

Common Writing Errors that are Easy to Fix¹

I. Dash vs. hyphen

| | Dash (AKA em-dash) | Hyphen |
|---------------------|---|-------------------|
| Appearance | long: — | short: - |
| To type | -- or CA-number-pad-hyphen (—) | - |
| Function | to separate | to connect |
| Alternatives | comma, parentheses, colon (A dash is less formal.) | no space or space |

Examples of the dash

- These books—which are on reserve in the library—are required reading for the course.
- In my hometown the basic needs of people—food, clothing, and shelter—are less costly than in Los Angeles.
- Lou took a few steps back, came running full speed, kicked a mighty kick—and missed the bass.

Examples of the hyphen

- policy-makers, policymakers, policy makers
- bath-tub, bathtub, bath tub
- check-book, checkbook, check book
- home-town, hometown, home town
- hard-working, hardworking

Hyphen to avoid ambiguity in a compound prenominal adjective

- little-expected aid (the aid was little expected vs. there was little of the expected aid)
- better-paid jobs (the job was better paid, vs. this paid job was better than some other paid job)
- a thought-provoking comment (vs. a thought provoking comment, i.e. a thought that provokes comment)
- lesser-known evil (vs. the lesser of the two known evils)
- LIPA just published their first-rate study.
- Mrs. Diaz gave Tanya a seashell and some newspaper-wrapped fish to take home to her mother.

II. Paired commas

- These books, which are on reserve in the library, are required reading for the course.
- Evolution, so far as we know, doesn't work that way.

¹ Adapted from these two online articles:

(1) Zantal-Wiener, A. 2016. *Grammar Police: 30 of the Most Common Grammatical Errors We All Need to Stop Making*. Retrieved June 15, 2017 from <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/common-grammar-mistakes-list>.

(2) Owens, J. 2017. "Common Errors in Technical Writing". Retrieved June 15, 2017 from <https://www.ece.ucdavis.edu/~jowens/commonerrors.html>.

- Recognizing the harmful effects of environmental hazards, such as alcohol, is an essential element in good prenatal care.
- Rock and roll may be here to stay; the sad truth for some rock musicians, however, is that their hearing may not be so.

Compare

- These books, which are on reserve in the library, are required reading for the course.
- These books (which are on reserve in the library) are required reading for the course.
- These books—which are on reserve in the library—are required reading for the course.

III. Serial comma:

- The serial comma is the comma used immediately before a coordinating conjunction preceding the final item in a list of three or more items.
- In a series of three or more terms with a single conjunction, use a comma after each term except the last.”
- To avoid this ambiguity, a writer must always include the serial comma.
“To my parents, Mother Teresa and the Pope.”
“To my parents, Mother Teresa, and the Pope.”
“To the Pope, Mother Teresa and my parents.”

“My usual breakfast is coffee, bacon and eggs and toast.”

“My usual breakfast is coffee, bacon, eggs and toast.”

III. Title Capitalization

This one is tough, since so many different outlets apply different rules to how titles are capitalized. An online tool for title capitalization is [TitleCap](http://titlecapitalization.com/) (<http://titlecapitalization.com/>)

Some capitalization rules are:

- Capitalize the first word.
- Capitalize nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs.
- Lowercase articles ("a," "an," "the"), coordinating conjunctions, and prepositions.

Compare:

- Nasal Place Assimilation in Urdu
- Nasal place assimilation in urdu
- Nasal Place Assimilation In Urdu
- Nasal Place assimilation in Urdu