

# Grammar and Punctuation

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## Introduction

Knowing how to arrange words to form sentences and correctly punctuate your work helps explain your views to your reader but also ensures you do not lose marks. Writing well is an important skill for both studying and the workplace, often resulting in higher marks for written submissions.

This guide gives a reminder of the grammar basics and explains common punctuation to help improve your written work.

## Sentences

Every sentence must have a verb (the action or doing word) and a noun (the thing or the person). For example:

The lady is frying an egg.

- The **lady** is the noun, or subject, of the sentence.
- **Frying** is the active verb: the doing word.
- The **egg** is the object because the subject (the lady) is doing something with or to the object

A sentence should always begin with a capital letter and always ends with a full stop (.), question mark (?) or exclamation mark (!).

Single words are not sentences.

## Paragraphs



Your writing is easier to read if you group sentences into paragraphs. In a paragraph, every sentence should contain a piece of information about the overall topic of that paragraph.

Paragraphs break up your writing into sections which make it easier to read and often easier to follow. You should leave a single line space between each paragraph.

## Capital letters



Capital letters are the 'big letter' form of the alphabet, as shown below:

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

You need to use a capital letter at the beginning of every sentence and also for proper nouns (see page 3).

When you talk about yourself in writing, always use a capital I:

I have experience of working in a busy restaurant.

Post codes should always be written in capital letters:

DD5 1NY

Abbreviations should also be written in capital letters:

BBC  
DVD  
SECC

## Nouns

Everything has a name, every person has a name. All names are nouns; a noun is often called a naming word.

Sam went to the shops and bought some mangoes, a diamond and a car.

The nouns in this sentence are:

Sam (proper noun, see below)  
shops  
mangoes  
diamond  
car

Nouns are usually a person, a place or a thing. See the section on proper nouns (below) to see if you need to capitalise the first letter of each word.

Nouns might tell you the gender of something, for example, a son is male and a niece is female.

## Proper nouns

A proper noun is the name of something, or someone. All first names and surnames, street names and company/shop names have capital letters, just as places and official titles must have capital letters.

First names: John, Jane, etc.

Surnames: Smith, McDonald, etc.

Street names: High Street, Kings Road, etc.

Place names: Dundee, France, Buckingham Palace, etc.

Company / institution names: Dundee and Angus College, Google, etc.

Titles should have capital letters:

Official titles: Pope, President, Her Majesty

People's titles: Dr, Mrs, Mr, Miss

Other titles: name of a boat (Titanic), a house (The White House), a pub, hotel, restaurant (The Kings Arms), stadium/venues (Old Trafford, Hampden Park, The Rep Theatre)

Section titles in your assignments should have capital letters.

Publications are also proper nouns, like The Times newspaper or The Beano comic. A book like Pride and Prejudice also must be capitalised.

## Abstract nouns

Abstract nouns describe things you cannot see or touch, like emotions.

Some examples:



Joy



Sadness



Thought

## Pronouns

Pronouns, such as **he** and **she**, are used instead of a noun.

Using a pronoun helps your writing flow by avoiding repetition of nouns. The pronoun saves you from repeating the proper noun in this example:

Kristen went to the market to buy material and then Kristen made a dress.

Kristen went to the market to buy material and then she made a dress.

## Adjectives

Adjectives are describing words. You would use them to give additional information about a noun or pronoun.

For example:

Michael is a man.

Michael is a tall, handsome, young man.

Michael is the proper noun and man is the noun, but we have described Michael's age and physical appearance by using adjectives.

## Verbs

A verb is a doing or action word, they explain in a sentence what is happening. Remember the lady frying the egg? Without the verb we would only know there was a lady (noun) and an egg (noun), not what was happening. By adding the verb 'frying', we know what the lady is doing and what is happening to the egg.

Verbs often end with 'ing', for example:



Running



Cooking



Reading



Drinking



Writing

but can also take other forms:

to Google something

to run somewhere

## Tenses

A verb tense explains when an action takes place. It must be either:

Past



Present



Future

## Present tense

I **am** at work.

## Past tense

I **was** at work.

## Future tense

I **will be** at work.

## Past tense

Verbs which explain actions in the past often use **-ed** at the end of the word:

Peter helped Emma tidy up.

Sam asked the class to stay behind.

## Auxiliary verbs

Auxiliary verbs help explain which tense is being used:

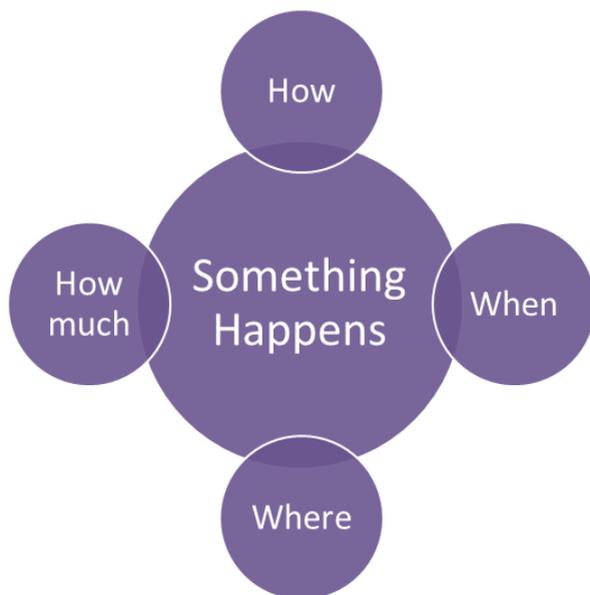
Present: I **am** helping

Past: I **was** helping

Future: I **will** help

## Adverbs

Adverbs are often used to explain the meaning of another word. They sometimes alter the meaning a little, always adding extra information or context. Adverbs can be split into four main groups:



## How adverbs

Usually, **how** adverbs are created by adding **-ly** to an adjective, for example:

**Quiet** becomes **quietly**

**Bad** becomes **badly**

Adverbs can also change the meaning when **-ly** is added, for example:

**Hard** is not used the same way as **hardly**

**Low** has a different meaning to **lowly**

Sometimes when converting an adjective into an adverb, the spelling will change. For example:

**Happy** becomes **happily**

Adverbs can look just like adjectives:

The train arrived **late** at the station.

Liz worked **hard** to pass her assessment.

## When adverbs

**When** adverbs explain when something happened or will happen, giving time context:

Soon

Yesterday

Immediately

Tomorrow

Already is classed as a **when** adverb as it indicates a timeframe, for example:

I have **already** done that.

## Where adverbs

**Where** adverbs explain where something happens:

Everywhere

Nowhere

In

Out

Above

Behind

Emma looked **everywhere** for her keys. She found them **above** her piano.

## How much adverbs

These show the extent to which something is happening:

Quite	Almost	Completely
Very	Too	Less

It was **too** hot to go out in the sun.

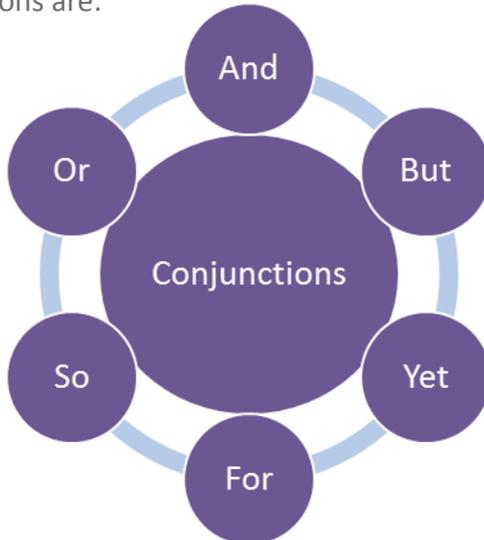
The washing was **quite** dry.

## Conjunctions



Conjunctions are used to join words or groups of words together. They can change the meaning of the sentence.

Common conjunctions are:



Conjunctions often join sentences before a reason:

Irene went to the cinema **because** it was her birthday

Conjunctions can show two sides of an argument, or contrasting opinions:

Although

Even if

While

Sam likes mangoes **while** Peter prefers apples.

Conjunctions can show time:

When

Whenever

Before

After

Since

Until

We will go for a picnic **when** it stops raining.

Conjunctions can be more than one word, often split in the sentence:

We will still go out **whether** the news is good **or** bad.

## Prepositions

A preposition is used before a noun or pronoun, showing where, when or how the noun or pronoun is connected to another word in the sentence.

To	At	On	In	Up
Down	With	Of	For	Near
Under	Through	After	Into	

Prepositions will often explain position or location of something:

The road runs **alongside** the fields.

Prepositions tend to be short words:

As far as

On top of

In spite of

Except for

Sometimes prepositions are groups of words:

Alistair will miss class **due to** other commitments.

## Finishing sentences

A full stop is the punctuation mark used at the end of most sentences.



A full stop looks like this .

It is needed when finishing a statement, for example:

The grass is green.

A full stop can be used to signify a shortened word or missing letters, for example:

info.

Dr.

etc. (shortened form of et cetera)

## Question marks

When we are speaking, we can make it clear we are asking a question by the tone of our voice. When we are writing, we do this by finishing the question with a question mark.



A question mark looks like this ?

Sometimes a single word can be a question:

Who?	Why?	When?	Where?	How?
------	------	-------	--------	------

If a sentence starts with one of these words, it is very likely to be a question and should end with a question mark.

## Exclamation marks

An exclamation mark looks like this !



They are usually used to show surprise, shock or joy:

Ouch!	Brilliant!	Yikes!
-------	------------	--------

Exclamation marks can be used to strengthen a command:

Pay attention!

Be quiet!

They can also be used to show amusement:

That was silly!

What good fun!

## Comma

A comma helps written sentences make sense to the reader. You may often find them at natural pauses if sentences were read aloud.



A comma looks like this ,

For example:

Excellent, thanks for doing that so quickly David.

Commas are used after words in a list or directions:

Once you reach the main road, take the first left, then the second right and you should get to the park.

Sam ordered staplers, drawing pins, paper clips and staples for the team.

Note: the last two items in a list should be joined with the conjunction **and**.

## Colons

A colon looks like this :



It would be used to start a list, a quotation or an example. For example:

Irene was experienced in: office filing; typing; photocopying and book keeping.

Emma explained: "I love sociology and study skills."

A colon is less common than a semi-colon.

## Semi-colons

A semi-colon is more common than a colon. A semi-colon can be used in place of a conjunction, often to join related sentences.



A semi-colon looks like this ;

For example:

Peter had to go home; he was feeling very unwell.

Both halves can be sentences in their own right:

Peter had to go home. He was feeling very unwell.

The sentences are closely related, so joining them with a semi-colon is appropriate.

## Brackets

Brackets look like this ( )



Brackets often contain supplementary information and are always used in pairs:

Jessica (Sam's daughter) loves eating yoghurt.

The information between the brackets can be described as in parenthesis. The sentence must read correctly without the information in parenthesis. If the information between the brackets is more than supplementary it should be included in the sentence itself.

## Hyphen

A hyphen looks like this -



A hyphen looks like a dash, but it is used to join words together:

Stratford-upon-Avon

Right-hand side

Sometimes a hyphen will give context to words which are not normally joined by one:

College-wide

This reads more easily than College wide, giving context to something relating to the whole College.

## Dashes

A dash is not the same as a hyphen, though they look the same.

A dash looks like this —



A dash is used before and after additional information in a sentence, or after a secondary thought:

Alistair is a member of MENSA — the high IQ society — and gets their newsletter.

A dash can be used singly and may sometimes be used in place of a colon or semi-colon:

Peter went home — he was feeling unwell.

## Inverted commas

Inverted commas are upside-down commas used in written work to show when someone is speaking. They can be used singly or in pairs.



They look like “ ” or ‘ ’

Quotations should always use inverted commas in pairs:

Emma explained: “I love sociology and study skills.”

When you are referring to colloquial language (slang) it is sometimes appropriate to use single inverted commas:

They thought the new building was ‘wicked’.

In this instance, wicked could be read with the meaning of nasty if it were not in inverted commas.

## Apostrophes

An apostrophe looks like this ’



It has two main functions:

To show the **omission of letters**.

To show **possession of a noun**.

## Omission of letters

### Have

I've	I have
You've	You have
Would've	Would have <b>not</b> Would of
Who've	Who have

### Not

Doesn't	Does not
Can't	Cannot
Won't	Will not
Didn't	Did not
Weren't	Were not
Shouldn't	Should not
Couldn't	Could not

### Other common abbreviations:

It's	It is
Let's	Let us
There's	There is
She's	She is
You're	You are
They're	They are

## Possession of a noun

An apostrophe can also mean that something belongs to someone:

Sam's bike

Peter's book

Michael's shop

When there is a single owner, like above (only Sam owns her bike) use the apostrophe with a single letter s, for example:

Sam's bike

When the word is plural (there is more than one owner/person) and the word already ends in s or es, add the apostrophe after the s:

The elves' workshop

The workshop belongs to all Santa's elves – the elves belong to Santa.

The footballers' kit

In this example it is the whole team's kit, not a single footballer's kit.

If a plural word does not end in an s, add the apostrophe then the s, like team's kit, children's play park.

Some belonging words do not have an apostrophe at all:

The alligator ate **its** prey.

The bag is **yours**.

These are not shortened words, they are pronouns. With a name, like Sam, you need the apostrophe:

That is Sam's bag.

With a pronoun you do not need the apostrophe:

The bag is hers.

## Synonyms

A synonym is a word you can use in place of another, but it means the same thing:

Rapid, speedy, quick

Happiness, joy

Antonyms are opposites:

Hot / cold

Old / new

Smooth / rough

## Americanisms

Although Americans use the English language, there are spelling differences between some common words:



### British Spelling

- Favourite
- Behaviour
- Colour
- Centre
- Metre
- Curb
- Grey
- Tyre
- Realise
- Optimise



### American Spelling

- Favorite
- Behavior
- Color
- Center
- Meter
- Kerb
- Gray
- Tire
- Realize
- Optimize

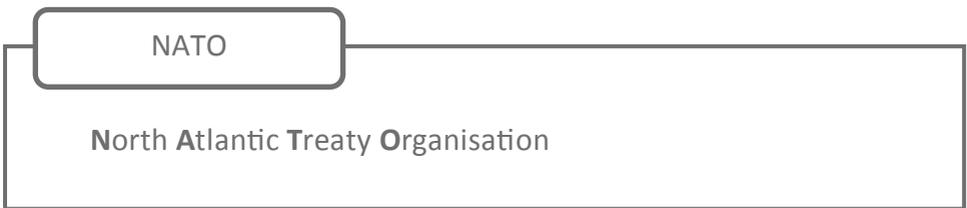
You will notice from that last two examples that using a **z** in place of an **s** is another common Americanism.

Microsoft Word can auto-detect the language you are using. Be careful as it is often set to American English. You can change this by going to the **Review** tab, selecting the **language** drop down menu and then **Set Proofing Language**.

Select **English (U.K.)** and then **Set As Default**.

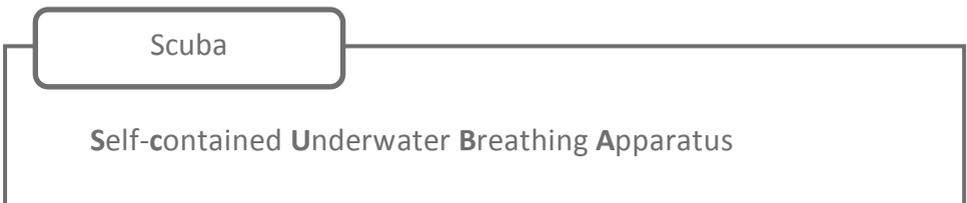
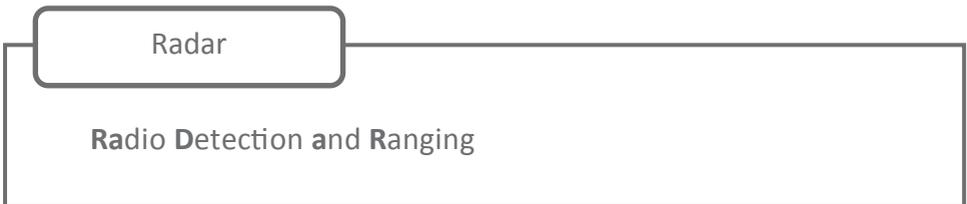
## Acronyms

An acronym is a special kind of abbreviation. It is a word or phrase made from the first letter, or group of letters, from each of the abbreviated words:



Although NATO is an acronym, it is commonly accepted as a word now and may often be written in lower case with a capital letter: **Nato**

Other words which were previously known as acronyms and are now commonly accepted words include:



## Proprietary eponym

Although this sounds complicated, it is a very common and simple occurrence.

When a product from a brand becomes very popular, like Hoover's vacuum cleaner or Apple's iPod, the whole product market is referred to by the brand name.

I got a new iPod.

If it was not made by Apple, it is a new MP3 player or digital music player, not an iPod.

The Hoover is broken.

Unless it was made by Hoover, the vacuum cleaner is broken.

## Choosing the correct word

### Who's and whose

**Who's** is the shortened version of **who is** or **who has**:

**Who's** going to the beach this afternoon?

**Who's** finished their essay?

**Whose** is used to ask who something belongs to. It is also used to say which person or thing you mean, or to give more information.

**Whose** pen is this?

The students, **whose** bus was late, missed the start of their exam.

To check if you are using the correct **whose** or **who's**, say or write the sentence with the word **who is**. If it sounds correct, use **who's**. If it sounds wrong, use **whose**.

**Whose** pen is this? ✓

**Who is** pen is this? ✗

Remember shortened versions of words should not be used in formal writing tasks such as your college assignments.

## I and me

If you are having difficulty deciding whether to use **I** or **me** in your sentence, rewrite it without mentioning the other person to see if **I** or **me** sounds correct.

Sam and **I** are going to the new restaurant for lunch tomorrow

**I** am going to the restaurant for lunch tomorrow. ✓

**Me** going to the new restaurant for lunch tomorrow. ✗

She asked if she could go for a walk with Alistair and **me**.

She asked if she could go for a walk with **me**. ✓

She asked if she could go for a walk with **I**. ✗

## To, two and too

**To** has a number of uses and is used the most out of these three words.

**I** am going **to** the shops

**To** find the treasure you must follow the map

Craig wants **to** learn **to** speak French

**Two** is the number 2:

Lisa has **two** exams today.

There were **two** tigers at the zoo.

**Too** means also, very, more than, etc.:

Can I come to the party **too**?

I was **too** excited about Christmas to sleep.

Alistair's shoes are **too** small for his feet.

## Their, there and they're

**Their** means to belong to them:

The students read **their** books in the library.

The kittens closed **their** eyes.

**There** refers to a place. It is also used with is, was, are, were, etc.:

The shop is along **there**.

**There** is a fly in my soup.

**There** was a dog running along the beach.

**There** are great books in the College library.

**There** were lots of students in the library.

**They're** is the shortened version of they are:

**They're** going on work experience.

I don't know how **they're** getting there.

Remember to use **they are** for formal writing tasks such as your college assignments.

**They're** is suitable for informal writing tasks such as an email to a friend.

## Like

Below are some example sentences where **like** has been exchanged with a more appropriate word for a formal writing task such as a College assignment:

I often visit local tourist attractions **like** The McManus and Discovery Point.  
I often visit local tourist attractions **such as** The McManus and Discovery Point.

It looks **like** your friend will win the race.  
It looks **as if** your friend will win the race.

Remember if you are stating that something is similar to something else in your college assignment, you would be required to give further explanation:

This style of painting is **like** Van Gogh's approach.

This style of painting is **very similar** to Van Gogh's approach because...

There are some sentences where it is OK to use **like**:

I own a pair of shoes just **like** yours.

We can meet in the quiet study room, **like** we did last week.

## Finally

This guide should help you understand the basic and most frequently confusing aspects of grammar and punctuation and will aid you in all aspects of your written work. If you feel you need any further information or help with grammar and punctuation please feel free to ask any member of our Learning Resources staff – we are always happy to help!



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