable: The stolen diamond (it was finally recovered, by the way) had been in their family for five generations.

Better: The stolen diamond had been in their family for five generations. The diamond was finally recovered, by the way.

With question marks and exclamation points

Question marks and exclamation points go inside parentheses if they apply solely to the parenthetical element. Otherwise, they go outside. (Note: While it is acceptable to put a sentence within another sentence, it is generally better to write two separate sentences.)

- Acceptable:* The fire escape (damn it!) was never designed to support the weight of that many people.
- Better:* Damn it! The fire escape was never designed to support the weight of that many people.

If a question mark or exclamation point is needed to end the sentence as a whole, omit it from the parenthetical element. Either put the punctuation mark at the end of the sentence or write two separate sentences.

- Wrong:* Do we need any more victims (and if so, how many?) for the mass casualty exercise?
- Right:* Do we need any more victims (and if so, how many) for the mass casualty exercise?
- Better:* Do we need any more victims for the mass casualty exercise? If so, how many?

With quotation marks

Quotation marks go inside the parentheses when the quoted words are part of the parenthetical element. Otherwise they go outside.

We know he was selling PCP (also known as “angel dust”).

Dieter reminded his students, “Gasoline vapors are heavier than air (meaning the specific gravity is greater than one).”

With commas

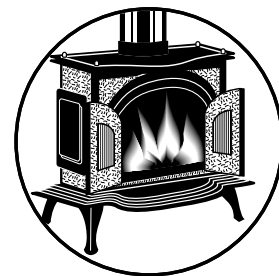
Do not put a comma before the opening parenthesis, even if a comma would have been appropriate in that location if the parentheses had not been there. The parenthesis bumps the comma out of its usual place.

We’ve seen an increase in violent crimes over the last twelve months (namely, homicide and rape).

Do, however, use commas, periods, colons, or semicolons after the closing parenthesis as appropriate to the context of the sentence.

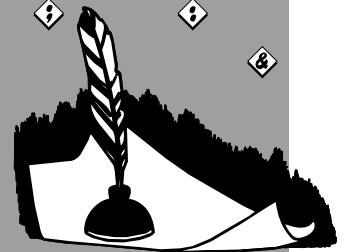
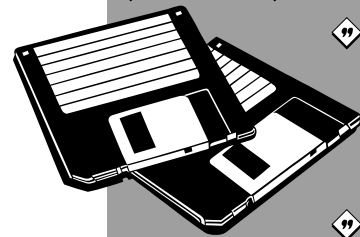
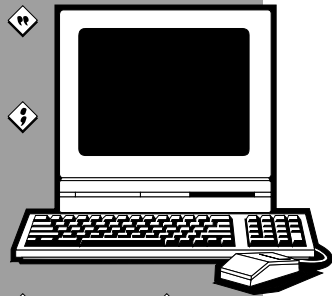
This dispatcher has her act together (as we’ve seen many times); she consistently performs well under pressure.

Do not put a comma before the opening parenthesis.



During the winter months (December through February), we see an increase in fires due to heating equipment.

Chapter 14: More Effective Writing



The active voice emphasizes the one doing the action.

Dolph detected a residue of flammable liquid.



The passive voice emphasizes the person or thing being acted upon.

A residue of flammable liquid had been detected.

Using the Appropriate Voice

Recognizing the Active and Passive Voices

There are two voices in sentence structure: *active* and *passive*. The *active voice* emphasizes the one doing the action. The *passive voice* emphasizes the person or thing being acted upon. The one doing the action may or may not even be mentioned in a sentence written in the passive voice.

Active: Ed treated the homeowner for smoke inhalation.

Passive: The homeowner was treated for smoke inhalation by Ed.

Active: John found the gun hidden in a desk drawer.

Passive: The gun was found hidden in a desk drawer.

Active: Dolph detected a residue of flammable liquid underneath the carpet.

Passive: A residue of flammable liquid had been detected underneath the carpet.

Notice that the passive voice requires a form of the verb *be* plus the past participle of the main verb (*was treated, was found, had been detected*).

Using the Appropriate Voice

Your writing will generally be more effective if you write in the active voice rather than the passive voice. The active voice is more powerful, more interesting, and usually more concise. You should use the active voice as much as possible, unless you have good reason to do otherwise.

Sometimes the passive voice is preferable to the active voice, particularly in the emergency response arena. For example, the passive voice is useful when the one doing the action is either unknown or less important than the one being acted upon.

Active: Someone kidnapped a newborn baby from the maternity ward this morning.

Passive: A newborn baby was kidnapped from the maternity ward this morning.

Active: A man attacked Susan in the parking lot of her apartment complex.

Passive: Susan was attacked in the parking lot of her apartment complex.

Sometimes it is desirable not to disclose the identity of the one doing the action—even when the identity is known. For example, it might be important to protect the identity of a witness. You can use the active voice, substituting the words *a witness*, or you can rephrase the sentence using the passive voice instead of the active voice.

Active: The bartender reported seeing the suspect with the murder victim an hour before the shooting.

Active: A witness reported seeing the suspect with the murder victim an hour before the shooting.

Passive: The suspect was seen with the murder victim an hour before the shooting.

The passive voice is often used to sound more diplomatic, to soften the impact of a strong statement, or to avoid sounding bossy.

Active: We rejected your request for a leave of absence.

Passive: Your request for a leave of absence was rejected.

Active: You must bring the building up to code within the next 60 days.

Passive: The building must be brought up to code within the next 60 days.

The passive voice is often used in scientific and technical writing where the emphasis is once again on the action being taken rather than the one doing the action.

Active: Several scientists across the country are conducting studies to identify a suitable replacement for Halon extinguishing agents.

Passive: Several studies are being conducted across the country to identify a suitable replacement for Halon extinguishing agents.

The active voice is stronger and more direct. However, the passive voice is appropriate when you need to emphasize the one(s) being acted upon.



A baby was kidnapped this morning.

Avoid needless shifts in tense. If actions take place in the same time frame, you should keep the tense consistent.

The man robbed the bank and steals ten thousand dollars.
(inconsistent)



The man robbed the bank and stole ten thousand dollars.
(revised)

Avoiding Needless Shifts

A shift is a change in structure or style midway through a sentence or paragraph. Shifts may involve changes in tense, number, person, mood, discourse, voice, or point of view.

Shifts in Tense

It is sometimes necessary to change tenses within a sentence or paragraph because relative time frames are different. Such is the case in the example below where we want to show how an event in the future relates to one in the past.

The victim *will have* a better chance of survival if we can get him to the hospital within *one hour* of when the accident occurred.

A problem occurs, however, when you change tenses without a valid reason to do so. If actions take place in the same time frame, you should keep the tense consistent.

Inconsistent: The boy *robbed* the clerk at gunpoint and *steals* over three hundred dollars.

Revised: The boy *robbed* the clerk at gunpoint and *stole* over three hundred dollars.

The first example above shifted from past tense (*robbed*) to present tense (*steals*). If you are describing an event that occurred in the past, use the past tense throughout. You can use the present tense instead: *The boy robs the clerk at gunpoint and steals over three hundred dollars.* However, this construction would be more appropriate when describing the action in a book or movie.

Shifts in Number

Pronouns and antecedents must agree in number. The first example on the following page shifts from a singular antecedent (*a person*) to a plural pronoun (*they*). You can correct this problem by making everything either singular or plural. Making everything plural is often the easiest approach. Alternately, you can rewrite the sentence to eliminate the pronoun. (The correct use of pronouns is covered in more detail in Chapter 7.)

Inconsistent: If *a person* mixes drinking and driving, *they* may end up in jail.

Revised: If *a person* mixes drinking and driving, *he or she* may end up in jail.

Revised: If *people* mix drinking and driving, *they* may end up in jail.

Better: People who mix drinking and driving may end up in jail.

There must also be a logical agreement between other related words. Look at the nouns in the examples below. *Recruits* is plural; however, the recruits do not have a single collective *attitude*. Therefore, *attitudes* must also be plural.

Inconsistent: All the *recruits* have a good *attitude*.

Revised: All the *recruits* have good *attitudes*.

Shifts in Person

Shifting from one person to another is a common problem, both in writing and in speech. The first example below *shifts* from third person (*a person*) to second person (*you*). You can correct this problem by putting everything in either the second person or the third person or by rewriting the sentence *entirely*.

Inconsistent: If *a person* stops breathing, *you* can suffer permanent brain damage in four to six minutes.

Revised: If *you* stop breathing, *you* can suffer permanent brain damage in four to six minutes.

Revised: If *a person* stops breathing, *he or she* can suffer permanent brain damage in four to six minutes.

Revised: *People* who stop breathing can suffer permanent brain damage in four to six minutes.

The first example below contains a shift from first person (*I*) to second person (*you*). This problem often occurs when writers try to state an opinion without being too “me-oriented” or when they try to show how others are impacted by the same thing. You can correct this problem by putting everything in the first person or by rewriting the sentence.

Inconsistent: I like the new helmets because they give *you* better protection.

Revised: I like the new helmets because they give *me* better protection.

Revised: I like the new helmets because they provide better protection.

Avoid shifts in number.

If a person mixes drinking and driving, they may end up in jail.



Often the best solution is to make everything plural.

If people mix drinking and driving, they may end up in jail.
(revised)

Avoid inappropriate shifts in voice.

We followed the suspect and his position was radioed to officers on the ground.
(inconsistent)



We followed the suspect and radioed his position to officers on the ground.
(revised)

Shifts in Voice

Sometimes a shift in voice is appropriate because it keeps the reader focused on a single subject. The following example shifts from an active voice to a passive voice, but the subject, *fire*, does not change.

The *fire* burned out of control for hours, but *was extinguished* by early morning.

If a shift in voice also involves a shift in subject (for example, from *we* to *the children*), the resulting sentence will be awkward and confusing. The following sentence was corrected by putting everything in the active voice.

Inconsistent: As *we* pulled up to the burning structure, the children inside *could be heard* screaming desperately for help.

Revised: As *we* pulled up to the burning structure, *we* could hear the children inside screaming desperately for help.

Shifts in Mood

Watch for shifts in mood when writing directions. The first example below shifts from the imperative mood (*apply direct pressure*) to the indicative mood (*you should elevate*). The initial revision is written in the indicative mood; the words *you should* are understood to apply to both directions. The imperative mood, used in the final example, is clearer and more concise. However, either mood is acceptable, as long as you use it consistently.

Inconsistent: Apply direct pressure to the wound, and you should elevate the arm above the level of the heart.

Revised: You should apply direct pressure to the wound and elevate the arm above the level of the heart.

Better: Apply direct pressure to the wound, and elevate the arm above the level of the heart.

Shifts in Discourse

Shifts in discourse can occur when reporting what someone else has said or written. The first example below shifts from a direct quotation to an indirect quotation. Correct this problem by using either direct discourse or indirect discourse throughout.

Inconsistent: The chief's secretary said, "He's in a meeting," and could she take a message.

Revised: The chief's secretary said that he was in a meeting and offered to take a message.

Revised: The chief's secretary said, "He's in a meeting. Can I take a message?"

The next example shifts from an indirect question to a direct question. By rewording it slightly, we can maintain an indirect question throughout. Alternately, the entire thing can be written as a direct question.

Inconsistent: I asked whether the product is flammable and, if so, is it within its flammable range.

Revised: I asked whether the product is flammable and, if so, whether it is within its flammable range.

Revised: Is the product flammable and, if so, is it within its flammable range?

Shifts in Point of View

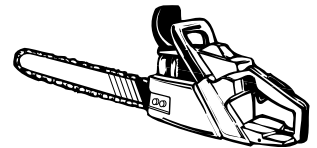
Point of view refers to the person through whose eyes the story is told. The first example below begins with an observation made by rescue workers, then abruptly switches to the driver's point of view. The problem was corrected by writing everything in the eyes of the rescue workers.

Inconsistent: We found the vehicle resting on its roof at the bottom of the embankment. The driver struggled to crawl out through the broken window, afraid the leaking gasoline would ignite.

Revised: We found the vehicle resting on its roof at the bottom of the embankment. We could see the driver struggling to crawl out through the broken window, apparently afraid that the leaking gasoline would ignite.

Avoid shifts between direct and indirect discourse.

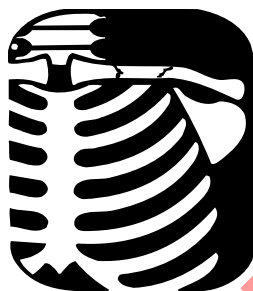
Steve said that we need to ventilate the roof and could I bring him the chain saw.
(inconsistent)



Steve said that we need to ventilate the roof and asked me to bring him the chain saw.
(revised)

Careless repetition will weaken your writing. Avoid using different words that mean the same thing.

Her fractured clavicle was broken in two places.
(repetitious)



Her clavicle was broken in two places.
(revised)

Being Concise

Being concise is fundamental to effective writing. Writing *concisely* does not mean omitting details for the sake of brevity. Nor does it require writers to sacrifice creativity. But it does mean *using* words economically and omitting words that don't add value.

Avoid Unnecessary Repetition

Repetition is sometimes an effective tool to *make writing* more coherent or emphatic. Careless repetition, however, will weaken your writing. Avoid using different words that *mean the same thing*.

Repetitious: He remained *awake* and *conscious* throughout the ordeal.

Revised: He remained conscious throughout the ordeal.

Revised: He remained awake throughout the ordeal.

Using both *awake* and *conscious* doesn't add value to the sentence. However, there are some *idiomatic* expressions where repetition is acceptable. For example, we refer to patients as being *alert* and *oriented*. *Alert* and *oriented* mean the same thing, yet emergency responders *are so* accustomed to using the words together that it would *seem incomplete* to use either one alone.

Repetitive words sometimes creep in at opposite ends of a sentence.

Repetitious: The *smoke-filled* attic was *charged with smoke*.

Revised: The attic was charged with smoke.

Repetitious: I *momentarily* lost sight of the suspect *for an instant*.

Revised: I momentarily lost sight of the suspect.

Revised: I lost sight of the suspect for an instant.

Repetitive words are often found side by side.

Repetitious: We would like you to *return again* tomorrow to work with our sketch artist.

Revised: We would like you to return tomorrow to work with our sketch artist.

Repetitious: The jury has reached a *consensus of opinion*.

Revised: The jury has reached a consensus.

The key to eliminating unnecessary repetition is being able to identify words that can be omitted without changing the meaning of the sentence. Consider the following examples.

Repetitious

red in color
circular in shape
dangerous in nature
cooperate together

Concise

red
circular
dangerous
cooperate

Redundant modifiers

Redundant modifiers are often harder to recognize. Many writers focus on how colorful or catchy the writing is, but fail to spot the redundancy. To say *the officer clenched his fists tightly* is redundant because *clenched* implies *tightly*. Similarly, there is no need to describe a *lifeless corpse*. Other examples of redundant modifiers include *intentional sabotage*, *flaming inferno*, *totally demolished*, *gaseous vapors*, *advance warning*, *unexpected surprise*, *personal belongings*, and *true facts*.

There are often subtle differences between a redundant modifier and one that serves a purpose. For example, *toxic poison* is redundant because *toxic* means *poisonous*. However, *deadly poison* is not redundant. By definition, a *poison* is a substance with an inherent property to destroy life or *impair health*. So, for example, a *mild poison* might be one that *causes* harmful effects to the body, but does not ordinarily cause death. A *deadly poison*, by comparison, would be one that easily causes death upon minimal exposure.

Omit Unnecessary Words

Be thorough when you need to be, but do not fill your sentences with empty words that don't add value.

Empty words

Let's start by looking at little words that can be easily eliminated without changing the meaning of the sentence.

Help me lower the basket ~~down~~ to the victim. (*Where else would you lower something—up?*)

Where is the gun ~~at~~?

We didn't have a single call all shift ~~long~~.

Avoid redundant modifiers.

*The **product** is **toxic** in nature.*
(redundant)

*The **product** is **toxic**.*
(concise)



Subtle differences may separate a redundant modifier from one that serves a purpose.

Toxic poison is redundant; deadly poison is not.

More Effective Writing

Don't fill your sentences with empty words.

I pulled him over for the reason that he made an illegal U-turn.
(wordy)



Many phrases can be replaced by one or two words.

I pulled him over because he made an illegal U-turn.
(concise)

Please ~~go~~ get the gurney.

We have triaged all ~~of~~ the victims.

Empty phrases

Many phrases can be replaced by one or two words.

Wordy: We had to shut down the highway *because of the fact that there was* an accident involving an overturned gasoline tanker.

Concise: We had to shut down the highway *because of* an accident involving an overturned gasoline tanker.

Wordy: We will need additional resources *in the event that* it becomes necessary to evacuate residents from the neighborhood.

Concise: We will need additional resources *if* it becomes necessary to evacuate residents from the neighborhood.

Here are more examples of empty phrases that can be replaced by a word or two.

Wordy
at the present time
at that point in time
until such time as
at a later date
ahead of schedule
for the purpose of
in order to
for the reason that
because of the fact that
in the event that
provided that
all of a sudden
at the same time as
during the course of
in spite of the fact that
has the ability to
pertaining to
with regard to
a sufficient number of
on two different occasions
make contact with
in view of the fact that
it would appear that
it is my opinion

Concise
now, currently
then
until
later
early
for
to
because
because
if
if
suddenly
while
during
although, though
can, is able to
about
about
enough
twice
meet, call
considering
it seems
I think

Empty thoughts

The following examples are more extreme. The unnecessary words and phrases make the sentences unclear and difficult to read. Readers quickly become frustrated with such garbled writing and may even question the credibility of document and its author.

Garbled: I made the decision to spend my own time and money to put myself through the paramedic training program mostly for the reason that I was under the impression it would give me an advantage that could possibly help me get a job as a firefighter someday.

Revised: I put myself through paramedic school mainly because I thought it would help me get a job as a firefighter someday.

Garbled: The operations concepts addressed in this plan allow for the emergency response and mitigation efforts relating to a broad spectrum of hazards with which the site could be faced.

Revised: This plan contains guidelines for responding to a variety of emergencies that could occur at the site.

Garbled: If special assistance is required for the evacuation of disabled persons, assist as necessary with “buddies” or Emergency Response Teams if the evacuation buddies are unable to accomplish the action.

Revised: Assign personnel to assist with the evacuation of disabled persons as needed.

Legal documents are some of the worst offenders. The attorneys and bureaucrats who write like this are overly concerned about addressing every minute detail from a legal standpoint and seldom stop to consider the individuals who must read the documents and implement the programs. The following garbled examples come from 29 CFR 1910.120, *Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response*. The suggested revisions are easier to read.

Garbled: All suspected conditions that may pose inhalation or skin absorption hazards that are immediately dangerous to life or health (IDLH), or other conditions that may cause death or serious harm, shall be identified during the preliminary survey and evaluated during the detailed survey.

Revised: All potential hazards shall be identified during the preliminary survey and evaluated during the detailed survey.

Make your message clear.

This plan contains guidelines for responding to a variety of emergencies that could occur at the site.



Assign personnel to assist with the evacuation of disabled persons as needed.

Discretionary expressions can often be eliminated.

It is my opinion that Bob is an excellent dispatcher.
(discretionary)



Bob is an excellent dispatcher.
(revised)

You must be able to recognize when an expression adds value and when it does not.

Garbled: Based upon the results of the preliminary site evaluation, an ensemble of PPE shall be selected and used during initial site entry which will provide protection to a level of exposure below permissible exposure limits and published exposure levels for known or suspected hazardous substances and health hazards, and which will provide protection against other known and suspected hazards identified during the preliminary site evaluation.

Revised: PPE used for initial site entry shall provide protection against known or suspected hazards identified during the preliminary site evaluation. PPE shall maintain exposures to known or suspected hazardous substances below permissible exposure limits and published exposure levels.

Excessive detail

Don't bore your readers with elaborate detail that adds nothing to the material. For example, most people either know how to do Rescue Breathing or have some picture of what the process entails. The first example below adds nothing to the meaning. The second sentence is far more effective.

Overkill: I knelt down next to the victim's head, put my right hand on his forehead and the index and middle fingers of my left hand on his chin, tipped his head back, put my ear down next to his face, with my head facing towards his chest, and checked his breathing by looking for the chest to rise and fall, listening for the sound of breathing, and feeling for his breath against the side of my face.

Revised: I knelt down next to the victim, tipped his head, and checked his breathing.

Discretionary expressions

Discretionary expressions used to qualify a statement can often be eliminated without sacrificing clarity. Consider the expression *It is my opinion that*. If you are making a statement, does it not imply that this is your opinion? If you need to clarify that this is *your* opinion versus someone else's, the expression may be important. Otherwise, why not leave it out?

Discretionary: *It is my opinion that* we should inspect the facility more often.

Revised: We should inspect the facility more often.

How about the phrase *for all intents and purposes* in the following example? Is the investigation complete or not? If it is, don't add the extra words. If not, why not specify what still needs to be done?

Discretionary: The investigation is complete, *for all intents and purposes*.

Revised: The investigation is complete.

Revised: The investigation is complete, except for the independent analysis from a private lab.

What about the phrase *all things considered* in the first example below? What does that really mean? It may be appropriate if the sentence follows a discussion of problems encountered at the fire. By itself, however, the phrase raises questions. It is better to eliminate the phrase or replace it with specific information.

Discretionary: *All things considered*, we made a good stop on the fire.

Revised: We made a good stop on the fire.

Revised: Despite delays due to difficult access and poor hydrant pressure, we made a good stop on the fire.

Keep It Simple and Direct

Your writing will be more powerful and more effective if you keep it simple and direct.

Combine sentences

If two or more sentences relate to the same subject, try combining them into one tight sentence.

Wordy: Engine 11 reported that a motorcycle officer was injured. Engine 11 requested an additional ambulance.

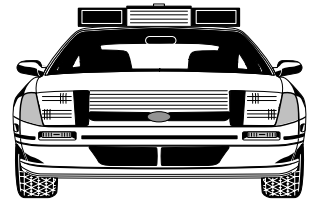
Revised: Engine 11 reported that a motorcycle officer was injured and requested an additional ambulance.

Wordy: I am taking an EMT class. Beth is taking the class also. The entire class runs twelve weeks. It is being held at the fire department training center.

Revised: Beth and I are taking a twelve-week EMT class at the fire department training center.

If two or more sentences relate to the same subject, you can often combine them into one tight sentence.

She saw the patrol car in her rear view mirror. She immediately slowed down when she saw the patrol car.
(wordy)



She saw the patrol car in her rear view mirror and immediately slowed down.
(revised)

Clauses and phrases used as modifiers can often be reduced to fewer words without losing emphasis or clarity.

The boots that have been contaminated need to be replaced. (wordy)



The contaminated boots need to be replaced. (revised)

Reduce your modifiers

Try restructuring clauses, phrases, and words used as modifiers to see if you can reduce the word count without losing emphasis or clarity.

Wordy: We found the knife, *which was covered with blood*, in a trash can behind the house.

Revised: We found the *bloody* knife in a trash can behind the house.

Wordy: The earthquake, *which was terrifying and occurred without warning*, left hundreds of people *displaced from their homes*.

Revised: The *sudden, terrifying* earthquake left hundreds homeless.

Use fewer expletives

Sentences that begin with expletives—*there is* or *it is*—are wordier and less dynamic than other sentences. Expletives have their place, such as when introducing a subject for the first time or when indicating a change in direction. However, you should eliminate expletives that merely postpone getting to the subject of the sentence.

Wordy: *There were* three children who perished in the fire.

Revised: *Three* children perished in the fire.

Wordy: *It is* the minister's daughter who was struck by a hit-and-run driver.

Revised: The minister's daughter was struck by a hit-and-run driver.

Use strong verbs

Use strong verbs that get directly to the point. Weak verbs de-energize your sentences.

Weak: The thought of being trapped in a burning building *is scary to* me.

Strong: The thought of being trapped in a burning building *scares* me.

Weak: We *made a search of* the woods all afternoon *with the hope that we might find* some clue that might lead us to the missing child.

Strong: We *searched* the woods all afternoon, *hoping to find* some clue that might lead us to the missing child.

When we talk about “weak verbs” in the context of being concise, we are not talking about your choice of verb, for example, *scares*, *frightens*, or *terrifies*. We are talking about how the verbs are used. Weak verbs are disguised as nouns and tucked into phrases, as in the left-hand column below.

Weak

conducted an *investigation*
 managed to *escape*
 reached an *agreement*
 came to the *realization*
 made a *decision*

Strong

investigated
 escaped
 agreed
 realized
 decided

Use the active voice

Sentences written in the active voice are generally more concise than those written in the passive voice. However, there are many times when the passive voice will be more appropriate. (See pages 472-473 for information on the active and passive voices.)

Don't be wishy-washy

Many writers use wishy-washy qualifiers such as *a bit*, *a little*, *sort of*, *kind of*, *really*, *rather*, *quite*, *pretty much*, *somewhat*, *for the most part*, *as a rule*, *more or less*, *actually*, *literally*, *essentially*, *very*, and *too*. These qualifiers dilute the power of the sentence.

Weak: I am *kind of irritated* by your lack of integrity.
Strong: I am *irritated* by your lack of integrity.

Weak: We need to be *somewhat cautious* about where we let our children go trick-or-treating.
Strong: We *need* to be *cautious* about where we let our children go trick-or-treating.

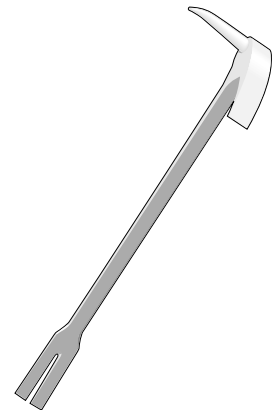
Some words don't need to be qualified. Either a person is exhausted or he isn't. Actions are either legal or illegal. Words such as *very* and *rather* don't change the situation.

Weak: Doug was *very exhausted* after completing the physical ability test.
Strong: Doug was *exhausted* after completing the physical ability test.

Weak: His actions are *rather illegal*.
Strong: His actions are *illegal*.

**Weak verbs
 de-energize your
 writing and add
 unnecessary
 words.**

**We managed to
force entry using
a Halligan tool.
 (weak)**



**Use strong verbs
 that get directly
 to the point.**

**We forced
entry using a
Halligan tool.
 (strong)**

The word *not* is often a signal that there may be a clearer and more economical way to phrase the sentence.



**The driver was not sober.
(wordy)**

**The driver was drunk.
(revised)**

Use positives rather than negatives

Negative sentences are wordier and less direct than positive ones.

Wordy: The driver *did not obey* the speed limit.

Revised: The driver *exceeded* the speed limit.

Wordy: It is *not likely* that anyone survived the crash.

Revised: It is *unlikely* that anyone survived the crash.

The word *not* is often a signal that there may be a clearer and more economical way to phrase the sentence. *Not guilty* means *innocent*. *Did not die* means *survived*. But not all negative sentences are bad. It makes more sense, for example, to say *we have not transported anyone to the hospital yet* than it does to say *we have transported no one to the hospital yet*.

Beware the double negatives

Negative constructions sometimes lead to double negatives. Double negatives are often confusing because two negatives in the same sentence give the sentence a positive meaning.

Confusing: We *don't want no* trouble from the police.

Clear: We *don't want any* trouble from the police.

Clear: We *want no* trouble from the police.

Confusing: We *didn't see hardly any* smoke upon our arrival.

Clear: We *didn't see much* smoke upon our arrival.

Clear: We *saw hardly any* smoke upon our arrival.

Double negatives can sometimes be used for effect, as long as the sentence is intended to have a positive meaning. Version 2 below puts more emphasis on the issue of awareness than the straightforward positive construction in version 1 does.

Version 1: We were *aware* of the danger.

Version 2: We were *not unaware* of the danger.

Use Pronouns

Pronouns, when used correctly, can be an effective tool to avoid unnecessary repetition.

Wordy: The county jail is overcrowded. *The county jail* was never built to house so many prisoners.

Revised: The county jail is overcrowded. *It* was never built to house so many prisoners.

Use Elliptical Constructions

Elliptical constructions are words or phrases that are understood to represent more complete thoughts.

Wordy: If it is possible, I would like to get a copy of the coroner's report before noon.

Revised: If possible, I would like to get a copy of the coroner's report before noon.

Wordy: Our helmets are color-coded. White helmets are for chief officers, red helmets are for captains, yellow helmets are for firefighters and engineers, and black helmets are for volunteers.

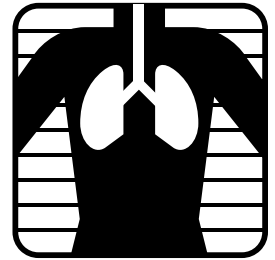
Revised: Our helmets are color-coded: white for chief officers, red for captains, yellow for firefighters and engineers, and black for volunteers.

Consolidate Where Possible

Look for ways to consolidate information. Let's say, for example, that you are writing about the signs and symptoms of respiratory emergencies and the proper treatment for each. There are two ways to present this information. One is to discuss each medical condition separately, describing each one in detail. The other is to first describe the general signs and symptoms that apply to all respiratory emergencies, followed by the appropriate treatment for those signs and symptoms. Then, once you have built a solid foundation for your readers, you can identify any variations that apply to specific medical conditions.

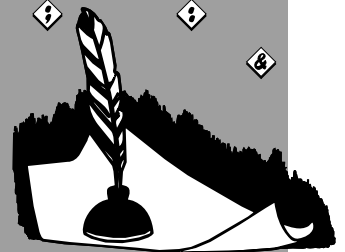
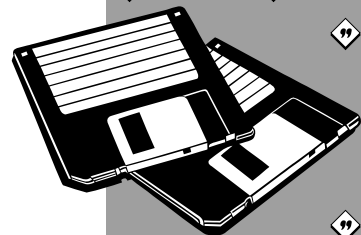
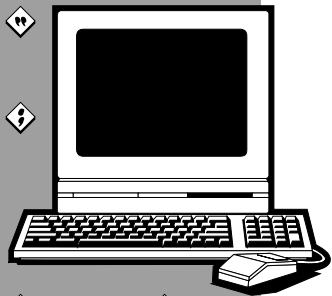
It's important to consider the reader's perspective when determining how to present the information. It is often easier for readers to remember one set of rules and a handful of exceptions than it is to remember a multitude of procedures.

Look for ways to consolidate information.



For example, all respiratory emergencies have certain things in common.

Chapter 15: Writing for Special Applications



Reports must be well-written.

Poorly written reports can hurt your credibility.



A poorly written report can cause you to lose a case in court.

Poorly written reports can undermine your goals in numerous other ways as well.

Writing Reports

Reports serve as a permanent record of incidents, events, problems, and so forth. There are many types of reports, each of which serves different functions. Some are used to keep people informed of activities within the department. Some are used to compile statistical information, identify problems in the community, or identify department training needs. Some reports are needed to facilitate investigations, prepare court cases, or defend cases in court.

It is beyond the scope of this book to elaborate on the different types of reports used in the emergency response field or on the report-writing process itself. That information needs to come from your particular agency. However, I want to briefly touch on the importance of well-written reports and the characteristics of a good report.

The Importance of Well-Written Reports

Poorly written reports hurt your credibility by making you appear less competent and professional. They can also undermine your ultimate goals in numerous ways. A poorly written report can cause you to lose a case in court, perhaps resulting in a criminal being set free to kill, rape, or steal again. Poorly written reports can make it difficult to accurately identify training and equipment needs. They can result in failure to take appropriate follow-up action on a problem. And those are just a few examples. You can probably think of others from your own experience.

Characteristics of a Good Report

A well-written report is accurate, factual, objective, concise, complete, clear, and grammatically correct. Well-written reports require some effort. They should not be something you merely throw together between calls. You should carefully review and edit each report before filing it or forwarding it to your supervisor.

Accurate and specific

Emergency responders do not have much room for error. The mistakes we make can mean the difference between life and death for the citizens we serve, as well as for ourselves and our coworkers.

Reports are a little different. You can *type* the wrong number when documenting a drug dosage, for example, without killing your patient. But the error can come back to haunt you later when your supervisor, the patient's family, or an attorney want to know why you administered the wrong dosage. Some errors are not discovered until years later when a case goes to court. By that time, you may have forgotten the details of the case. Even if you do remember the correct information, your credibility will suffer when you have to admit you made an error in your report. It raises questions about how many other errors you made.

Many inaccuracies are due to simple spelling errors and typos. Spell check your reports. Double check dates, times, names, phone numbers, addresses, license numbers, and so forth.

Being accurate also means being specific. Vague references do not give readers much information.

Vague: The patient had a high fever.

Specific: The patient was running a fever of 103°F.

Vague: The victim was hit by a tan truck exceeding the speed limit.

Specific: The victim was hit by a 1985 tan Toyota pickup that was traveling an estimated 45 mph in a 25-mph zone.

Factual

Well-written reports are also factual. There is a difference, by the way, between accurate and factual. A fact is something real that can be either proved or disproved. *The fire destroyed nine homes* is a statement of fact. However, further investigation may show that the fire destroyed three homes and six outbuildings. The first statement was found to be inaccurate, but it was a statement of fact versus an inference or opinion.

An *inference* is a conclusion based on reasoning. Inferences can be valuable if you support them with sufficient evidence. Supporting evidence gives you credibility.

Inference: We suspected he was driving under the influence because we could smell alcohol on his breath and because his speech was slurred.

Fact: Blood tests confirmed that he had a blood alcohol level that was twice the legal limit.

Reports must be accurate, specific, and factual.

***He was drunk.*
(vague)**

***He had a blood alcohol level of 0.18%.*
(specific and factual)**



Inferences should be supported by evidence.

I suspected he was drunk because he made two unsafe lane changes.

Writing for Special Applications

Well-written reports are fair and impartial, not influenced by emotion or opinion.

Subjective:
The only person visible in the area was a dirty bag lady pushing a shopping cart.



Objective:
The only person visible in the area was a homeless woman pushing a shopping cart.

Inference: We concluded that she had been killed sometime before midnight based on the presence of rigor mortis.

Fact: Rigor mortis had set in prior to our arrival.

An *opinion* is a personal belief. Opinions are often based on prejudice and bias. Opinions do not belong in your reports.

Fact: The driver who caused the accident had a blood alcohol level that was twice the legal limit.

Opinion: People who kill others while driving under the influence of alcohol should be charged with first-degree murder.

Objective

Objective reports are fair and impartial, not influenced by emotion or opinion. One key to being objective is to avoid words that have connotative meanings, either positive or negative.

Objective: Her face was *bloody* after the accident.

Subjective: Her face was *gruesome* after the accident.

An objective report includes both sides of the story and does not favor one side or the other. The first account below is objective. However, the second and third are slanted to favor wife and the husband, respectively. Only the first one is appropriate.

Objective: Several witnesses reported hearing the couple arguing about money. Mr. Reilly allegedly hit his wife in the face during the argument. We found Mrs. Reilly with a bloody nose and a swollen cheek.

Slanted: Numerous witnesses reported that the couple had been fighting because Mr. Reilly couldn't hold down a job. Mr. Reilly slugged his wife in the face because he was furious that she brought up the subject. We found Mrs. Reilly with severe injuries to the face, including a bloody nose and a badly swollen cheek.

Slanted: Several witnesses reported that the couple had been arguing because Mrs. Reilly kept nagging her husband about being laid off. Mrs. Reilly became so hostile that her husband momentarily lost control and slapped her in the face. Mrs. Reilly claimed to have been badly beaten, but she had only a little bit of blood beneath her nose and a slightly red cheek.

Statements from other people may not be objective. However, when you include those statements in your reports, you need to make it clear that you are quoting someone else, for example, “Mrs. Reilly claimed her husband slugged her in the face because he was furious with her.” “Slugged” and “furious” are Mrs. Reilly’s words, not yours. She can use emotional words; you should not. You must be objective even if the people you are quoting from are not.

Concise

Being concise means using words economically and omitting words that do not add value. It does not mean leaving out important details. The following are just two examples. Refer to pages 490-499 for more information how to write concisely.

Wordy: The paramedics made the decision to take her to the trauma unit at Valley Medical Center because of the fact that she had massive internal injuries.

Concise: The paramedics decided to take her to Valley Medical Center’s trauma unit because she had massive internal injuries.

Wordy: The engine company that arrived first on the scene immediately began operations to search the first floor of the hotel and rescue anyone who might be trapped.

Concise: The first-in engine company immediately began search and rescue operations on the first floor of the hotel.

Complete

A well-written report is complete. It covers *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, and *how*. It does not leave any unanswered questions. For example, don’t stop with *who* the victim was and who responded to the call. Include who discovered the incident, who reported it, who witnessed it, whom you talked to during your investigation, who marked and received the evidence, other people whom you notified, who the insurance carrier is, and so forth.

How much detail is appropriate for a given report depends largely on the incident and your department’s policies. Consider, also, how the report may be used in the future. Will it be used in court someday? If so, anticipate that both the prosecution and the defense will examine the report closely. You should anticipate being questioned about every detail, including some that are not in the report. The more you put in the report, the less you have to rely on memory and the more credibility you have in the courtroom.

A well-written report does not contain unnecessary words. Nor does it leave unanswered questions.



Recognize that your reports may be used in court someday. The more complete your reports, the less you have to rely on memory.

Writing for Special Applications

A clear report is one that can be easily understood by anyone who is reading it.

He illegally modifies cars.
(vague)



He buys stolen vehicles, repaints them, changes a few parts, then sells the cars for a profit.
(clear)

Will you want to reference the report someday? Will you need the information to show a trend in your city? Will you need to compare the circumstances of this incident with another one that might be related? If there are details you may need in the future, include them in the report.

Who else may read your report? Investigators? City officials? Insurance companies? Others? What information will they need? Be sure your report covers those details too.

Does your department have a procedure for recording details that should *not* be made public? Many of the details you don't want made public still need to be documented somewhere.

Clear

A clear report is one that can be easily understood and that contains no ambiguities. If different people can read the same report and come up with different interpretations, the report is not clear.

Provide specific details. As already indicated, vague references do not give readers much information. The more details you provide, the clearer the incident will be to your readers. Look at the first example below. What does *overcrowded* mean? Who says the balcony was *overcrowded*? The first sentence is unclear because it leaves too much open to interpretation.

Vague: The balcony collapsed because it was overcrowded.

Clear: The wooden balcony collapsed because it was overloaded. Structural engineers confirmed that it was designed to hold a maximum of eight people. Several witnesses said there were at least fifteen people on the balcony when it collapsed.

Use standard English and standard abbreviations. Do not use words or abbreviations that your readers may misinterpret. For example, just because *SOB* means "shortness of breath" to you does not mean everyone will interpret it the same way. Likewise, keep jargon to a minimum. Keep in mind that your reports may be read by people outside the department, including citizens, the media, city officials, attorneys, judges, and jurors. You need to write in a way that they will understand what you have written.

Use diagrams, sketches, and photographs to help illustrate the scene. Make sure the information in your report is consistent with what is shown in the diagrams, sketches, and photographs.

Grammatically Correct

Many of the errors made in report writing are errors in grammar and punctuation. Errors in grammar and punctuation can affect both the clarity and the accuracy of your report. They also make you look less professional. Grammar and punctuation are covered in much more detail throughout this book; however, the following examples should give you an idea of some of the problems that can occur when your sentences are not grammatically correct.

The first example below is called a *run-on sentence*. Two independent clauses are incorrectly joined without any punctuation. The best way to fix this error is to write two separate sentences.

Wrong: Witnesses said the suspect fled the scene on foot he was last seen running southbound on University Avenue.

Right: Witnesses said the suspect fled the scene on foot. He was last seen running southbound on University Avenue.

The first sentence below is missing a comma that is essential to prevent misreading. It can be fixed either by inserting the comma or by restructuring the sentence.

Wrong: While he was eating the patient began experiencing chest pain.

Right: While he was eating, the patient began experiencing chest pain.

Right: The patient began experiencing chest pain while he was eating.

The following is an example of a *dangling modifier*. The introductory phrase does not clearly modify the subject. It appears as if the officers, not the drunk driver, were weaving in and out of traffic.

Wrong: Weaving in and out of traffic, we suspected the man was driving under the influence.

Right: Because he was weaving in and out of traffic, we suspected the man was driving under the influence.

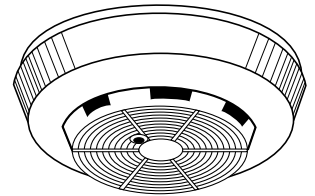
The following example shifts from the past tense to the present tense. This is easily fixed by changing the word *hits* to *hit*.

Wrong: The driver lost control of her vehicle and hits a pedestrian in the crosswalk.

Right: The driver lost control of her vehicle and hit a pedestrian in the crosswalk.

Errors in grammar and punctuation can affect both the clarity and the accuracy of your report.

The woman died, she didn't have a smoke detector. (wrong)



The woman died because she didn't have a smoke detector. (right)