

# Basic Grammar Rules

## 1. Spelling Errors

- There is no good excuse for spelling errors in a final draft.
- Everyone should use a dictionary or turn on Spell Check. When in doubt, check it out!

## 2. Run-on Sentences

- Run-ons occur when you try to make one sentence do too much. For example:  
*William gazed across the broad Pacific his heart was filled with dread.*
- Avoid run-ons by:
  - a. breaking the long sentence into separate sentences:  
*William gazed across the broad Pacific. His heart was filled with dread.*
  - b. reducing one of the clauses to a subordinate clause and adding a comma:  
*When William gazed across the broad Pacific, his heart was filled with dread.*
  - c. adding a comma and coordinating conjunction between the two clauses:  
*William gazed across the broad Pacific, but his heart was filled with dread.*

## 3. Sentence Fragments

- Fragments occur when you've written only part of a sentence. For example:  
*Because there was no other way of escaping the fire.*
- Fix fragments by making sure your sentence contains both a subject and a verb:  
*He leaped out of the window because there was no other way of escaping the fire.*

## 4. Subject/Verb Agreement

- If the subject is singular, use a singular verb; if the subject is plural, use a plural verb:  
*The arrival of many friends promises a good time.*  
*Either the principal or the coach usually attends the dance.*
- Remember: the subject of a sentence is never contained within a prepositional phrase!

## 5. Pronoun Agreement

- Almost everyone makes this mistake: *Everyone should get out their books.*
- A pronoun must agree in number with its antecedent (the word to which the pronoun refers).
- Rewrite the sentence using singular pronouns: *Everyone should take out his or her book.*  
Singular pronouns include: *each, either, neither, one, everyone, no one, everybody, nobody, anyone, someone, somebody.*

## 6. Verb Tense

- Tense means time. Verbs tell us what action is occurring, and when it is occurring. Verbs change form to indicate when an action takes place. Your writing should remain in one tense, switching only when necessary to the meaning. To fix tenses, read your draft looking only for tense agreement.

## 7. Plural & Possessive

- An "s" is put at the end of a word for two reasons: to make it plural or to show possession.

- When you add an “s” to make a plural, don’t use an apostrophe:  
Plurals: *books, students*                      Possessives: *the book’s pages; the student’s desk*  
Possessives for plural nouns: *the books’ pages; all of the students’ desks*
- When you add an “s” to make a plural, don’t use an apostrophe.  
Possessive pronouns don’t use apostrophes: *yours, hers, its, ours, theirs.*

## 8. Capitalization

- Remember to capitalize proper names, the personal pronoun “I”, names of cities, states, countries, and important words in titles such as I Never Promised You a Rose Garden.
- Titles that should be underlined (or italicized) include: books, long poems, plays, magazines, movies, published speeches, TV programs, ships, works of art, long musical works, CDs.
- Titles that should be in “quotation marks” are short stories, songs, short poems, articles in magazines or newspapers, essays, episodes of a TV program, chapter titles in books.

## 9. Word Usage = A word used incorrectly. Sentence Usage = a sentence constructed awkwardly.

- Frequently confused words:

<i>It’s = it is</i>	<i>Its = possessive of it</i>	<i>To = toward, as far as</i>
<i>Too = also, extremely</i>	<i>Two = 2</i>	<i>Your = possessive of you</i>
<i>You’re = you + are</i>	<i>Their = possessive of they</i>	<i>They’re = they + are</i>
<i>There = in that place</i>		

## Improper Contractions

- Never use *could of, should of, would of*. What you mean is *could have, should have, would have*; correct contractions are *could’ve, would’ve, should’ve*.
- Try not to use contractions at all in formal writing.

## Negatives

- You should only have one negative word per sentence. Example: *I can’t do that.*
- Negatives: *not, don’t, can’t, won’t, shouldn’t, couldn’t, wouldn’t, didn’t, neither/nor, no, nothing.*

## Parallel Structure

- All items in a series need to follow the same structure:
  - Incorrect: *He stopped, listened a moment, then he locked the door.*
  - Correct: *He stopped, listened a moment, then locked the door.*
  - Incorrect: *They were singing, dancing, and looked at each other.*
  - Correct: *They were singing, dancing, and looking at each other.*

## 10. Punctuation

- A question ends with a question mark [?].
- A semi-colon [;] is not a comma. It joins two clauses of a compound sentence:  
*We were bored with the programs on TV; we decided to go to the library.*
- A colon [:] introduces a list of items:  
*Our school has teams for most sports: track, basketball, football, soccer, swimming and tennis.*
- A hyphen [-] shows that part of a word is carried onto the next line. Break the word between syllables; you can't divide a one-syllable word.
- Quotation marks are used properly as follows:  
*Craig said, "Something is wrong with my hard drive."*  
*"I want to go to the Epicentre," she explained. "My favorite team is the Quakes."*

## 11. Troublesome Verb Conjugation

- There are several troublesome verbs that aren't ordinary, the ones we call irregular verbs because they don't take their different forms in standard ways. Most writers occasionally have trouble remembering the basic forms of some of the following irregular verbs:

Verb (Present Tense)	Past Tense	Past Participle
Begin	Began	Have Begun
Bring*	Brought	Have Brought
Choose	Chose	Have Chosen
Come*	Came	Have Come
Do*	Did	Have Done
Drink	Drank	Have Drunk
Drive	Drove	Have Driven
Eat	Ate	Have Eaten
Fall	Fell	Have Fallen
Fly	Flew	Have Flown
Forget	Forgot	Have Forgotten
Give	Gave	Have Given
Know	Knew	Have Known

Verb (Present Tense)	Past Tense	Past Participle
Lie	Lay	Have Lain
Ride	Rode	Have Ridden
Ring	Rang	Have Rung
Rise	Rose	Have Risen
Run*	Ran	Have Run
Seek	Sought	Have Sought
See	Saw	Have Seen
Sink	Sank	Have Sunk
Speak	Spoke	Have Spoken
Swim	Swam	Have Swum
Take	Took	Have Taken
Throw	Threw	Have Thrown
Write	Wrote	Have Written

\*Especially troublesome verbs