



Grammar Slammer!

Welcome to **Grammar Slammer**, the reference file that goes **beyond** a grammar checker. Use it as you would any Acrobat Reader file.

Please note that **this is a Sample File**. This shows you what **Grammar Slammer** and **Grammar Slammer Deluxe** are like. It contains approximately 110 pages. **Grammar Slammer** contains over 400 pages; **Grammar Slammer Deluxe** contains over 1000 pages. You may use this to see if **Grammar Slammer** or **Grammar Slammer Deluxe** are compatible with your system and to see how useful they would be for you or your business. We have tried to make only live links work. The complete versions will have many more links for you to use. You will have some idea, anyhow, of what the **English Plus** grammar and spelling references contain.

For more on how to use **Grammar Slammer Deluxe** and **Grammar Slammer**, click the "How To" on the contents below.

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Welcome to *Grammar Slammer!*

Looking for a specific rule to help you in your writing? Trying to decide between two similar words? A grammar checker helps you, but does not tell you why. Grammar checkers also miss many errors, especially those having to do with names, punctuation, sounds, and style.

Some of you may have a full grammar textbook stored on your disk somewhere, but it is a nuisance to access and use.

Grammar Slammer takes care of **both** problems in an easy-to-use format. **Grammar Slammer** contains the rules and tips you need to write your best and make yourself clear. **Grammar Slammer** uses the widely used Adobe Acrobat format to make it easy to find what you are looking for. It even has an easy-to-use glossary to help with those grammatical terms you can't remember. It will truly **Slam your Grammar Agony!**

Click on the marked link for instructions on [How To Use Grammar Slammer.](#)

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How to Use *Grammar Slammer Deluxe!*

This program uses Adobe Acrobat Reader. If you can use Adobe Acrobat Reader, you can use **Grammar Slammer**. The specific commands may vary depending on your operating system. Read the **Quick Tour** or **Quick Reference Guide** that came with your Adobe Reader software for information on how to use the index, bookmarks, navigation tools. Generally, the following patterns apply.

Marked or Underlined Words

Click on any **Marked** word or words and you will go to that topic.

(See the marked word *Grammar Contents* below.)

Most browsers show the marked words as **underlined words**, but some users have different preferences. The marked words may be indicated by a different color or font style. Some marked words such as the words **English Plus** contain links to an internet page. If your computer system is not connected to the Internet or does not have Internet defaults, those few links will not work for you.

This is adapted from a program written for Windows Help files. Because it is adapted for users of various non-Windows platforms, we are using only features common to all Adobe Acrobat Readers. Because of this, it does not have some features that the Windows program has--a floating toolbar, start when computer starts, or pop-up windows, for example. However, the nearly 400 pages (900 pages for Grammar Slammer Deluxe) here contain all the information that the Windows version has. We recommend working from the various contents pages such as those noted below.



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Click on the topic you seek. Click on the appropriate browser button to take you to the opening screen or to a previous screen.

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Sentence Fragments (Incomplete Sentences)

1. A sentence must have a [subject](#) and a [verb](#) if it is to make sense.

Incorrect: John, being a friendly computer salesman and baseball fan.
(No verb)

Correct: John, being a friendly computer salesman and baseball fan,
refused to argue.
(John--the subject--is doing something, namely, refusing.)

2. A [subordinate clause](#) (also sometimes called a dependent [clause](#)) is not a complete sentence if it does not have a [main clause](#) even though it may have a [subject](#) and [verb](#).

Incorrect: Because we are baseball fans.

Correct: We watched the All-Star Game because we are baseball fans.

There is nothing wrong with beginning a sentence with the word *because* as long as the clause with *because* is followed by a [main clause](#).

Correct: Because we are baseball fans, we watched the All-Star Game.

3. Sometimes **in conversation only** sentence fragments make sense.

OK, if you are recording a conversation, otherwise incorrect: She asked, "Why did you watch that baseball game?"

"Because we are baseball fans."

Run-On Sentences

A **run-on sentence** consists of two or more [main clauses](#) that are run together without proper punctuation. Sometimes even sentences which are technically correct are easier to read if they are made into shorter sentences. We often **speak** in run-on sentences, but we make pauses and change our tone so people can understand us. But when we write, no one can hear us, so sometimes we must break our sentences into shorter units so that they do not sound run-on.

Incorrect: The boy showed us his tickets someone gave them to him.

Correct: The boy showed us his tickets. Someone gave them to him.

Incorrect: We often speak in run-on sentences, but we make pauses and change our tone so people can understand us, but when we write, no one can hear us, so sometimes we must break our sentences into shorter units so that they do not sound run-on.

(Technically punctuated OK, but too long to be easily understood.
See better sentence structure above.)

Dangling Modifiers

A **dangling modifier** is a [phrase](#) or [clause](#) which says something different from what is meant because words are left out. The meaning of the sentence, therefore, is left "dangling."

Incorrect: While driving on Greenwood Avenue yesterday afternoon, a tree began to fall toward Wendy H's car.

(It sounds like the tree was driving! This actually appeared in a newspaper article. An alert reader wrote, "Is the Department of Motor Vehicles branching out and issuing licenses to hardwoods? Have they taken leaf of their senses?")

Adding a word or two makes the sentence clear.

Correct: While Wendy H was driving on Greenwood Avenue yesterday afternoon, a tree began to fall toward her car.

When a modifier "dangles" so that the sentence is meaningless (or means something other than your intent), restate it and add the words it needs in order to make sense.

Misplaced Modifiers

This is a common problem in American speech. Writing has to be more precise than speaking, or it will be misunderstood.

A **misplaced modifier** is simply a word or phrase describing something but not placed near enough the word it is supposed to modify. The modifying word or phrase is not [dangling](#); no extra words are needed; the modifier is just in the wrong place.

Incorrect: I had to take down the shutters painting the house yesterday.

It sounds like the shutters painted the house! Place the modifying phrase *painting the house* near or next to the word it is meant to modify.

Correct: Painting the house yesterday, I had to take down the shutters.

Pronoun Case

Pronouns are words that Americans often carelessly use in their speech. The problem is that the use of pronouns must be very clear when we write. Many times the writing will be misunderstood; at best, the writer will appear uneducated.

A major problem with pronouns is the use of the wrong [case](#). In English certain pronouns are meant to be the [subject](#) or [predicate nominative](#) of a sentence. Other words are meant to be the objects--whether [direct](#), [indirect](#), objects of [prepositions](#), or [object complements](#).

Pronouns used as subjects or predicate nominatives (nominative case):

I, you, he, she, it, we, they, who

Pronouns used as objects (objective case):

me, you, him, her, it, us, them, whom

Some things are really obvious. All English speakers know we say "I like him," not "Me like he." But there are four common problem areas with pronoun [case](#): compounds, appositives, predicate nominatives, and who/whom.

Compound Subjects and Objects with Pronouns

If we know that "Me like him" is incorrect, then that also means that "Katy and me like him" is incorrect. The word **I** belongs in the **subject**. The sentence should read "Katy and I like him." Similarly, the subject in "Katy and we like him" is correct.

Politeness says that the **I, we, me** or **us** comes last.

If the sentence had some kind of compound object the sentence would read: "Katy likes Joe and me," **not** "Katy likes Joe and I."

After all, we would say "Katy likes me," not "Katy likes I." Similarly the object in "Katy likes the Johnsons and us" is correct.

Pronouns with Appositives

Sometimes a descriptive noun [phrase](#) called an [appositive](#) will follow a personal pronoun. Keep the proper case of the pronoun.

We do not say: "Us want ease of use."

We say: "We want ease of use."

Therefore we do **not** say: "Us computer users want ease of use."

Instead, we should say: "**We** computer users want ease of use."

The Chronicles of Narnia says: "Come in front with **us lions**." That is correct. We say "with us," not "with we," so we should say "with us lions."

Pronouns in the Predicate Nominative

In **standard written English**, the personal pronouns in the [predicate nominative](#) are the **same** as they would be in the [subject](#). Most Americans do not speak this way, but it is grammatically correct.

The **nominative case** follows a linking verb to rename the subject.

Incorrect: The winner was her. (Objective case)

Correct: The winner was she. (Nominative case)

She is a [predicate nominative](#). It uses the same [case](#) as the [subject](#) since it simply **renames** the [subject](#).

Even though we may often say, "It's me"; the grammatically correct way is "It's I."

Who and Whom

Who and **whom** correspond to **he** and **him**. **Who** is the [subject](#) or [predicate nominative](#). **Whom** is the object.

Correct: Who are you? (Subject)

Correct: Whom do you see? ([Direct object](#))

Correct: Whom did you give it to?
(Object of [preposition to](#))

Correct: Who did that? (Subject)

It may help you to recall that **who** follows the same pattern as **he** and **they**. When all three are in the **objective case**, they **end** with **m: whom, him, them**.

This same pattern applies when you add the suffix -ever or -soever:

Correct: Whoever dies with the most toys wins.
([Subject](#))

Correct: He gave that ticket to whoever asked for one.
(Subject of *asked*)

Correct: Pick whomever I tell you to. ([Direct object](#))

Possessive Pronouns

Certain pronouns called **possessive pronouns** show **ownership**. Some are used alone; some describe a noun.

Used alone: mine, yours, his, hers, ours, theirs, whose

Correct: That computer is hers.

Modify noun: my, your, his, her, its, our, their, whose

Correct: That is her computer.

Please note that **none** of the possessive pronouns are spelled with an apostrophe. See [Apostrophes with Pronouns](#) for more on this.

Possessive Pronouns with Gerunds

Possessive pronouns are used to describe [gerunds](#). Using the objective [case](#) confuses the reader.

Incorrect: You winning in spite of the odds inspired us all.
(Ambiguous and awkward. Do you inspire or does the winning inspire?)

Correct: Your winning in spite of the odds inspired us all.

Incorrect: We could not stand him whining about everything.
(Which could you not stand? Him? or His whining?)

Because of the possible confusion, use possessive pronouns with gerunds.

Correct: We could not stand his whining about everything.

Pronouns with *Than* or *As*

When you use a pronoun in a [comparison](#) using the words **than** or **as**, use the proper pronouns as if all the words were being said.

Most of the time when we use a comparison using **than** or **as**, we leave words out. This is technically called an **elliptical clause**--a [clause](#) with an ellipsis. An ellipsis is words left out.

Look at it this way. There is a difference between the two following sentences. Both are grammatically correct; they just mean two different things.

He likes you more than me.

He likes you more than I.

Think of what words are left out:

He likes you more than I *do*.
(**I** is the [subject](#))

He likes you more than *he likes* me.
(**Me** is the [direct object](#))

When a pronoun follows **than** or **as** in a comparison, make sure you understand what words are missing and then use the correct pronoun.

Incorrect: He is taller than her.
(i.e., than **her is**?)

Correct: He is taller than she.
(i.e., than **she is**. Much better!)

Incorrect: He is as happy as them.
(i.e., as happy as **them are**?)

Correct: He is as happy as they.
(i.e., as happy as **they are**.)

Correct with one meaning:

He sees you more often than I. (i.e., than **I see you**.)

Correct with another meaning:

He sees you more often than me. (i.e., than **he sees me**.)

The [case](#) of the pronoun makes the difference!

For more, see [Pronoun Case](#).

Subject Agreement with the Verb

It is usually pretty easy to match the [verb](#) with the [subject](#) in English. Only in the present tense does the verb have more than one form. And except for one verb, only the third person singular is different. Besides, the third person singular present tense always ends in an **s**. We understand this most of the time.

Verb: To speak

I, you, we, they **speak**

he, she, it **speaks**

Verb: To do

I, you, we, they **do**

he, she, it **does**

Verb: To be (the only exception)

I **am**

you, we, they **are**

he, she, it **is**

The verb **to be** is also the **only** verb with more than one form in the past tense. See also the [subjunctive mood](#).

Verb: To be, past

I, he, she, it **was**

you, we, they **were**

Normally, none of this is a problem. However, there are a few cases that confuse writers and speakers.

Separated Subjects and Verbs

A phrase or clause often separates the [subject](#) and the [verb](#). The verb must still agree with the subject.

Incorrect: The climate in both places are mild.

Correct: The climate in both places is mild.
(**Climate** is the subject, not **places**. It takes the verb **is**.)

Keep track of the subject, especially when there is a singular pronoun or collective noun for the subject and a plural element in the phrase that separates the subject and verb.

Collective noun: A group of senators was calling for an investigation.

Singular pronoun: One of the many galaxies was proven to be near a black hole.

Compound Subjects

Two or more **singular** [subjects](#) joined by **or** or **nor** take a singular verb.

Correct: Neither John nor Mary knows what happened.

Two or more **plural** subjects joined by any conjunction (including and, or, but, or nor) take a plural verb.

Correct: Both men and women are allowed to enter.

If one or more **singular** subject is joined to one or more **plural** subject by **or** or **nor**, the verb agrees with the subject closest to the verb.

Incorrect: Neither Mary nor her brothers knows what happened.
(**Brothers** is closer to the verb and is plural; the verb should agree with **brothers**).

Correct: Neither Mary nor her brothers know what happened.

Correct: Neither her brothers nor Mary knows what happened.

A compound subject whose parts are joined by **and** normally takes a plural verb.

Correct: Joe and his brother know what happened.

A compound subject whose parts are joined by **and** takes a singular verb in two special instances.

1. When the parts of the subject combine to form a single item.

Correct: One and one equals two.

Correct: Cookies and cream is my favorite flavor.

2. When the compound subject is modified by the words **each** or **every**.

Correct: Every boy and girl has to participate.

See also [British vs. American Grammar](#), [The Verb To Be](#), and [Indefinite Pronouns](#).

Using Indefinite Pronouns

Indefinite pronouns are words which replace nouns without specifying which noun they replace.

Singular: another, anybody, anyone, anything, each, either, everybody, everyone, everything, little, much, neither, nobody, no one, nothing, one, other, somebody, someone, something

Plural: both, few, many, others, several

Singular or Plural: all, any, more, most, none, some

Singular indefinite pronouns take singular verbs or singular personal pronouns.

Correct: Each of the members has one vote.
(The subject, **each**, is singular. Use **has**.)

Incorrect: One of the girls gave up their seat.

Correct: One of the girls gave up her seat.
(**Her** refers to **one**, which is singular.)

Plural indefinite pronouns take plural verbs or plural personal pronouns.

Correct: A few of the justices were voicing their opposition.
(**Few** is plural, so are **were** and **their**.)

For indefinite pronouns that can be singular **or** plural, it depends on what the indefinite pronoun refers to.

Correct: All of the people clapped their hands.
(**All** refers to **people**, which is plural.)

Correct: All of the newspaper was soaked.
(Here **all** refers to **newspaper**, which is singular.)

A Gender-Sensitive Case

The pronouns ending with **-body** or **-one** such as **anybody**, **somebody**, **no one**, or **anyone** are singular. So are pronouns like **each** and **every**. Words like **all** or **some** may be singular. That means that a possessive pronoun referring to these singular words must also be singular. In standard written English the possessive pronoun **his** is used to refer to a singular indefinite pronoun unless the group referred to is known to be all female.

Incorrect: Is everyone happy with their gift?

Correct: Is everyone happy with his gift?
(**Everyone** and **is** are singular. The possessive pronoun must be singular, too)

Most languages, including English, observe the standard of using the masculine pronoun in situations like this. However, in some circles today the idea of choosing the masculine pronoun sounds discriminatory against women. If this usage bothers you, or if you think it may bother your audience, there are two possible ways to work around this and still use standard English.

1. Use the phrase **his or her**. It is a little awkward, but OK.

Correct: Is everyone happy with his or her gift?

2. Rewrite the sentence using a **plural** pronoun or [antecedent](#). Plural personal pronouns in English no longer distinguish between masculine and feminine.

Correct: Are all the people happy with their gifts?

Use of Pronouns Ending in *-self*

Words ending in **-self** or **-selves** are called **reflexive** or **intensive pronouns**. They should always refer to another word that has already been named. In grammatical terms, they need an [antecedent](#).

Incorrect: The president named myself to the committee.
(**Myself** is not previously named)

Correct: The president named me to the committee.

Correct: I did it all by myself.
(**Myself** refers to I)

Correct: John talks to himself when he is nervous.
(**Himself** refers to John)

General Antecedent Agreement

The [antecedent](#) of a pronoun is the word the pronoun refers to. There are several style problems which writers and speakers sometimes have when they do not match the pronoun and the noun it replaces correctly.

Missing or Mismatched Antecedent

A pronoun, unless it is an [indefinite pronoun](#), must have an [antecedent](#), a word it refers to. The pronoun must match the word it replaces--singular or plural, and, sometimes, masculine or feminine.

Incorrect: Every student must have their pencils.
(Both **every** and **student** are singular; therefore, **his**, **her**, or **his or her** must be used. **Their** is plural and cannot refer to a singular noun.)

Unclear Antecedent

A pronoun's antecedent must be clear.

Incorrect: I never go to that place because they have stale bread.
(What does **they** refer to? Both **I** and **place** are singular.)

Correct: I never go to that place because it has stale bread.

When the antecedent is a different gender, person, or number than the pronoun it is supposed to replace; this is sometimes called a "faulty co-reference."

Incorrect: Politics is my favorite subject. They are such fascinating people.

Correct: Politics is my favorite subject. Politicians are such fascinating people.

Faulty co-reference may also occur with adverbs that do not replace an adverbial expression or pronouns that do not replace nouns.

Incorrect: He ought to speak French well. He lived there for twenty years.

Correct: He ought to speak French well. He lived in France for twenty years.

Ambiguous Antecedent

A pronoun's [antecedent](#) must be unambiguous. Sometimes there may be more than one word the pronoun could refer to. In a case like that, it may be better not to use the pronoun.

Incorrect: The suitcase was on the plane, but now it's gone.
(What is gone? The suitcase or the plane?)

Correct: The suitcase was on the plane, but now the suitcase is gone.

OR

The suitcase was on the plane, but now the plane is gone.
(Depends on which you mean...)

Faraway Antecedent

The pronoun must be close enough to the word it is replacing so that your reader knows whom or what you are talking about.

Unclear: Buford saw Longstreet's division coming toward his men. Reynolds' troops responded quickly to the calls for assistance, and soon **he** found himself in the midst of a deadly battle.
(Who is **he**? Buford, Reynolds, or Longstreet?)

Clear: Buford saw Longstreet's division coming toward his men. Reynolds' troops responded quickly to the calls for assistance, and soon Buford found himself in the midst of a deadly battle.

See also [Using Indefinite Pronouns](#).

The Subjunctive Mood

A verb is in the **subjunctive mood** when it expresses a condition which is doubtful or not factual. It is most often found in a [clause](#) beginning with the word **if**. It is also found in [clauses](#) following a verb that expresses a doubt, a wish, regret, request, demand, or proposal.

These are verbs typically followed by clauses that take the subjunctive:

ask, demand, determine, insist, move, order, pray, prefer, recommend, regret, request, require, suggest, and wish.

In English there is no difference between the subjunctive and normal, or indicative, form of the verb **except** for the present tense third person singular **and** for the verb to be.

The subjunctive for the present tense third person singular drops the **-s** or **-es** so that it looks and sounds like the present tense for everything else.

The subjunctive mood of the verb **to be** is **be** in the present tense and **were** in the past tense, regardless of what the subject is.

Incorrect: If I was you, I would run.

Correct: If I were you, I would run.
(The verb follows **if** and expresses a non-factual condition.)

Incorrect: I wish he was able to type faster.

Correct: I wish he were able to type faster.
(The second verb is in a clause following a verb expressing a wish. It also suggests a non-factual or doubtful condition.)

Incorrect: His requirement is that everyone is computer literate.

Correct: His requirement is that everyone be computer literate.
(Subordinate clause follows main clause with a demand.)

Incorrect: He recommended that each driver reports his tips.

Correct: He recommended that each driver report his tips.

Sometimes we may use the **conditional** auxiliary verbs of **could, should, or would** to express the same sense.

Subjunctive: I wish he were kinder to me.

Conditional: I wish he would be kinder to me.

Note: In modern English, the subjunctive is only found in [subordinate clauses](#).

Comparatives and Superlatives

Use words ending in **-er** or modified by the word **more** to compare two items. This is known as the comparative degree.

Use words ending in **-est** or modified by the word **most** to compare three or more items. This is known as the superlative degree.

Correct: K2 is taller than Annapurna.

Incorrect: Annapurna is the taller of the three peaks.
(Three or more requires superlative.)

Correct: Annapurna is the tallest of the three peaks.

Normally, **-er** and **-est** are added to one-syllable words.

-er and **-est** are added to two-syllable words unless the new word sounds awkward.

Correct: fairer prettier handsomest

Awkward: famousest readier

Correct: most famous more ready

Use the modifiers **more** or **most** with all root words longer than two syllables as well as with two syllable words that sound awkward. Always use **more** or **most** with adverbs that end in **-ly**.

Incorrect: beautifuller smoothliest

Correct: more beautiful most smoothly

Correct: friendliest beastliest (adjectives, not adverbs)

Less and **least** form comparisons of a lesser degree in a similar manner. **Less** is used when comparing two items, **least** with three or more.

See also [Irregular Comparisons](#) and [Comparison Problems](#).

Irregular Comparisons

A few of the comparatives and superlatives in English do not follow the usual pattern. Here is a list of common exceptions.

<u>Positive</u>	<u>Comparative</u>	<u>Superlative</u>
bad	worse	worst
badly	worse	worst
far(distance)	farther	farthest
far(extent)	further	furthest
good	better	best
ill	worse	worst
late	later	latest or last
less	lesser	least
little(amount)	less	least
many	more	most
much	more	most
well	better	best

The comparisons for **well** apply to both the adjective meaning "healthy" and the adverb meaning "in a good manner."

For more on how to use some of these see the Common Mistakes section on [good/well](#) and [bad/badly](#). Also see Common Mistakes section for the difference between [further and farther](#) and between [littlest and least](#).

Comparison Problems

There are five problems writers sometimes have with comparisons.

1. Make sure you are comparing **similar items**.

Incorrect: The tusk of a mastodon is bigger than an elephant.
(It sounds as if the writer is comparing the *tusk* with an elephant.)

Correct: The tusk of a mastodon is bigger than the tusk of an elephant.

2. Make sure your comparison is **balanced**. Use the same pattern on both sides of the comparison to make it readable and clear.

Unbalanced: The tusk of a mastodon is bigger than an elephant's.

Correct: The tusk of a mastodon is bigger than that of an elephant.
(Or "than the tusk of an elephant" ; either choice keeps the pattern of using the [prepositional phrase](#).)

Correct: A mastodon's tusk is bigger than an elephant's.
(Or "than an elephant's tusk" ; either choice keeps the pattern of using the possessive noun.)

3. When comparing people or items that are grouped together, it may be necessary to use the word **other** or **else** to make the meaning clear.

Incorrect: The X-15 was faster than any airplane.
(The X-15 is an airplane. The sentence makes it sound as though it were some other kind of aircraft.)

Correct: The X-15 was faster than any other airplane.

Incorrect: Manute was taller than anyone on the team.
(This suggests that he either was not on the team or that he is being compared to himself.)

Correct: Manute was taller than anyone else on the team.

4. The words **major** and **minor** are comparative forms that have lost some of their original usage. However, it is nonstandard to add **-ly** to them just as it is to add **-ly** to any comparative adjective or adverb that ends in **-er**.

Incorrect: He was majorly disappointed.

Correct: He was greatly disappointed.

Correct: He was more greatly disappointed than we thought.

5. Avoid the **double comparison**. Words that end in **-er** or **-est** and certain [irregular comparisons](#) do **not** need to be modified with the words **more**, **most**, **less**, or **least** since they are **already** comparative or superlative.

Similarly, do **not** add an **-er** or **-est** to an [irregular comparison](#) for the same reason.

Incorrect: That film was more funnier than the one we saw last week.

Correct: That film was funnier than the one we saw last week.

Incorrect: She felt worser yesterday. (Worse is already comparative.)

Correct: She felt worse yesterday.

The word **lesser** is accepted by most authorities when used as an adjective meaning **smaller** or **less significant**.

Using Negatives

There are a few rules to keep in mind when making a sentence say "No."

1. **Double negatives** are **nonstandard**. Avoid two negative words in the same [clause](#).

Incorrect: I don't want no seconds.
(Both *don't* and *no* are negatives.)

Correct: I don't want any seconds.

Correct: I want no seconds.

This rule does not include negative interjections at the beginning of a sentence or clause, since those are grammatically separate.

Correct: No, I don't want any seconds.

2. Do not use **but** in a negative sense with another negative.

Incorrect: He didn't want but one good manuscript.

Correct: He wanted but one good manuscript.

Correct: He wanted only one good manuscript.

3. Words like **barely**, **hardly**, and **scarcely** have a negative sense and should not be used with another negative. In effect, this creates a double negative.

Incorrect: He couldn't hardly speak.

Correct: He could hardly speak.

Incorrect: We were not barely able to see the stage.

Correct: We were barely able to see the stage.

Tricky Plurals

There are four groups of words which some speakers and writers have difficulty with. In each case it has to do with the [agreement](#) of plurals or plural-looking words with the verbs or other words they go with.

Plural-looking Nouns

Some nouns that end in **-s** look like they are plural, but they really are singular. This is particularly true of branches of knowledge, certain foods or dishes, and certain diseases.

Branches of knowledge like **mathematics, physics, ethics, politics, or social studies** are singular.

Names of foods, while plural, are treated singularly when they are treated as a single dish.

Some diseases, while plural in origin, are treated singularly because just one disease is discussed: **measles, mumps, rickets, or pox.**

Examples: Politics is a rough life.

Baked beans is one of my favorite dishes.

Mumps has been nearly eradicated in the U.S.

A few words, though singular in nature, are made of paired items and generally treated as plural: **scissors, pants, trousers, glasses, pliers, tongs, tweezers,** and the like. Many are often used with the word **pair** as in **pair of pants** or **pair of scissors.**

Example: These scissors are too dull to cut with.

Nouns Expressing Measurement

A noun expressing an amount or **measurement** is normally singular.

If the unit of measurement refers to a number of **individual** items, then it treated as a plural.

Examples: Two spoons of sugar is too much for me.

(A single measurement)

Twelve dollars is less than what I want to sell it for.

(A single sum of money)

Four-fifths of the country is satisfied with its

health insurance.

(One part of a whole)

Four-fifths of the people are satisfied with their

health insurance.

(*Four-fifths* refers to many individuals.)

Titles

Titles of books and other works of art are always considered singular even if the title sounds plural.

The Alfred Hitchcock film **The Birds** was successfully advertised with a campaign that said, "**The Birds** is coming!" Unlike so many ads, that one was grammatically correct.

Plurals That Do Not End in -s

A number of plurals, mostly derived from Latin, do not end in **-s**. Nevertheless, they are plural and should be treated as such. Words such as **criteria, phenomena, memoranda,** and **media** are plural. Their singular forms are **criterion, phenomenon, memorandum,** and **medium.**

The word **data** is also technically plural, but the singular form, **datum,** is rare in English, so using **data** as singular is tolerated, but not precisely correct. Say "a piece of data" or "item of data" for the singular if **datum** sounds too affected.

The Verb *To Be*

The verb **to be** is the most irregular verb in the English language. It is normally a linking verb showing existence or condition of the subject. It can also be used as an auxiliary verb when forming the passive voice.

The forms of the verb **to be** in English are as follows:

Infinitive	to be
Present	am, is, are
Past	was, were
Present Participle	being
Past Participle	been
Present Subjunctive	be
Past Subjunctive	were
Imperative	be

For more on this see [The Subjunctive Mood](#) and [Subject-Verb Agreement](#).



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[Capitalizing Sentences](#)

Capitalizing Quotations

Special Cases for Capitalizing

Capitalizing Proper Nouns

Names *Not* Capitalized

Capitalizing Proper Adjectives

Capitalizing Personal Titles

Capitalizing Titles of Things

Capitalizing in Letters

Scientific Nomenclature

Click on the topic you seek. Click on the appropriate button or computer command to take you to the opening screen or to a previous screen.

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Capitalizing Sentences

The first letter of the first word in a sentence is capitalized.

Correct: The first word in a sentence is capitalized.

The first word of an interjection, an incomplete question, or [fragmentary response](#) is capitalized.

Correct:

"Did you do it?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because."

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Rules for Abbreviations Contents

[Abbreviated Names and Social Titles](#)

Abbreviated Rank and Academic Titles

Abbreviations After a Name

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Acronyms and Pronounced Abbreviations

Scientific Nomenclature

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Abbreviations with Names and Titles of People

Use the **full name** in standard writing unless the person uses an initial as part of his or her name. Initials may be used in lists and addresses if appropriate.

Correct: George Smith

Correct, only in list or address: G. Smith

Correct: Robert E. Lee

(The initial is fine here because that is the name he went by.)

Social titles before a proper name are capitalized. All but **Miss** and **Master** are abbreviated and end with a period.

Social titles: Mr. Master Mrs. Miss Ms.

Mlle. Mme. M. Messrs. (Plural of Mr. or M.)

Mmes. (Plural of Mrs., Ms., Mme.)

Those social titles that are abbreviated are only abbreviated in front of names.

Correct: Mr. Smith is not at home.

Incorrect: You'd better listen, Mr.

(*Mr.* is not in front of name; do not abbreviate.)

Correct: You'd better listen, Mister.



Punctuation Rules

[Periods](#)

Question Marks

Exclamation Points

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[Semicolons and Colons](#)

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The Ellipsis

Brackets

The Virgule

Click on the topic you seek. Click on the appropriate browser button or computer command to take you to the opening screen or to a previous screen.

See also [Abbreviations](#) for periods with abbreviations.

Using Periods

Periods end [declarative sentences](#) and requests or mild commands.

Declarative: His name is Joshua.

Request or Mild Command: Please be sure to tell her I am coming.

Periods are used to end most **abbreviations** except for [acronyms](#) and abbreviations which are pronounced. See [Abbreviations Contents](#) for more information.

If a sentence **ends** with an **abbreviation**, no additional period is needed. If the sentence requires a question mark or exclamation point, one may be added after the period.

Incorrect: Please make the check out to Roland N. Payne, D.D.S..
(Second period at end not needed)

Correct: Please make the check out to Roland N. Payne, D.D.S.

Correct: Do I make the check out to Roland N. Payne, D.D.S.?

A period is used after numbers and letters in outlines.

Outline:

I. Punctuation

A. Periods

1. End sentences
2. Abbreviations
3. Outlines

A period always comes **before** a **closing quotation mark**.

Incorrect: George said, "I don't get it".

Correct: George said, "I don't get it."

Commas

Commas are the most frequently used punctuation mark in English. Originally used to show a pause, they are used nowadays in a variety of situations to make writing clearer.

Click on the topic below for more specific comma rules.

[The Three Most Common Comma Rules](#)

[Commas in Compound Sentences](#)

[Commas in a Series](#)

[Commas with Paired Adjectives](#)

[Commas and Introductory Words](#)

[Commas After Introductory Phrases](#)

[Commas After Introductory Clauses](#)

[Commas with Interrupting Expressions](#)

[Commas with Nonrestrictive Modifiers](#)

[Commas with Geographical Names](#)

[Commas with Dates](#)

[Commas with Titles that Follow Names](#)

[Commas in Addresses](#)

[Commas in Letter Writing](#)

[Commas in Numbers](#)

[Commas with Certain Words Omitted](#)

[Commas with Quotations](#)

[Adding Commas for Clarity](#)

[Commas with Adjectives Following Nouns](#)

[When *Not* to Use Commas](#)

Semicolons and Colons

Semicolons and colons were originally used to designate pauses shorter than a period and longer than a comma. Now they are used to show certain grammatical relationships with the colon the more emphatic of the two.

[Semicolons with Clauses](#)

[Semicolons in a Series](#)

[Colons with Lists](#)

[Colons Before Quotations](#)

[Colons Separating Independent Clauses](#)

[Colons with Appositives](#)

[Special Cases Using Colons](#)

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Quotation Marks

Quotation marks normally come in pairs to set off a portion of text for a variety of purposes. Paired single quotation marks are sometimes used as well.

[Quotation Marks in Direct Quotations](#)

[Question Marks and Exclamation Points in Quotations](#)

[Other Punctuation Marks with Quotation Marks](#)

[Quotation Marks in Dialogue](#)

[Quotation Marks in Titles](#)

[Quotation Marks with Slang](#)

[Definitions in Quotation Marks](#)

[Single Quotation Marks](#)

Underlining and Italicizing

Underlining words and ***Italicizing*** words in standard written English mean **the same thing**.

Handwriting and typing normally show underlining. Typesetting for print usually uses italics. Most computers can go either way.

Whichever way is chosen, be consistent and keep the same style throughout.

Grammar Slammer normally uses *italics* because of the Web file convention of using underlining to show a jump spot or link.

[Underlining Titles](#)

[Underlining Names](#)

[Underlining Foreign Words or Abbreviations](#)

[Underlining Words for Emphasis](#)

[Underlining Items Which Name Themselves](#)

[Titles Which Take No Punctuation](#)

[Scientific Nomenclature](#)

Dashes and Parentheses

Dashes and Parentheses are both used to show an interruption in thought or some kind of aside. Dashes are more emphatic. Parentheses are normally paired. Both should be used sparingly or they become a distraction. Parentheses also have a few special uses.

[Using Dashes](#)

[Dashes with Nonrestrictive Modifiers](#)

[Using Parentheses](#)

[Parentheses with Certain Numbers and Letters](#)

[Punctuation Inside Parentheses](#)

Hyphens

A **hyphen** is a short horizontal line used **within** words. (The longer **dash** is used **between** words.)

Hyphens are used in a variety of situations.

[Numbers Written Out with Hyphens](#)

[Hyphenated Prefixes and Suffixes](#)

[Hyphenated Compound Words](#)

[Hyphens for Clarity](#)

[Dividing at the End of a Line](#)

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Apostrophes

The apostrophe is generally used with the letter **s** to indicate possession. It is also used in various ways to show letters have been left out of a word.

[Apostrophes Showing Possession](#)

[Plural Possessives](#)

[Possessives with More than One Owner](#)

[Apostrophes with Pronouns](#)

[Apostrophes with Underlined or Italicized Items](#)

[Apostrophes with Verb Contractions](#)

[Apostrophes with Other Contractions](#)

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The Ellipsis

The **ellipsis** is three periods in a row. It signifies that words or figures are missing.

Most frequently an ellipsis is used with quotations. It may come at the middle or end of a quotation. It may be used at the beginning of a quotation if the quotation begins mid-sentence and there is an appropriate lead-in.

In mathematics an ellipsis shows that numbers have been left out. This is usually used in decimals, series, and matrices.

Quotation: "Sometimes I'm ancient. I'm afraid of children my own age. They kill each other. Did it always use to be that way? My uncle says no. Six of my friends have been shot in the last year alone. Ten of them died in car wrecks. I'm afraid of them and they don't like me because I'm afraid. My uncle says his grandfather remembered when children didn't kill each other. But that was a long time ago when they had things different. They believed in responsibility, my uncle says."

Ellipsis in middle: "I'm afraid of children my own age. They kill each other. Did it always use to be that way? My uncle says no...My uncle says his grandfather remembered when children didn't kill each other. But that was a long time ago when they had things different. They believed in responsibility, my uncle says."

Ellipsis at end: "My uncle says his grandfather remembered when children didn't kill each other. But that was a long time ago..."
(Some authorities use **four** periods instead of three when the ellipsis is at the end or if more than a paragraph has been left out.)

Ellipsis at beginning: Clarisse said her uncle's grandfather "...remembered when children did not kill each other."

Mathematical: 3.14159...

Quotation from Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*, (New York: Ballantine, 1979) 32.

Brackets

Brackets, or crotchets, are always used in pairs to mark off material inserted into a quotation which is not part of the original quotation. The use of brackets should be limited, but may include short references, short definitions, a short piece of information which clarifies the quotation, or an editorial comment.

The Latin word **sic**, which means "thus" or "so," is often put into brackets to indicate a misspelling or some other misuse of language in the original quotation.

Brackets are also used in dictionaries, glossaries, and word lists to show word origins and etymologies.

Brackets may be used to show parenthetical information for material already inside parentheses.

Editorial insertion:

Then Ceres asked: Tell me, heavenly bow,
If Venus or her son [Cupid], as thou dost know,
Do now attend the queen.
(Clarifies the meaning)

Misspelling in original quotation:

"Mi dere Jo I hope u r write [sic] well."

Word origin: Brackets [L.]
(The word *brackets* comes from Latin.)

Parentheses within parentheses: (Charles Dickens [1812-1870] had been trained as a stenographer.)

The Virgule

The **virgule**, often called the "slant bar" by computer users, has four specific uses in punctuation.

A virgule separates parts of an extended date.

Example: The 1994/95 basketball season.

Washington was born in February [1731/32](#).

A virgule represents the word **per** in measurements:

Example: 186,000 mi./sec. (miles per second)

A virgule stands for the word **or** in the expression **and/or**. (Though not considered standard, it sometimes stands for the word **or** in other expressions also.)

A virgule separates lines of poetry that are quoted in run-on fashion in the text. (For readability, avoid this with more than four lines.)

Example: Ann continued, "And up and down the people go,/ Gazing where the lilies blow/ Round an island there below,/ The island of Shalott."

Why are Some Years Written with a Virgule (Slant Bar)?

Why is George Washington's birth date, for example, shown sometimes as February 1731/32? He could have only been born in one year!

During the rule of Julius Caesar, the Romans adopted the calendar with leap years. This became known as the Julian Calendar after Julius Caesar. By the year 1582, the calendar was over ten days off. Pope Gregory II changed the calendar slightly to account for this difference by skipping the leap day in three of four century years. He did this because religious holidays did not correspond to the season as they originally had been intended to.

Until this time, the Roman practice of beginning the year on March 15 (the Ides of March) was standard. Gregory adopted January 1 as the beginning of the New Year to correspond to the Christmas season and the birth of Jesus.

Not all countries adopted the Gregorian Calendar right away. England and its colonies did not do this until 1752. Until then, January, February, and the first two weeks of March still belonged to the old year. So when George Washington was born, the records were written that he was born February 11, 1731, because England and its colonies were still using the Julian Calendar. When the English adopted the Gregorian Calendar in 1752, that meant Washington's birthday under the new system was February 22, 1732. They added 11 days to make up for the time lost over the years, and they recalculated the year's first day to January 1.

Dates of years between 1582 and the time when the country adopted the new calendar are often written with a virgule to show the old and new notation.

Another historical note: Russia did not adopt the Gregorian Calendar until 1918. That is why the "Red October" Revolution of 1917 began November 7. That was October 24 according to the Julian Calendar.



Letter Writing Rules

[Business Letters](#)

[Business Letter Styles](#)

[Friendly Letters](#)

[Friendly Letter Format](#)

[Envelopes](#)

[Envelope Format](#)

[Folding a Standard Letter](#)

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Business Letters

A **business letter** is more formal than a personal letter. It should have a margin of at least one inch on all four edges. It is always written on 8½"x11" (or metric equivalent) unlined stationery. There are **six** parts to a business letter.

1. The Heading. This contains the return address (usually two or three lines) with the date on the last line.

Sometimes it may be necessary to include a line after the address and before the date for a phone number, fax number, E-mail address, or something similar.

Often a line is skipped between the address and date. That should always be done if the heading is next to the left margin. (See [Business Letter Styles](#).)

It is not necessary to type the return address if you are using stationery with the return address already imprinted. Always include the date.

2. The Inside Address. This is the address you are sending your letter to. Make it as complete as possible. Include titles and names if you know them.

This is always on the left margin. If an 8½" x 11" paper is folded in thirds to fit in a standard 9" business envelope, the inside address can appear through the window in the envelope.

An inside address also helps the recipient route the letter properly and can help should the envelope be damaged and the address become unreadable.

Skip a line after the heading before the inside address. Skip another line after the inside address before the greeting.

3. The Greeting. Also called the salutation. The greeting in a business letter is always formal. It normally begins with the word "Dear" and always includes the person's last name.

It normally has a title. Use a first name only if the title is unclear--for example, you are writing to someone named "Leslie," but do not know whether the person is male or female. For more on the form of titles, see [Titles with Names](#).

The greeting in a business letter always ends in a colon. (You know you are in trouble if you get a letter from a boyfriend or girlfriend and the greeting ends in a colon--it is not going to be friendly.)

4. The Body. The body is written as text. A business letter is never hand written. Depending on the letter style you choose, paragraphs may be indented. Regardless of format, skip a line between paragraphs.

Skip a line between the greeting and the body. Skip a line between the body and the close.

5. The Complimentary Close. This short, polite closing ends with a comma. It is either at the left margin or its left edge is in the center, depending on the [Business Letter Style](#) that you use. It begins at the same column the heading does.

The block style is becoming more widely used because there is no indenting to bother with in the whole letter.

6. The Signature Line. Skip two lines (unless you have unusually wide or narrow lines) and type out the name to be signed. This customarily includes a middle initial, but does not have to. Women may indicate how they wish to be addressed by placing **Miss, Mrs., Ms.** or similar title in parentheses before their name.

The signature line may include a second line for a title, if appropriate. The term "By direction" in the second line means that a superior is authorizing the signer.

The signature should start directly above the first letter of the signature line in the space between the close and the signature line. Use blue or black ink.

Business letters should not contain postscripts.

Some organizations and companies may have formats that vary slightly.

Use the "Edit" function in the Help Menu above if you need to make additions to the information on this page.

[Click here for various Business Letter Styles.](#)

See also [Commas in Letters](#), [Special Colon Uses](#), and [Capitalization in Letters](#)

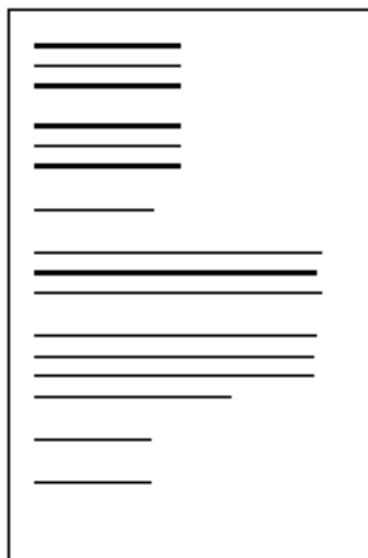
Business Letter Styles

The following pictures show what a one-page business letter should look like. There are three accepted styles. The horizontal lines represent lines of type. Click your mouse pointer on any part of the picture for a description and example of that part.

Modified Block Style



Block Style



Semiblock Style



[More on Business Letters.](#)

The Heading

The heading of a business letter should contain the return address (usually two or three lines) followed by a line with the date.

The heading is indented to the middle of the page in the modified block and semiblock styles. It begins at the left margin in the block style.

If the stationery is imprinted with the return address, then the return address may be omitted.

Sometimes a line after the address and before the date may include a phone number, a fax number, an E-mail address, or the like.

Particularly if the address uses three or more lines, it is good to skip a line before the date. When using the block style, always skip a line before the date.

Always include the date.

Example:

Acme Explosives, Inc.
100-B Dry Gulch Alley
Lonesome Coyote AZ 85789
(602) 555-5555

July 14, 2004

The Inside Address

This is the address you are sending your letter to. Make it as complete as possible. Include titles, names, and routing information if you know them.

This is always on the left margin.

Skip a line after the heading before the inside address. Skip another line after the inside address before the greeting.

Example:

Dr. Calvin Carson
Cross Country Coach
Dept. of Athletics
Colorado Community College at Cripple Creek
Cripple Creek CO 80678

The Greeting

The greeting in a business letter is always formal. It normally begins with the word "Dear" and always includes the person's last name.

It normally has a title such as **Mr.**, **Mrs.**, **Dr.**, or a political title.

The greeting in a business letter always ends in a **colon**.

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The Body

The first line of a new paragraph is indented in the semiblock style. The block and modified block style have all lines of the body to the left margin.

Regardless of style, skip a line between paragraphs.

Skip a line between the greeting and the body. Skip a line between the body and the close.

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The Complimentary Close and Signature Line

The left edge of the close and signature line in the semiblock and modified block begin in the center, at the same column as the heading.

The close and signature of the block letter begins at the left margin.

The complimentary close begins with a capital letter and ends with a comma.

Skip from one to three spaces (two on a typewriter), and type in the signature line, the printed name of the person signing the letter.

Sign the name in the space between the close and the signature line, starting at the left edge of the signature line.

Women may indicate how they wish to be addressed by placing **Miss, Mrs., Ms.** or similar title in parentheses before their name.

The signature line may include a second line for a title, if appropriate.

The signature should start directly above the first letter of the signature line in the space between the close and the signature line. Use blue or black ink.

Example:

Sincerely,

(Signature goes here)

(Mrs.) Elisabeth Jackson
Director of Acquisitions



Common Mistakes and Tricky Choices

Sometimes we need to make word choices. Sometimes we misuse words or phrases in standard English. This section includes many of the most common problems.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z

With many browsers or readers, you may click on a letter on this grid to find the term or word you are looking for. If this does not work with your version, you may scroll down the alphabetical list to find the word you need or click on the **text** letter below.

[A](#)[B](#)[C](#)[D](#)[E](#)[F](#)[G](#)[H](#)[I](#)[J](#)[K](#)[L](#)[M](#)[N](#)[O](#)[P](#)[Q](#)[R](#)[S](#)[T](#)[U](#)[V](#)[W](#)[Z](#)

- [Go to Grammar Slammer Contents](#)

This shows you the entries available. This sample does not link you to the pages listed, but each entry listed below is covered in **Grammar Slammer** and **Grammar Slammer Deluxe**.

A
A/An
Absolute Modifiers
Accept/Except
Accuse/Allege
Across/Acrossed/Cross
Adapt/Adopt
Administer/Administrate
Aggravate/Irritate
Ain't
A hold/Ahold
A lot/Allot/Alot
Already/All Ready
Alright/All Right
Alternate(ly)/Alternative(ly)
Altogether/All Together
Always/All Ways
American Grammar vs. British Grammar
Among/Between
Amount/Number
Ante-/Anti-
Anxious/Eager
Anymore
Anyone/Any One
Anyway/Any Way
Anyways
Anywheres
Apart/A part
As/Like
As To
Assume/Presume
At after Where
A Ways
Awhile/A While

B
Bad/Badly
Because after Reason
Being As or Being That
Beside/Besides
Between/Among
Blatant/Flagrant
Blond/Blonde
Bring/Take
British Grammar vs. American Grammar
Burst/Bust/Busted

C
Can/May
Can't Help But
Clipped Words
Compose/Comprise
Continual/Continuous
Convince/Persuade
Could Have/Could Of
Credible/Credulous/Creditable
Cross/Across/Acrossed
Cult/Occult

D
Decisive/Incisive
Definite/Definitive
Different From/Different Than
Diffuse/Defuse
Disinterested/Uninterested
Done as Verb
Doesn't/Don't
Due To
Due To the Fact That

E
Economic/Economical
Emigrate/Immigrate
Enthused/Enthusiastic
Envious/Jealous/Suspicious
Equivocal/Equivocable
Especial(ly)/Special(ly)
Everyone/Every One
Everywheres
Exalt/Exult
Except/Accept

F
Farther/Further
Fewer/Less
Flagrant/Blatant
For Free
Fortunate/Fortuitous

G
Gone/Went
Good/Well

H
Hanged/Hung
Have or Had plus Ought
Have after Could, Would, Should, or Will
Healthful/Healthy
Height or Heighth
Hers/Her's
Historic/Historical
Hopefully
Hypo-/Hyper-
Hypocritical/Hypercritica

I
I Hope/Hopefully
Immigrate/Emigrate
Imply/Infer
In after Want
Incisive/Decisive
Incredible/Incredulous
Indeterminate/Indeterminable
Irregardless/Regardless
Irritate/Aggravate
Its/It's

J
Jealous/Envious/Suspicious
Jiggle/Joggle/Juggle
Judicious/Judicial/Juridical
Just, Use of P>

K
Kind Of, Use of

L
Lay/Lie
Leave/Let
Lend/Loan
Less/Fewer
Less/Littler (More Little)
Like/As
Lie/Lay
Literal(ly)
Littlest/Least
Loath/Loathe
Luxuriant/Luxurious

M
Macro-/Micro-
Magnificent/Munificent
Manic/Maniac
May/Can
Maybe/May Be
Morale/Moral

N
Nowheres
Number/Amount

O
Occult/Cult
Of, Use of
Of after Would, Could, Should, or Will
Official/Officious
Orient/Oriente
Only, Use of
Ought with Have or Had

P
Perimeter/Parameter
Persecute/Prosecute/Persecution/Prosecution
Perspective/Prospective
Persuade/Convince
Prepositions Ending a Sentence
Prescribe/Proscribe/Prescription
Presume/Assume
Proscribe/Prescribe/Prescription
Prosecute/Persecute/Prosecution/Persecution
Prospective/Perspective

Q
Quash/Squash
Quote/Quotation/Quotation Mark

R
Raise/Rise
Real/Really
Reason with Because
Regardless/Irregardless
Renown/Reknown

S
Says/Said
Seen/Saw
Sensual/Sensuous
Set/Sit
Should Have/Should Of
Single/Singular
Solid/Stolid
Somewheres
Sort Of
Special(ly)/Especial(ly)
Split Infinitives
Squash/Quash
Strategy/Tactics
Supposed to/Suppose to
Sure/Surely
Suspicious/Jealous/Envious

T
Tactics/Strategy
Take/Bring
Tenet/Tenant
Than/Then
That/Where
That There and This Here
That/Which/Who
Them/Those
Then/Than
There/Their/They're
There's/Theirs/Their's
To/Too/Two
Tortuous/Torturous/Tortured
Try And/Try To
Turbid/Turgid

U
Unequivocal/Unequivocable
Uninterested/Disinterested
Unique (and Other Absolute Modifiers)
Used to/Use to

W
Want followed by In, Out, Off, Down, or Up
Warranty/Warrantee/Warrant
Ways after A
Well/Good
Went/Gone
Where Followed by At
Where/That
Who/Which/That
Who/Whom
Who's/Whose
Will Have/Will Of
-Wise (Suffix)
Would Have/Would Of

How to Use this Index

Click on the letter for the index of words and terms beginning with that letter.

Then click on the specific marked word or term you want to check.

Use your Acrobat Reader's "Back" command or button to return to your previous position.

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Glossary of Grammatical Terms

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N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z

With many browsers, you may click on a letter on the above grid to reach the letter quickly. If the grid does not work with your browser or reader version, simply scroll down to the grammatical term that you want or click on the **text** letter below.

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Over 100 words follow in the complete **Grammar Slammer** and **Grammar Slammer Deluxe**.

How to Use the Glossary

Click on the letter for the index of words and terms beginning with that letter. Then click on the word or term for the definition you need. Acrobat Readers in some operating systems may not be able to click down to the letter. If yours does not do that, you will have to scroll down the page manually using a browser button or a key like the "**Page Down**" key.

To return to the opening Glossary screen, click on your Acrobat Reader's "**Back**" button or press whatever key or menu takes you back to your previous screen. For more on how to use Acrobat Reader, see the **Quick Tour** or **Quick Reference Guide** that came with your Acrobat Reader.

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Abbreviation

An **abbreviation** is a shortened form of a word or expression.

CT and **Conn.** are abbreviations for Connecticut.

See the **Abbreviations** topic in the main Contents for rules on making and using abbreviations.

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Accented Syllables

In all dialects of English, the pattern of pronunciation depends not only on the sounds of the vowels and consonants, but on the stress each syllable receives when pronounced. A syllable that is stressed in pronunciation is called an **accented syllable**.

The accent often changes the meaning of words which otherwise would be pronounced or even spelled alike. The word *object* when accented on the first syllable is a noun; when accented on the second syllable it is a verb.

Here is another subtle example:

A crow is a black bird.
(Accent both *black* and *bird*.)

A crow is not a blackbird.
(That is, a species of bird called *blackbird*. Accent *black*.)

All English dictionaries show the accented syllables in their pronunciation keys, usually with an acute accent mark (´). See also [Syllable](#).

Active Voice

The **voice** of a verb refers to the form of the verb used in relation to what the subject is doing. In English there are only **two** voices-- passive and active.

The **active voice** of a verb simply means the form of the verb used when the subject is the doer of the action.

In most writing, use the active voice. It is more direct and less ambiguous.

Passive Voice: The project was reviewed by the committee.

Active Voice: The committee reviewed the project.

Adjective

An **adjective** is a word that modifies a noun or pronoun.

Examples: The big dog barked loudly.

(*The* and *big* modify the noun *dog*. They are adjectives.)

The dog was big and loud.

(The adjectives *The*, *big*, and *loud* modify the noun *dog*.)

The dog was a big one.

(The adjective *the* modifies *dog*; the adjective *big* modifies the pronoun *one*.)

Adjective Clause

An **adjective clause** is a [subordinate clause](#) *that modifies a noun or pronoun*.

The italicized clause in the first sentence is an adjective clause because it modifies the noun *clause*.

Most of the time adjective clauses begin with the relative pronouns **that, which, who, whom, or whose**.

See also [That, Which, and Who](#).

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Adverb

An **adverb** is a word that modifies a verb, an adjective, or another adverb. Adverbs generally answer one of four questions: how, when, where, or to what extent.

Adding the suffix **-ly** to an adjective *commonly* turns the word into an adverb.

Examples: He ran *fast*. (how)

He responded *immediately*. (when)

He put it *there*. (where)

He became *extremely* happy. (to what extent, modifies adjective)

Adverb Clause

An **adverb clause** is a [subordinate clause](#) that modifies a verb, adjective, or adverb. It answers one of four questions: how, when, where, and why.

An adverb clause always begins with a subordinating conjunction.

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Ambiguous

When something is **ambiguous** it has more than one possible meaning.

Writing should strive to be clear. Avoid ambiguity if you want your reader to be sure of what you are saying.

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Antecedent

The **antecedent** of a pronoun is the word which the pronoun stands for. In the first sentence on this page the pronoun **which** is taking the place of **word**. Therefore, **word** is the antecedent.

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Appositive

An **appositive** is a noun, noun phrase, or noun clause which follows a noun or pronoun and renames or describes the noun or pronoun. A simple appositive is an epithet like Alexander the Great. Appositives are often set off by commas.

Example: We visited the home of Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

(The underlined portion is the appositive.)

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Archaic or Archaism

Archaic means "old fashioned" or "no longer in use." When applied to language, it refers to a word, phrase, or usage that is either no longer used in the language or whose meaning has significantly changed.

Archaism is the noun form, referring to an old-fashioned or obsolete use of a word, phrase, or usage.

Example: The word **thou**, the singular form of **you**, is an **archaism**.

Example: The word **prevent** has an **archaic** meaning of "precede;" today it means "hinder."

Some dictionaries use the word **obsolete** when referring to archaisms.

Article

In grammar, an **article** is a type of adjective which makes a noun specific or indefinite. In English there are three articles: the definite article **the** and the two indefinite articles [a](#) and [an](#).

In writing, an **article** is a brief nonfiction composition such as is commonly found in periodicals.

See [Titles of Things](#) and [Quotation Marks with Titles](#) for information on punctuating the titles of articles.

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Auxiliary Verb

An **auxiliary verb** combines with another verb to help form the tense, mood, voice, or condition of the verb it combines with.

The verbs **to have, to be, to do, will, shall, would, should, can, may, might, and could** are the common auxiliary verbs in English.

Auxiliary verbs are sometimes called **helping verbs**.

In the last sentence, *are* is the auxiliary verb in the passive verb phrase *are called*.

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Basic Tenses

The **basic** or **simple tenses** are the three tenses which are the simplest in the English language--past, present, future, without any other condition or character.

The basic **present tense** uses the same verb as the verb part of the infinitive. In the third person singular an **-s** or **-es** is added. There are a number of irregular verbs, but they all have an *s* or *z* sound at the end of the third person singular.

The basic **past tense** is a single word. Usually a **-d** or **-ed** is added to the root verb to put it in the past. However, there are many irregular verbs. All persons, singular and plural are the same except for the verb **to be** in which all persons are **were** but first and third person singular are **was**.

The **future tense** is formed by adding the present form to the auxiliary verb **will** or **shall**. All persons, singular and plural, are the same.

	Present	Past	Future
<i>Regular:</i>	I like	I liked	I will like
	he likes	: he liked	he will like
<i>Irregular:</i>	I have	I had	I will go
	he has	he had	he will have

Capital Letters and Capitalizing

Capital Letters are the larger letters used at the beginning of sentences and names. They are the letters made on a typewriter when the "Shift" key is pressed.

To **capitalize** a word means "to make the first letter of the word a capital letter." See the Capitalization Rules topic in the [Grammar Contents](#) for more on when to capitalize.

Capital letters are sometimes called **Upper Case** letters.

For a list of the capital letters, see the letters in the Glossary Index Page.

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Noun or Pronoun Case

The **case** of a noun or pronoun in English is that form of a word which shows its relationship to other words in the sentence. The three cases in English are **nominative** (for subjects and predicate nominatives), **objective** (for direct objects, indirect objects, objects of prepositions, object complements, and subjects of infinitives), and **possessive**. In all English nouns and indefinite pronouns, there is no difference between the form of the nominative and the form of the objective.

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Clause

A **clause** is a group of words containing a subject and verb which forms part of a sentence. The first sentence on this page is made up of two clauses: the first clause from "*A clause*" to "*verb*," the second from "*which*" to the end.

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New England Clam Chowder

2 to 4 c. drained, chopped clams (reserve broth)

4 oz. diced salt pork or bacon

2 small onions chopped fine

2 medium potatoes, chopped

2 c. light cream (or cream/milk mixture)

Salt and Pepper (white pepper preferred)

Fry salt pork till crisp. Remove meat with slotted spoon. Add onion to remaining fat in pan and cook three minutes. Add potatoes. Add enough clam broth and/or water to almost cover potatoes. Cook over low heat till potatoes are tender. Add clams and cook for just two minutes after water returns to boil. Add heated, not boiled, cream. Season to taste. Stir, let stand a few minutes and serve in heated bowls. May be frozen or reheated, but do not boil.

Cliche

A **cliche** is a trite or overused word or expression. A cliche has lost much of its original meaning through overuse.

Unless you have a specific reason to do so, avoid cliches.

This word came from the French and is sometimes spelled with an acute accent on the final **e**: **clich  **.

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Comparative Degree

Adjectives and adverbs ending in **-er** or modified by the word **more** compare two items. This is known as the **comparative degree**.

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Complement

The word **complement** has the same root as the word **complete**.

A **complement** is a word that follows a verb and completes the meaning of the sentence or verbal phrase. In English, the complements are direct object, indirect object, predicate nominative, predicate adjective, and object complement.

To find the meaning of any of these terms, go to the "**Glossary**" linked below.

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Complex and Compound-Complex Sentences

A **complex sentence** is a sentence made up of **one** main clause and at least one [subordinate clause](#).

A **compound-complex sentence** is a sentence made up of **more than one** [main clause](#) and at least one subordinate clause. It is the combining of a [compound sentence](#) with a complex sentence.

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Compound Constructions

The term **compound** is used to describe the combining of similar grammatical units in a number of circumstances.

A [compound sentence](#) is a sentence made up of two or more [independent clauses](#). The clauses are joined by conjunctions and/or distinctive punctuation marks.

A **compound subject** is a [subject](#) made up of two or more different subjects acting on the same [predicate](#).

A **compound verb** is a simple predicate with two or more different verbs showing different actions or conditions.

Both compound subjects and compound verbs are joined by conjunctions, sometimes with additional punctuation.

A **compound modifier** is two or more adjectives or adverbs modifying a single word or phrase. They are normally joined by conjunctions or punctuation marks.

A **compound word** is a single word made up of two or more distinct words combined into that single word. The word *blackbird* is a compound word made up of the words *black* and *bird*.

Compound Sentence

A **compound sentence** is a sentence made up of two or more [independent clauses](#) but no [subordinate clauses](#).

The [clauses](#) in a compound sentence are usually joined by conjunctions and/or some kind of punctuation.

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Conjunctions

Conjunctions are words that **join** words, phrases, or sentence parts.

In English there are three kinds of conjunctions.

1. Coordinate conjunctions join similar words, [phrases](#), or [clauses](#) to each other. In English the main coordinate conjunctions are **and, or, for, but, nor, so** and **yet**.

(Note the use of **or** and **and** in the last two sentences.)

2. Correlative conjunctions also join similar words, phrases, or clauses, but act in **pairs**. In modern English the main correlative conjunctions are **either/or, neither/nor, both/and, whether/or, not/but** and **not only/but also**.

3. Subordinating conjunctions join a [subordinate clause](#) to a [main clause](#).

For a listing see the Glossary entry on Subordinating Conjunctions.

Conjunctive Adverbs

Conjunctive adverbs are adverbs that act as a transition between complete ideas. They normally show comparison, contrast, cause-effect, sequence, or other relationships. They usually occur between [independent clauses](#) or sentences.

The following words are common conjunctive adverbs:

accordingly, again, also, [besides](#) consequently, finally, furthermore, however, indeed, moreover, nevertheless, otherwise, then, therefore, and thus.

See [Commas with Interrupting Expressions](#) and [Semicolons with Clauses](#) for information on punctuating and using conjunctive adverbs.

Contraction

A **contraction** is a word shortened by leaving out some letters. The missing letters are indicated by an apostrophe.

Examples: *don't* for *do not*

o'clock for *of the clock*

See, for example, [Verb Contractions](#) and [Other Contractions](#).

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Wordiness

Wordiness, or being **wordy** simply means using too many words to say something. Usually there is a simpler way of saying the same thing.

Example: Work was canceled today due to the fact that it snowed.
(Wordy)

Work was canceled today because it snowed. (Clearer and more direct)

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A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
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This sample gives you a little idea of what **Spelling Slammer** is like. The full version contains approximately 1100 words that are often overlooked by spelling checkers as well as the main spelling rules in English.

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[addition](#)

[adherence](#)

[adherents](#)

[adjure](#)

[adulteress](#)

[adulterous](#)

[adverse](#)

Plus over 1,000 more words...



Welcome to *Spelling Slammer!*

Not sure how to spell a word? Your spell checker gives you a choice, and you don't know which to choose? Some of you may have a dictionary stored on your disk somewhere, but it is a nuisance to access and use.

Spelling Slammer takes care of **both** problems in an easy-to-use format. **Spelling Slammer** contains the rules and spellings you need to and make yourself clear. **Spelling Slammer** uses the familiar Internet HTML file format to make it easy to find what you are looking for. It even connects to the companion **Grammar Slammer**, to make a complete reference to vanquish your writing anguish!

Spelling Slammer is **not** a dictionary or vocabulary list. The words it lists are soundalikes, names, and other confusing words that a spell checker usually overlooks.

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How to Use *Spelling Slammer!*

This program works like any other Acrobat Reader file. If you can use browse the Internet, you can use **Spelling Slammer**.

Marked Words

Click on any **Marked** word or words and you will go to that topic. Most browsers or reader versions use underlining to mark these links, but some versions may be different.

A good way to become familiar with **Spelling Slammer** is to **browse** through some of the pages or take a look at some of the **Contents** topics. Use your browse or reader's "**Back**" command to return to the previous page.

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How to Use this Index Page

Welcome to **Spelling Slammer**, the help file that goes **beyond** a spell checker. Use it as you would any browser or reader file.

For more on how to use **Spelling Slammer**, click on [How to Use Spelling Slammer](#).

For spelling rules, click on [Spelling Rules](#).

For how to spell specific words, find the word by clicking on the appropriate letter on the alphabetic grid. Then click on the underlined or marked word that you want to check.

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Spelling Rules Contents

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Adding -s to Most Words

To make a [plural](#) of most nouns or [third person](#) singular of most verbs, we add an s sound to the root. Normally this means just adding the letter s.

Example: make, makes

Example: toy, toys

However, there are a number of exceptions:

[When the root ends in s, x, z, ch, or sh](#)

[When the root ends in o](#)

[When the root ends in y](#)

[When the root ends in f, fe, or ff](#)

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See also:

[Adding -s to Names](#)

[Plurals of Underlined and Italicized Items](#)

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Adding -s to Roots ending in s, x, z, ch, and sh

When the root of the word ends in **s**, **x**, **z**, **ch**, or **sh**, add **-es** to the root to make it plural or third person singular.

Example: boss, bosses

Example: tax, taxes

Example: church, churches

Example: blush, blushes

Doubling rules still apply:

Example: quiz, quizzes

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Adding -s to Roots ending in o

If the word ends in a **consonant** followed by an **o**, add **-es**.

Example: tomato, tomatoes

If the word ends in a **vowel** followed by an **o**, add **-s**.

Example: radio, radios

If the word is a **musical term** derived from Italian, add an **s**.

Example: piano, pianos

Example: soprano, sopranos

Proper names and words derived from proper names end in -s, if they are made plurals.

Example: Mr. Martino, the Martinos

Example: yo-yo, yo-yos

Adding -s to Roots ending in y

If the **y** is **preceded by a consonant**, change the **y** to **i** and add **-es**.

Incorrect: trys

Correct: tries

Incorrect: partys

Correct: parties

If the **y** is **preceded by a vowel**, add **-s**.

Example: day, days

Example: deploy, deploys

Adding -s to Words ending in f, fe, or ff

Normally to make a plural of words ending in **f**, **fe**, or **ff**, simply add **-s**.

However, if the **pronunciation** of the word **changes** so that the **f** sound changes to a **v** sound, then change the **f** to **v** and add **-es** (or just **s** if the root ends in **fe**.)

Example: puffs, cliffs, giraffes, serfs

Example: wives, wharves, scarves

Note that the **noun** *knife* becomes *knives*, and the **noun** *loaf* becomes *loaves*. The **verb** *knife*, however, becomes *knifes* and the verb *loaf* becomes *loafs*.

What about [dwarf](#)?

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What about *dwarf*?

Most dialects and authorities consider the plural or third person singular verb of *dwarf* to be **dwarfs**.

However, for the plural of the noun, the author J.R.R. Tolkien preferred **dwarves**. Because of the popularity of his novels and the many games and other products that have derived from his novels, **dwarves** is becoming more widely used.

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Plurals of Compound Terms Separated by Hyphens or Spaces

To pluralize a compound noun whose parts are separated by hyphens or spaces, pluralize the main noun of the compound term, if there is one.

Example: editor-in chief

Incorrect: editor-in-chiefs

Correct: editors-in-chief (*editor* is the main noun)

Example: bucket seat

Correct: bucket seats (*seat* is the main noun)

Example: whip-poor-will

Correct: whip-poor-wills (no main noun)

Compound names are made plural by pluralizing the last name in the compound.

Example: The Garden of the Finzi-Continis

Exceptional Plurals

Sometimes plurals (and a few third person verbs) are different. In most cases, they are either very common words or words that derive from a foreign word and still use the foreign plural.

Common words: child, children; mouse, mice; ox, oxen

Foreign words which use the foreign plural:

medium, media; radius, radii; thesis, theses; beau, beaux bacterium, bacteria; datum, data

Note: The plural of *medium* meaning "fortune teller" is *mediums*.

For foreign-derived words, you may need to check the dictionary.

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Words that Do Not Change when Plural

There are a few words in English that are the same in both singular and plural.

Example: sheep, moose, deer, fish, species

Species of fin fish and others whose name ends in **-fish** are usually also treated this way.

Example: pike, flounder, bream, swordfish, starfish

Some words are only used in the plural, especially disciplines of study or work that end in **-ics** and items that are normally paired.

Example: mathematics, politics, physics

Example: scissors, pants, tweezers, tongs

Adding -s to Names

To make the plural of a person's name, especially the last name, just add an **s**. Do **not** add an apostrophe plus **s** unless you mean to show [possession](#).

Example: Smith, the Smiths

Incorrect: We are going to visit the Grant's today.

Correct: We are going to visit the Grants today.

Correct: We are going to the Grants' house. (possessive)

If the name ends in **s**, **z**, **ch**, or **sh**, then the plural is made by adding **-es**.

Example: Shabazz, the Shabazzes

Example: We are going to visit the Joneses today.

Unlike other types of plurals, plural names ending in vowels including **o** and **y** end in a single **s**. This also applies to the rare English name whose common noun plural is irregular.

Example: Overby, the Overbys

Example: We just saw the Sciortinos.

Example: Mr. Child, the Childs.

If the name ends in **s**, **z**, **ch**, or **sh** and the common noun plural is irregular, then the plural is made by adding **-es**.

Example: Mr. Fish, the Fishes

See also [Apostrophes with Plurals](#) and [Apostrophes with Italicized Items](#).

Adding Prefixes to Roots

When a **prefix** is added to a word or root, the spelling of the **root does not change**.

Example: dis + appear = disappear

mis + spell = misspell

re + cede = recede

un + necessary = unnecessary

in + oculte = inoculate

an + oint = anoint (like *ointment*)

Sometimes the spelling of the **prefix** may change to make the new word easier to pronounce. This does **not** normally mean dropping a letter.

Example: ad + fect = affect

in + legal = illegal

sub + tain = sustain

ob + cur = occur

This spelling rule can help you many times, especially if deciding whether or not to double a letter. Spell checkers usually check for this.

Adjure or Abjure?

Abjure means to "formally give up or renounce."

Adjure means to "give an order to a person under oath."

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Words Rhyming with *Able*

Common words rhyming with **able** may be spelled differently.

The adjective **able** ends in **-ble**.

The proper name is spelled **Abel**. This is true for first names and virtually always true for last names as well.

Label ends with **-bel**. This may be slightly confusing because **ladle** ends with an **-le**.

Table ends with **-ble**.

The name **Mabel** normally ends with **-bel**, although there are some variations such as Maybelle. Double-check if you are not sure.

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Exhilarate, Accelerate and Related Words

Exhilarate and related words are frequently misspelled. It may help to note that the root of **exhilarate** is the same as **hilarious**. The root **-hilar-** means "happy or glad."

Related words include **exhilarated** and **exhilaration**.

Exhilarate sounds similar to **accelerate** which means "to gain in speed." Sometimes these two words are confused. The root of **accelerate** is the same as "celerity" which means "speed" as does the root **-celer**.

Related words include **accelerator** and **acceleration**.

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Acclamation or Acclimation?

Acclamation comes from **acclaim**. It means a "loud expression of approval or consent."

Acclimation is related to **climate**. It means "to adjust to a climate." The more common word of a similar meaning is **acclimatization**, but **acclimation** is commonly used when speaking of adjusted laboratory conditions.

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Accommodate

Accommodate is a word that is frequently misspelled. The second and third vowels are **both o's**. It has the same root as **commodious** and even **commode**.

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Ad or Add?

Ad is short for "advertisement."

Add is an arithmetical function meaning "to combine."

The **prefix ad-** is used in many English words and means "to" or "toward." For more on this see [Adding Prefixes to Roots](#).

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Addition or Edition?

Addition is a mathematical function, it comes from the word **add** and means "the act of combining."

Edition comes from the word **edit**. It means either "the version of a publication" or "the act of editing."

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Suffix *-Ents (-Ants) or -Ence (-Ance)*?

The suffix **-ent** is usually an **adjective-forming** suffix. The suffix **-ence** is normally **noun-forming**. Most of the time there is no problem because the suffix **-ent** would never have an **-s** added to it as long it came at the end of an adjective.

Sometimes, however, **-ent** is used for **nouns**. It can mean either "**a person, or doer**" or occasionally "**a product, or example**".

For example, an **adherent** is "one who adheres to a belief"; an **effluent** is a "product of an outflow."

The suffix **-ence** normally means "the act of" or "the quality of." So **adherence** means "the quality or act of adhering." This can create confusion between **adherents**, the **plural** of **adherent**, and the word **adherence**. The two words sound virtually identical. Keep track of what the suffixes mean.

The same applies for the few words that can end in **-ants** or **-ance**.

The following words, for example, mean "persons or doers" of the specific action or idea: **adherents**, **assistants**, **dissidents**, **penitents**, and **residents**.

The following words mean "products" or "examples" of the specific action or idea: **effluents**, **incidents**, or **variants**.

The suffix **-ence** is rarely pluralized. It usually has a more abstract and less personal or specific meaning. The following words mean the "act of doing" the action or idea: **assistance**, **dissidence**, **penitence**, **residence**, **effluence**, **incidence**, or **variance**.

Residence, in the sense of "dwelling place," is about the only **-ence** word that is commonly pluralized. **Variance**, in the sense of a "legal permit," may also be pluralized.

Correct: The Fire Marshal inspected student residences.

Correct: How many variances did the Fire Marshal issue?

In most cases the word **incidences** is used incorrectly--it should be **incidents**. **Incidence** means the "rate at which something occurs"; seldom is this needed plurally. **Incident** means "occurrence," and often more than one occurrence can be spoken of.

Incorrect: There were three incidences of fire last month.

Correct: There were three incidents of fire last month.

Correct: The incidence of reported fires is up five percent.

See also [Suffix -Ence or -Ance?](#)

Adulteress or Adulterous?

Adulteress is a woman who commits or is found guilty of adultery.

Adulterous is an adjective meaning "characterized by or committing adultery."

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Adverse or Averse?

Adverse means "hostile to" or "opposing." It is related to **adversity**. The first syllable of **adverse** is accented.

Averse means "disliking," usually fairly intense. It is related to **aversion**. The second syllable of **averse** is accented.

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We dedicate this program to the memory of Connecticut Yankee **Noah Webster**. While Webster is best known today for publishing the first dictionary and spelling books in English North America, he also made an invaluable contribution to many of the freedoms Americans treasure. Webster was familiar with the form of government in Connecticut which was based not on the theocratic Puritan Massachusetts form as much as on the pattern of Plymouth Colony. In Plymouth the government was instituted only for the protection of life, liberty, and property. The church and the individual were responsible for such things as teaching, religion, press, speech, and so on. Webster wrote George Washington a letter about these things and met with him shortly before Washington attended the United States Constitutional Convention. While many other individuals contributed to the writing of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, Webster as much as anyone articulated the basic principles which would establish the American Constitution as an example of liberty and responsibility that the world had not seen since the fall of Judah to Babylon.

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