

Quick Reference for Grammar & Punctuation

Importance of Writing Skills: Communicating in writing is a very important skill that you will use throughout your college career as well as in your professional career. Grammatical errors could be embarrassing and cost you a grade. Every student should strive to develop good writing skills.

Grammar Tips

Spelling <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If you're not sure how to spell a word, use a dictionary.• Be careful when using the Spell Check function – it may catch some mistakes, but won't catch them all!• It is always a good idea to proofread your papers (more than once) before turning them in.
Its or It's <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The word "its" is used to show ownership, for example: the bird spread its wings.• The word "it's" is a contraction for "it is."• The use of its versus it's can be very confusing! Apostrophes are generally used to show possession – except when using the word "it."
There, Their, or They're <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The word "there" is used when referring to a place or location, for example: She forgot her books over there.• The word "their" indicates ownership by a group, such as: Their papers were turned in on time.• The word "they're" is a contraction for "they" and "are" for example: They're late for class.
Your or You're <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The word "your" indicates ownership, such as: Your classes are online.• The word "you're" is a contraction for "you" and "are" for example: You're an excellent student.
Affect or Effect <p>One of the most common mistakes is the misuse of the words "affect" and "effect." These are homonyms—they are words that sound similar but have different meanings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Affect is a verb. (to influence)• Effect is a noun. (a result)• You can affect something or you can have an effect on something—but you can't do it the other way around.³
Referring to This <ul style="list-style-type: none">• When you are writing "this theorist" or "that theory" or you simply write "it," make sure your reader knows what you are referring to.• Are you clear which theorist or theory you are talking about?• If you are using "he" or "she" will your reader have to stop and figure out exactly who you are referring to?
Referring to That <p>Never use "that" when referring to a person.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If you write: "The first woman that was elected to Congress." You would be insulting this person, because—she is a person! People are not referred to as "that" they are referred to as "who" or "whom."• Instead, you would write: "The first woman who was elected to Congress."
Who or Whom <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If you are not sure whether to use "who" or "whom," ask yourself this question: <i>Who is what doing what to whom?</i>²• If your answer is the one that does the action (the subject), use <i>who</i>.• If your answer is the one that gets something done to it (the object), use <i>whom</i>.

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Punctuation Tips

Commas, Semi-colons, or Periods

Read your sentence out loud and see where you would naturally pause to take a breath.

- If your pause is short (,) you probably need a comma.
- If your pause is longer (;) you probably need a semi-colon.
- If your sentence is complete, use a period (.)
- Does your sentence ask a question (?) If so use a question mark.
- If your sentence is an exclamation, use an exclamation mark (!)
- Remember, whatever follows a semi-colon must be able to stand on its own as a full sentence.
- If the first part of the sentence can stand on its own, you can use a colon (:) in essays, business letters, and research papers.

Apostrophes

- Use apostrophes when indicating ownership, such as: I proofread Sally's paper.
- Use apostrophes for contractions, for example: use "don't" in place of "do not."
- DO NOT use apostrophes for a plural noun, such as: My book's were expensive.

Dashes and hyphens *NOTE: dashes should be used sparingly in formal writing. Do not use dashes when commas would do the work for you.*

- When you're setting off a phrase in a sentence—you can use the longer dash to emphasize the words that follow in a more informal manner. *Called an em-dash because it is the same width as the letter "M."*¹
 - Em-dash example: "What the heck did you mean by—oh, never mind!"
- When you're joining phrases such as two-word proper nouns or for the space between dates in a chronological range, use the shorter dash. *Called an en-dash because it is the same width as the letter "N."*¹
 - En-dash example: Colorado-New Mexico border or 1961–1963 or 6:30–8:45 p.m.
- Hyphens are used to join words together, such as: time-specific, old-fashioned, one-half, father-in-law.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

- Always identify acronyms before you use them for the first time, for example:
 - National American University (NAU) or Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
 - After you state the full term once with the acronym in parentheses, it is permissible for you to just use the acronym.
- DO NOT abbreviate words to save space or time, for example: using "thru" for "through" or "econ" for "economics."¹

Italics and Underlines

- You can use one or the other but never both at the same time, because they really mean the same thing!
 - Underlining used to be a copy-editing mark to tell printers to set certain words in italic type. Underlining italics meant the editor wanted the words taken out of italics. So underlining your already-italicized phrase is, in effect, like using a double negative.²

Remember: good writing will reflect well on you personally and professionally throughout your life. Work at it! Time invested now is indeed well spent! If you have further questions please contact your instructor or visit the NAU Online Library at: <https://nauproxy01.national.edu/login>

References:

¹Capital Community College Foundation. (2004). *The guide to grammar and writing*. Retrieved from: <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/>.

²Cooper, K. (1999). *Tips on grammar, punctuation and style*. Writing Center at Harvard University. Retrieved from: <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/documents/GP.html>.

³Williamson, J. (2008). *Grammar tips for college students: Common mistakes that make you look bad*. Retrieved from: <http://www.distance-education.org/Articles/Grammar-Tips-for-College-Students--Common-Mistakes-That-Make-You-Look-Bad-73.html>.