

WRITING

Tips & Tricks



Introduction

Whether you are writing a report for school, need tips for writing essays for standardized tests, or want to improve reports and correspondence in your career, this guide will help you write clearly and effectively. This guide focuses on the writing process, with step-by-step instructions for effective writing, and highlights important English grammar, usage, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation rules. Checklists are included to ensure you are doing everything possible to make your writing the best it can be!

To Improve Your Writing...

- Write more; your writing will improve with practice.
- Take time to plan before you begin to write your essay; planning will make writing the essay much easier.

- Use a graphic organizer or outline to plan essays.
- Don't worry about mistakes when writing your first draft; edit later.
- Read your rough draft out loud to yourself and listen for mistakes.
- Do not rely entirely on spell-check.
- Avoid wordiness; remove excess words as long as removing them doesn't change the meaning of the original sentence or paragraph.
- Avoid being too repetitive; vary your word choice.
- Vary sentence length and form.
- Avoid passive voice.
- Practice proper grammar, usage, and punctuation in emails, text messages, and other correspondence.

The Writing Process

- When you look at a book or magazine article, you don't notice the writing process. Believe it or not, the author may have rewritten the book or article *many* times.
- Professional writers use the writing process. Follow the professionals' lead, and use the writing process to improve your writing.
- While the writing process may vary slightly depending on the type of writing, it is recommended that all writers use this process to create a clear, well-organized, detailed piece of writing.
- For some writing assignments, you may have days, weeks, or even months to complete them; other writing assignments, such as test-based writing, require you to write within specific time constraints.

The 5 Stages of the Writing Process

Prewriting & Planning

Drafting

Revising

Editing

Publishing

- Your thesis statement should appear somewhere in the introduction of your essay.
 - o The thesis statement can be placed in the beginning, middle, or end of the introductory paragraph, but it is essential that it appears in the very first paragraph of your essay to give the reader a clear direction.
- If you are given a writing prompt or question to address, create the thesis statement by clearly addressing the prompt or answering the question.
- Pay attention to the type of essay you are assigned; the requirements for various types of writing may be different.
 - For example, in a persuasive essay, the writer is trying to convince the reader to accept his/her opinion about a topic.

Sample Writing Prompt

If you could travel to any city in the United States, where would you like to visit and why?

Sample Thesis Statements

- If I could travel to any city in the United States, I would like to visit New York City.
- Some people dream of visiting Chicago, others would love to visit Los Angeles, but for me, no city would be better to visit than New York City.

Sample Writing Prompt

Today more and more classes are being offered online. Is online education beneficial?

Sample Thesis Statement

While online courses are certainly convenient, the drawbacks of online education far outweigh the benefits.

Planning

- Create a writing plan to help generate ideas and organize your thoughts.
- Short phrases are best for the writing plan.
- There are many different types of writing plan templates; choose one that works best for you.
- By using a writing plan, your essay will be focused on your topic, well-organized, and detailed.
- Two common types of writing plans are graphic organizers and outlines.

Graphic Organizer

- A graphic organizer uses shapes (graphics) to sort information.
- Each shape has a specific purpose to encourage the writer to create an organized, detailed plan (see p. 2 for a sample graphic organizer).
- To create a graphic organizer:
 1. Read the prompt, decide on a topic sentence, and write it in the large center circle.
 - A. This gives your essay a clear focus.
 - B. The topic sentence should appear in the introductory paragraph once you write the actual essay.
 2. Decide on two or more main ideas to support your topic, and add each main idea to the medium-sized circles that branch out from the large center circle.
 - A. Each main idea will serve as a new body paragraph.
 - B. Remember, each main idea *must* relate to the topic.
 - C. Ask yourself what you want the reader to know about the topic; each main idea will serve as a focus for each body paragraph.
 - D. To avoid redundancy in your writing, make sure the main ideas do not overlap.
 3. Think of at least three details or examples about each main idea, and add the supporting details and examples to small circles that stem from each of the medium circles.
 - A. Make sure each detail specifically relates to the main idea for that given paragraph.
 - B. Make sure your details are specific (see *Idea Development*, p. 4, for information about how to make your sentences detailed and vivid).
 - C. Each detail listed on the graphic organizer will serve as at least one sentence in the body of your essay. In most cases, you should add two or more sentences to your essay for each detail listed on your organizer.

Timed Writing

- In **timed writing** (a.k.a. **writing on demand**), you are writing with time constraints; in other words, a timer is ticking away!
- In most instances, your first draft is also your final draft; therefore, you will *not* have time to write a final copy after your rough draft.
- It is essential to take a few minutes to brainstorm and plan your essay. Having a clear idea about what you are going to write will make writing the essay much easier.
- While content is most important in a timed essay, you still need to be conscious of spelling, punctuation, grammar, and usage to avoid having too many errors.
- You should take a minute or two to reread your writing, look for any mistakes, and fix them.

NOTE: The readers who will be evaluating and scoring your essay *do* take into consideration that the writing was timed.

Prewriting

Brainstorm:

- Take some time to think about the topic before you begin writing.
- Consider the given writing prompt to make sure you are responding to the question.
- Use this time to create a clear focus for your essay.
- Write down your thoughts using short words and phrases so that you can use these ideas to help you create a writing plan.
- Create your **thesis statement** (a.k.a. **topic sentence**):
 - A thesis statement is one or two sentences that sum up your entire essay; it provides a road map for the rest of your essay.

Timed Writing, or "Writing on Demand"



1. Prewriting & Planning

2. Drafting, Revising & Editing

- As there is not enough time to rewrite your essay, revise and edit directly on your first draft.

3. Publish

- Submit for scoring.

Writing with No Time Limit



1. Prewriting & Planning

2. Drafting

3. Revising

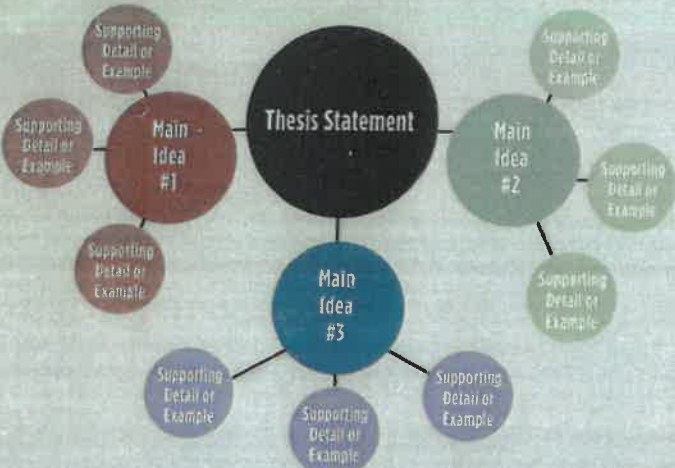
4. Editing

- After revising and editing, rewrite or retype your essay to make sure it's ready for publishing.

5. Publish

- Submit for a grade or feedback.

Sample Graphic Organizer



Outline

- An **outline** uses roman numerals, letters, and numbers to sort information.
- Each roman numeral, letter, and number serves a specific purpose to encourage the writer to create an organized, detailed plan.
- To create an outline:

1. Read the prompt, decide on a topic sentence, and write it next to roman numeral I.

A. This gives your essay a clear focus.

B. The topic sentence should appear in the introductory paragraph once you write the essay.

2. Decide on two or more main ideas to support your topic, and add each main idea next to the other roman numerals listed in the outline (II, III, IV, V, etc.).

A. Each main idea will serve as a new body paragraph.

B. Remember, each main idea *must* relate to the topic.

C. Ask yourself what you want the reader to know about the topic; each main idea will serve as a focus for each body paragraph.

D. To avoid redundancy in your writing, make sure the main ideas do not overlap.

3. Think of at least three details or examples for each main idea, and add the supporting details and examples next to the capital letters listed under each roman numeral.

A. Make sure each detail specifically relates to the main idea for that given paragraph.

B. Make sure your details are specific (see **Idea Development**, p. 4, for information about how to make your sentences detailed and vivid).

C. Each detail listed in the outline will serve as at least one sentence in the body of your essay. In most cases, you should add two or more sentences to your essay for each detail listed in your outline.

Sample Outline Format

I. Thesis statement

II. First main idea

A. Detail

B. Detail

C. Detail

III. Second main idea

A. Detail

B. Detail

C. Detail

IV. Third main idea

A. Detail

B. Detail

C. Detail

NOTE: This is a basic outline. Depending on the amount of content and the required length of your essay, your outline may be much longer and may require more detail and levels.

Before You Start Your Draft

Consider the following tips when going from the planning phase to the drafting phase:

- Use your prewriting and writing plan to guide you when you write your essay.
- Don't stop once you start writing, and don't worry about misspelling words or repeating yourself. You'll have a chance to fix mistakes later when you revise and edit. For now, just let the ideas flow.

- Consider using the **hamburger method** (p. 3) to construct your essay.

Drafting

- Use your writing plan as a blueprint. The ideas on your plan should be included in your essay and easily organized into paragraphs. Once you have a plan, be sure to follow it!

- A **first draft** (a.k.a. **rough draft**) is generally messy, repetitive, and full of mistakes. That is perfectly fine (unless you are writing with a time limit, in which case your first draft is your final draft).

- The purpose of a rough draft is to capture ideas and supporting details, not to compose a perfect essay on the first attempt.

- Remember to begin with a clear introductory paragraph.

- Create a new paragraph for each new idea.

- Indent each new paragraph.

- In your final paragraph, conclude with a thought-provoking summary of the ideas you presented in your essay.

Revising

- In the revising phase of the writing process, you should examine your content more closely.

- You will add, delete, and move content to make sure your writing is clear, detailed, and easy for the reader to follow.

- Add details for support in paragraphs that seem too vague or unclear.

- Delete information that is redundant or unnecessary. Sometimes less is more. Shorten sentences and paragraphs that are too wordy.

- Move things around. Sometimes shifting sentence order within a paragraph makes the paragraph clearer. Shifting paragraph order may help the essay flow better, too.

Editing

- During the editing phase, you will correct mistakes in grammar, usage, word choice, spelling, sentence structure, capitalization, and punctuation.

- See **The Most Common Writing Errors** for more information, as well as the following sections on specific issues and how to fix them.

Publishing

- While the word *publishing* may make you think about professional writing, it applies to all types of writing and to all writers.

- By the time you reach this phase of the writing process, you should have already revised and edited your writing.

- When you publish an essay for school (or a report for work), you are simply writing or typing a final draft and submitting it to your instructor (or employer) for feedback or a grade.

An instructor will consider the following questions when scoring student writing:

- Is the essay on topic?
- Does the writer organize his/her thoughts?
- Does the writer include an introduction that clearly presents the topic?
- Does the writer provide plenty of specific details to support the topic?
- Does the writer include a conclusion that summarizes the essay?
- Does the writer demonstrate an understanding of grammar and usage?
- Are there any mechanical errors (e.g., errors in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization)?

The Most Common Writing Errors

- Subject-verb agreement errors
- Misplaced or dangling modifiers
- Incorrect word choice
- Missing comma after an introductory phrase
- Spelling errors
- Punctuation or capitalization errors within a quotation
- Unnecessary commas
- Unnecessary or incorrect capitalization
- Missing words
- Wrong verb tenses
- Incorrect use of apostrophes
- Run-on sentences or sentence fragments

Sentence Structure

Did you ever receive feedback on an essay from an English teacher and notice that your once polished, neat-looking writing is now decorated with red circles, strike-throughs, and other error-related comments? Many wonder why proper sentence structure and grammar are so important in writing. Consider the following comparisons between writing and talking:

- Both writing and talking are forms of communication.
- Talking is usually done with live dialogue (person to person) so that you can ask questions and get clarification if you don't understand something.
- When you write, you are communicating ideas with words on paper (or on screen). In most cases, you are not present when the reader reads your writing, so you are not able to clarify it; therefore, writing must be clear and correct for it to be effective.

Sentences & Paragraphs

- Effective writing includes plenty of information about a specific topic to clearly communicate the main idea to the reader. This information is presented in complete sentences, which are sorted into paragraphs to make the writing clear and organized (see **Effective Paragraphs**, p. 3).

- A sentence expresses a complete thought and includes a subject (noun) and a predicate (verb).

- A complete sentence is known as an **independent clause**.

EX: The dog barked.

Subject: dog

Predicate: barked

EX: The man whistled.

Subject: man

Predicate: whistled

TIP

The entire essay should align with the hamburger method to help ensure a well-organized, detailed essay (see **The Hamburger Method**, p. 3). In addition, each paragraph within your essay should follow a mini burger format.

Sentence Checklist

Check all sentences to make sure they are complete. Does each sentence:

- Have a subject?
- Have a predicate?
- Express a complete thought?

Sentence Fragments

- A **sentence fragment** is an incomplete sentence; it does not express a complete thought.
- A **dependent**, or **subordinate**, clause not attached to an independent clause is a fragment.
- In a fragment, the subject or predicate or both will be missing.
- A fragment leaves the reader wondering, "who," "what," "what happened," or "what about it."

Fragment: Broke the expensive crystal glass.

Subject: Who broke the glass? The subject is missing.

Predicate: broke

Complete sentence: The child broke the expensive crystal glass.

Subject: child

Predicate: broke

Fragment: Without hesitation, Mr. and Mrs. Smith.

Subject: Mr. and Mrs. Smith (compound subject)

Predicate: What about them? The predicate is missing.

Complete sentence: Without hesitation, Mr. and Mrs. Smith cheered with delight when their daughter announced her engagement.

Subject: Mr. and Mrs. Smith (compound subject)

Predicate: cheered

Fragment: At Disney World for the annual field trip.

Subject: Who is at Disney World? The subject is missing. (NOTE: *Disney World* is an object, not the subject.)

Predicate: What is being done at Disney World? The predicate is missing.

Complete sentence: Our class will meet at Disney World for the annual field trip.

Subject: Our class (noun phrase)

Predicate: will meet

Subordinate Clauses

- As mentioned previously, all sentences require a subject and a predicate and must express a complete thought.
- A subordinate clause contains a subject and a verb but is only part of a sentence and does not express a complete thought.
- A subordinate clause is introduced by a **subordinating conjunction**, which is a connecting word or words that create a relationship between the clauses.

after	in order to	unless	When you use any of the words or phrases from this table in your writing, check to make sure you expressed a complete thought.
although	now that	until	
as	once	when	
as long as	rather than	whenever	
as though	since	where	
because	so that	whereas	
before	than	whether	
even though	that	whether	
if	though	while	

Subordinate clause: After we went shopping. (Although there is both a noun and a verb in this example, it does not express a complete thought. The reader will wonder what happened after shopping.)

Complete sentence: After we went shopping, we went to dinner at Chili's.

Subordinate clause: Because it rained. (The reader will wonder what happened because it rained.)

Complete sentence: The picnic was cancelled because it rained.

TIP

At the beginning of the sentence, the subordinate clause will be separated from the rest of the sentence with a comma. At the end of a sentence, the subordinate clause does not use a comma. For example,

- Because it snowed, schools were closed.
- Schools were closed because it snowed.

Run-On Sentences

- A **run-on sentence** is two or more sentences written as one.
- A sentence can include more than one thought as long as the sentence is punctuated correctly; a run-on sentence occurs when ideas are joined together incorrectly.

- To fix a run-on sentence, use one of the three methods:

1. Create two separate sentences.
2. Use a semicolon to divide the thoughts.
3. Separate the thoughts with both a comma and a coordinating conjunction. The seven coordinating conjunctions are *and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, *for*, *so*, and *yet*.

Run-on: They are perfect for each other they spend every waking moment together.

Correct: They are perfect for each other. They spend every waking moment together.

Run-on: It's such a beautiful day I'd love to have a picnic outside.

Correct: It's such a beautiful day; I'd love to have a picnic outside.

Run-on: She loves visiting new places her fear of flying keeps her from traveling too far.

Correct: She loves visiting new places, but her fear of flying keeps her from traveling too far.

Run-on: We can meet at the mall for lunch if you prefer, we can go to Panera.

Correct: We can meet at the mall for lunch, or if you prefer, we can go to Panera.

Comma Splices

- Sometimes run-on sentences occur because of incorrect punctuation, known as a **comma splice**.
- A comma splice occurs when independent clauses are joined with a comma only; the coordinating conjunction is missing.
- Simply add a coordinating conjunction to fix this type of run-on.

Comma splice: Tomorrow is a busy day, I better get to bed early tonight.

Correct: Tomorrow is a busy day, so I better get to bed early tonight.

Parallel Structure

- To visualize parallel structure, think about parallel lines; parallel lines point in the same direction. When we talk about parallel structure in writing, think "same."
- To ensure parallel structure in your writing, match items in a series, match parts of speech (e.g., nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs), and match similar forms.

Incorrect: Fred is energetic, enthusiastic, and could not wait for his big job interview. The items listed in this series do not match.

Energetic and *enthusiastic* are adjectives, but *could not wait* is a verb phrase.

Correct: Fred is energetic, enthusiastic, and eager for his big job interview.

We have a match: all three items in the series are adjectives.

Incorrect: Ancient Neanderthals hunted, searched, and were gathering food. The items listed in this series do not match.

Were gathering has a different tense from the verbs *hunted* and *searched*.

Correct: Ancient Neanderthals hunted, searched, and gathered food.

We have a match: all three items in the series are past-tense verbs.

Organization

Effective Paragraphs

- A paragraph consists of a group of related sentences that develop a single main idea.
- A well-developed essay will include several paragraphs to make it complete.
- The length of each paragraph and the number of details needed will vary depending on the type of paragraph you are writing:
 - **Introductory paragraphs** are usually shorter than body paragraphs because they are simply introducing your topic.
 - **Body paragraphs** will be longer and more detailed because they add specific support for your topic.
 - **Concluding paragraphs** are usually shorter, like introductions, because they simply summarize information and do not add any new details about your topic.

The Hamburger Method

- When you take all of the required components of an effective essay, put them together in a clear order, and present them neatly, it is very similar to making a hamburger.

- Use this visual aid to remind you of what your essay should look like.

- To make a hamburger, you need to include all of the important parts or you'll end up with a mess. Just like a hamburger, a good essay needs all of its parts to be complete.

Paragraph Checklist

Check to make sure each paragraph is complete. Does each paragraph:

- Begin with a topic sentence?
- Have supporting details?
- End with a closing sentence or transition sentence?

Top bun
(Introduction)

Burger & toppings
(Body)

Bottom bun
(Conclusion)



Introduction:

- Introduce the reader to the essay topic.
- Use a catchy hook to get the reader interested in your topic.
- Briefly mention what you will discuss in the essay.
- Be sure to clearly state the topic sentence in the introduction.

Body:

- Add details and support for your topic in the body.
- Create a new paragraph for each new example or idea.
- Be sure each paragraph contains all the components of an effective paragraph: a topic sentence, plenty of details, and a closing or transition sentence.

Conclusion:

- Sum up your essay in the conclusion.
- Rephrase what you mentioned earlier.
- Don't restate the introduction word for word.
- Don't add new information.

Remember, the hamburger method applies not only to the essay as a whole but also to each paragraph within the essay.

Organization Checklist

- Is there a clearly stated purpose or objective in the introduction?
- Are there effective transitions throughout the essay, not only between new paragraphs, but also between new examples within paragraphs?
- Are the introduction and conclusion focused on the topic of the essay?
- When you reread your work, can you easily follow the flow of ideas?
- Is each paragraph focused on a single idea?
- When reviewing the essay, are there any points at which a reader may get lost or confused?
- Do any of the ideas or paragraphs seem out of order—either too early or too late to be as effective as they could be?

Transitions

- Using transitional words and phrases helps essays read more smoothly. Transitions allow the reader to easily follow your ideas or arguments from one point to the next.
- Examples of transitions include coordinating conjunctions, subordinating conjunctions, and conjunctive adverbs.
- Transitions enhance logical organization and understandability:
 - Transitions help paragraphs connect to each other and to the thesis or topic sentence.
 - Transitions indicate relationships, whether the relationships appear within a sentence, within a paragraph, or throughout the entire essay.

No transition: Gas prices continue to soar. I paid \$3.50 per gallon last month, and this month I am averaging over \$4.00 per gallon.

Transition: Gas prices continue to soar. For example, I paid \$3.50 per gallon last month, and this month I am averaging over \$4.00 per gallon. (By simply adding the transitional phrase *for example*, the writing flows from sentence to sentence more smoothly and the relationship between the first and second sentence is emphasized.)

Transitional Words & Phrases

again	at the same time
also	simultaneously
as well as	and
besides	initially
consequently	for now
in addition	finally
in conclusion	next
likewise	the next step
moreover	to begin with
for example	in time
second	then

Idea Development

- When writing, you should aim to paint a picture in the reader's mind.
- Use vivid words to help the reader visualize examples, and use details to develop your paragraphs.

Basic sentence: I went for a walk.

Detailed sentence: Yesterday, as the sun set on Dania Beach, I walked along the water's edge and combed the sand for shells.

This sentence lets the reader know:

- When this person went for a walk.
- Where he/she walked.
- What he/she was doing while walking.

Basic sentence: She entered the room.

Detailed sentence: I felt a cold chill sweep across me as the terrifying judge entered the old, musty courtroom.

This sentence lets the reader know:

- Who entered the room.
- Which room the judge entered.
- How the subject felt when the judge entered the courtroom.
- What the courtroom looked like.

- Paragraphs should contain more than three sentences; paragraphs that are shorter than this are usually not fully developed.

- As explained in the **Organization** section (pp. 3–4), there are different types of paragraphs; the length of your introductory and concluding paragraphs will usually be shorter than the body paragraphs.

- The body paragraphs are where you should develop your ideas.
- To thoroughly develop your ideas, consider trying some of the following strategies (it is not necessary to use all the items in the list; these are simply suggestions):
 - Analyze and describe the paragraph's main idea, focusing on its specific supporting details.
 - Use specific examples and illustrations.
 - Cite data, such as facts, statistics, and evidence, in research-based writing.
 - Use quotes or paraphrases from other sources for support.
 - Use an anecdote or story for a vivid description.
 - Compare and contrast ideas or opinions.
 - Demonstrate cause-and-effect relationships.
 - Use chronological order to present your ideas.

Usage & Grammar

Subject-Verb Agreement

- Verbs can be tricky because they have so many properties: person, number, tense, voice, and mood.
- Basic sentence structure depends on subject-verb agreement. The correct verb form to use is based on **number, person, and tense**.

Subject-Verb Agreement Checklist

- Ask yourself who or what the sentence is about—that's the subject.
- Decide whether the subject is singular or plural.
- Check for agreement between the subject and the verb (e.g., if you have a singular subject, you need a singular verb).

Number

- The verb of a sentence *must* match the subject in number; therefore, the subject and the verb in a sentence must both be either singular (one) or plural (more than one).
- With a singular subject, use a singular verb.
Incorrect: My mother *plan* a birthday party for me every year.
Correct: My mother *plans* a birthday party for me every year.
The singular subject, *my mother*, needs a singular verb, *plans*.

- With a plural subject, use a plural verb.
Incorrect: The teachers *helps* with the fundraiser.
Correct: The teachers *help* with the fundraiser.
The plural subject, *teachers*, needs a plural verb, *help*.

- With compound subjects joined by *and*, use a plural verb.
Incorrect: Jack and Jill *knows* some fun activities.
Correct: Jack and Jill *know* some fun activities.
The subject, *Jack and Jill*, refers to two people. The plural verb *know* agrees with the compound subject.

- When a compound subject is joined by *or* or *nor*, choose a verb that agrees with its nearest subject.
Incorrect: Either my brother or my parents *is* taking us to the airport.
Correct: Either my brother or my parents *are* taking us to the airport.
Brother is a singular subject, but *parents* is a plural subject and is closest to the verb.

- Make the verb agree with the subject, not simply the noun closest to the verb.
Incorrect: Directions to the event *is* easy.
Correct: Directions to the event *are* easy.
The subject, *directions*, is plural, so you need a plural verb, *are*.

- If the subject is a **collective noun** (a noun that names a group of people or things, such as *committee*, *staff*, and *group*), make the verb singular if the group is acting as a unit.
Incorrect: The staff *are* meeting tomorrow morning.
Correct: The staff *is* meeting tomorrow morning.
The members of the staff are meeting together as a group, so the verb should be singular.

Person

- The subject and verb of a sentence must agree in person.
 - A **first-person** subject must have a first-person verb form. First person means the subject of the verb is *I* or *we*.
 - A **second-person** subject must have a second-person verb form. Second person means the subject of the verb is *you*.
 - A **third-person** subject must have a third-person verb form. Third person means the subject is *he*, *she*, *it*, or *they*.

Number & Person Subject-Verb Agreement

Number	Person	Present	Past	Future
Singular	First (I)	am	was	will be
	Second (you)	are	were	will be
	Third (he, she, it)	is	was	will be
Plural	First (we)	are	were	will be
	Second (you)	are	were	will be
	Third (they)	are	were	will be

Tense

- Verb tenses express information about the time an action occurred.
- Knowing various words that represent time will help you choose the correct tense of the verb. Time words include *tomorrow*, *yesterday*, *today*, *now*, *later*, *currently*, *presently*, *upcoming*, and *past*.
- Use these time words to help you determine when the action occurred so that you can use the correct verb tense:
 - Present tense** expresses an action or condition that takes place now, all the time, or habitually (e.g., *I work late often. She also works late often.*). It is also used to indicate a general truth (e.g., *The Statue of Liberty weighs 225 tons.*).
 - Past tense** expresses an action or condition that took place previously (e.g., *I worked late last night. She also worked late last night.*).
 - Future tense** expresses an action or condition that will take place (e.g., *I will work late next Monday. She will work late next Monday, too.*).

Regular Verbs

- Regular verbs follow a consistent pattern in their tenses. The past tense and the past participle are formed by adding the ending *-d* or *-ed* to the base form.
- To conjugate regular verbs, identify the base form of the verb from the infinitive (e.g., the base form *jump* comes from the infinitive *to jump*), and then follow this pattern (done for singular subjects from all three points of view):
 - First person**
 - The first-person, singular, present tense: *I jump.*
 - The first-person, singular, past tense: *I jumped.*
 - The past participle, which uses a helping verb: *I have jumped.*
 - Second person**
 - The second-person, singular, present tense: *You jump.*
 - The second-person, singular, past tense: *You jumped.*
 - The past participle, which uses a helping verb: *You have jumped.*
 - Third person**
 - The third-person, singular, present tense: *He jumps.*
 - The third-person, singular, past tense: *He jumped.*
 - The past participle, which uses a helping verb: *He has jumped.*

Verb Forms of Regular Verbs

Base Form	Third-Person, Singular, Present Tense	Past Tense	Past Participle
achieve	achieves	achieved	achieved
dance	dances	danced	danced
log	logs	logged	logged
skip	skips	skipped	skipped
zip	zips	zipped	zipped

Irregular Verbs

- Unlike regular verbs, the past tense and past participle forms of irregular verbs are not created by adding *-d* or *-ed* to the base form; therefore, irregular verbs are *not* consistent.
- In the following examples, notice how the verb changes depending on the tense and the person for the verb *grow* (from the infinitive *to grow*):
 - First person**
 - The first-person, singular, present tense: *I grow.*
 - The first-person, singular, past tense: *I grew.*
 - The past participle, which uses a helping verb: *I have grown.*
 - Second person**
 - The second-person, singular, present tense: *You grow.*
 - The second-person, singular, past tense: *You grew.*
 - The past participle, which uses a helping verb: *You have grown.*
 - Third person**
 - The third-person, singular, present tense: *He grows.*
 - The third-person, singular, past tense: *He grew.*
 - The past participle, which uses a helping verb: *He has grown.*
- Note that the verb *to be* is also irregular and has the following forms: *be* (base form); *am*, *is*, *are* (present tense); *was*, *were* (past tense); *being*, *been* (present and past participles, respectively).

Active & Passive Voice

- Passive voice** occurs when the subject of the sentence is the receiver of the action; in contrast, **active voice** occurs when the subject of the sentence performs the action.
- Overuse of passive voice in writing can make writing awkward and less powerful.
- By rearranging the structure of your sentences, you can easily eliminate passive voice in your writing.
- Passive voice usually requires more words, since an **auxiliary verb** (a.k.a. **helping verb**) must be used with the main verb.
- Passive voice:** The race was won by the girl.
- Active voice:** The girl won the race.
- Passive voice:** The assignment was completed by the student.
- Active voice:** The student completed the assignment.

Verb Forms of Irregular Verbs

Base Form	Third-Person, Singular, Present Tense	Past Tense	Past Participle
arise	arises	arose	arisen
begin	begins	began	begun
bite	bites	bit	bitten
bring	brings	brought	brought
buy	buys	bought	bought
choose	chooses	chose	chosen
creep	creeps	crept	crept
drive	drives	drove	driven
do	does	did	done
draw	draws	drew	drawn
drink	drinks	drank	drank
fall	falls	fell	fallen
fight	fights	fought	fought
forget	forgets	forgot	forgotten
forgive	forgives	forgave	forgiven
get	gets	got	got/gotten
give	gives	gave	given
go	goes	went	gone
hide	hides	hid	hidden
know	knows	knew	known
lay	lays	laid	laid
lead	leads	led	led
lie	lies	lay	lain
lose	loses	lost	lost
run	runs	ran	run
see	sees	saw	seen
seek	seeks	sought	sought
sit	sits	sat	sat
speak	speaks	spoke	spoken
strike	strikes	struck	struck
sweat	sweats	swore	sworn
swing	swings	swung	swung
take	takes	took	taken
wear	wears	wore	worn
write	writes	wrote	written

Pronouns

- Pronouns take the place of nouns.
- I*, *you*, *he*, *she*, *it*, *we*, and *they* are **subjective pronouns**—that is, they appear in the subject of a sentence.
- EX:** I wrote a romance novel.
- The pronouns *me*, *him*, *her*, *you*, *us*, *them*, and *it* are **objective pronouns**.
- EX:** Mary gave the book to me.
- The word that a pronoun replaces is called the **antecedent**. Problems occur when the pronoun does not agree with its antecedent.

Incorrect: Each student was asked to submit their project by the August 1 deadline.

Correct: Each student was asked to submit his or her project by the August 1 deadline.

- Confusion occurs when more than one word could be the antecedent.

Incorrect: Brandy sent Jane a letter questioning her decision.

Correct: Brandy sent Jane a letter questioning Jane's decision.

Modifiers

- Modifiers enhance or alter other words in a sentence.
- Every sentence needs a subject and a predicate, but too often, writers use vague, bland descriptions in their writing.
- Modifiers help paint a picture in your reader's mind and make the reader want to continue reading.
- Use vivid modifiers to help the reader visualize the examples in your writing.

Adjectives

- An **adjective** is a word that modifies a noun or a pronoun.
- An adjective answers the questions:
 - What kind?
 - How much?
 - Which one?

EX: The model's luxurious, blonde hair looked stunning.
Luxurious and *blonde* describe the noun *hair*.

Adverbs

- An **adverb** is a word that modifies a verb, an adjective, or another adverb.
- An adverb answers the questions:
 - How?
 - When?
 - Where?

EX: Sam ran quickly to try and catch the bus.

Quickly modifies the verb *ran*.

Misplaced & Dangling Modifiers

- A **dangling modifier** occurs when a modifier does not logically refer to other words in the sentence.

Incorrect: Visiting the zoo, the birds chirped loudly.

Correct: While I was visiting the zoo, the birds chirped loudly.

- A **misplaced modifier** occurs when a modifier is placed incorrectly in a sentence.

- To fix a dangling or a misplaced modifier, make sure the doer of the action is named, the modifier is placed near the word(s) it modifies, and the modifier refers to something else in the sentence.

Incorrect: The patient was referred to a therapist with severe psychological problems.

What the writer thinks it says: The patient has psychological problems.

What the sentence really says: The therapist has psychological problems.

Correct: The patient with severe psychological problems was referred to a therapist.

Mechanics

Capitalization

- Capitalize the first letter of a sentence.
- Capitalize proper names (e.g., Empire State Building).
- Capitalize the first word of a quoted sentence (e.g., She said, "Be kind to others, and they will be kind to you.")
- Capitalize the days of the week and the months of the year; do not capitalize seasons.
- Do not capitalize the directional words *north*, *south*, *east*, and *west* unless the directional term refers to a specific region (e.g., the Deep South).
- Always capitalize the pronoun *I*.
- Capitalize the first word of a salutation and the closing of a letter (e.g., Dear Mr. Smith; Sincerely).
- Capitalize a person's title when it precedes the name (e.g., Principal Jones), but do not capitalize it when it is acting as a description following the name (e.g., Mrs. Jones, the school principal).
- Capitalize the first and last words in titles of publications (e.g., *Of Mice and Men*).
- Capitalize verbs within titles, including the short verb forms *is*, *are*, and *be*.
- Do not capitalize small words commonly found in titles, including articles, conjunctions, and prepositions (e.g., *All Quiet on the Western Front*).

Punctuation End Marks

- **Period:** Use a period at the end of all declarative sentences and most imperative sentences.
 - Declarative sentences tell you something or simply make a statement.
 - Imperative sentences give commands.
- **Question mark:** Use a question mark at the end of all interrogative sentences (i.e., a sentence that asks a question).
- **Exclamation point:** Use an exclamation point at the end of an exclamatory sentence. Be careful that you do not use this mark too often.
- See **Quotation Marks** for placement of end marks with quotations.

Comma

- Use a comma between items in a series.

EX: She loves strawberries, grapes, and oranges.
- Use commas between two or more adjectives when they are used to describe a noun.

EX: He is a smart, handsome man.
- Use a comma when an *-ly* adjective is used with other adjectives. To check whether an *-ly* word is an adjective, test to see if it can be used alone with the noun, if it can, use the comma.

EX: Sarah is a lovely, young girl.

EX: People stared at her oddly matched outfit.

Oddly is not an adjective because it cannot be used alone with *outfit*; therefore, no comma is used between *oddly* and *matched*.
- Use a comma to separate an introductory word or phrase from the rest of the sentence.

EX: At eight o'clock in the evening, the fireworks began.
- Use commas to separate a nonessential appositive from

the rest of the sentence. Do not use commas for essential appositives. An appositive is a noun or noun phrase that further explains or describes another noun or pronoun.

Nonessential: Max, my brother, will be joining us for dinner tonight.

Essential: Last night we watched the movie *Gone with the Wind*.

- Use commas to set off one or more words that interrupt a train of thought in a sentence.

EX: That pizza, in my opinion, was the best I've ever tasted.

Semicolon

- Use a semicolon to join two independent clauses.

EX: She needs to be careful; I'm afraid she's going to get hurt.
- Use a semicolon to separate items in a series that already contains commas.

EX: I packed my suitcase with old, cozy jeans; warm, soft sweaters; and new, freshly washed undergarments.
- Use a semicolon with transitional words.

EX: I have a great deal of work to do tomorrow; however, I should have time to meet you for lunch.

Apostrophe

- Use apostrophes to show ownership.
 - Singular ownership uses an apostrophe followed by an *s*.

EX: We are going to Sue's house for dinner tonight.

An apostrophe followed by an *s* is needed to show singular ownership; the house belongs to Sue.

EX: My neighbor's dog will not stop barking.

An apostrophe followed by an *s* is needed to show singular ownership; the dog belongs to my neighbor.

EX: Nancy and Tom's new home is spectacular.

An apostrophe followed by an *s* is needed, since the subject is compound, but the nouns share collective (singular) ownership.

EX: Jill's and John's bikes are new.

An apostrophe followed by an *s* is needed for both of the pronouns, since Jill and John each (singular) own new bikes.
 - Plural ownership uses an apostrophe after the final *s*. In cases where a plural noun does not end in *s*, follow the rules for singular nouns.

EX: The teachers' classrooms will be inspected for safety.

Only an apostrophe is needed, since *teachers* is plural.

EX: The women's soccer team won the state championship.

An apostrophe followed by an *s* shows plural ownership here, since *women* is a plural noun.
- An apostrophe is not needed with the possessive pronouns *mine*, *his*, *hers*, *its*, *ours*, *yours*, *theirs*, and *whose*.

Incorrect: That gorgeous, new car is *their's*.

Correct: That gorgeous, new car is *theirs*.
- Use apostrophes with contractions:
 - *they will* → *they'll*
 - *she is* → *she's*
 - *should not* → *shouldn't*

- *cannot* → *can't*
- *do not* → *don't*
- *could have* → *could've*

Quotation Marks

- Quotation marks surround direct quotations, setting them off from the rest of the sentence.
- Always capitalize the first word of a direct quotation.

EX: She said, "I hate homework. It's just one more thing to worry about when I get home from school."
- Do not capitalize the first word in the second part of an interrupted quotation.

EX: "When," she asked, "will this test be finished?"
- Commas go inside closing quotation marks. Periods go inside closing quotation marks if the quote ends a sentence. Question marks and exclamation marks are placed outside closing quotation marks unless they are part of the quote.

EX: Mark said, "I want to see the movie tonight."

EX: Jason asked, "Do you know the time?"

EX: Did Mary say, "I'm scared of the dark?"
- Indirect quotations are paraphrases or summaries of another person's words. It is not necessary to use quotation marks for indirect quotations.

EX: The meteorologist stated that there is a 90% chance of rain with likely flooding in some areas.

EX: My mom always reminds me to treat others the way I want to be treated.

Spelling

- Be careful; do not rely entirely on spell-check. Spell-check may autocorrect and insert an incorrect word or may mark a word as spelled correctly when in fact another similar word should have been used (e.g., "from" when you meant "form").
- Avoid abbreviations and slang in formal writing. Write out the entire word; examples include:
 - *w/o* → *without*
 - *cuz* → *because*
 - *kinda* → *kind of*
- Some words are often confused. Be careful to use the correct word! These words are similar but have very different meanings:
 - *to, too, two*
 - *their, there, they're*
 - *its, it's*
 - *affect, effect*
 - *your, you're*
 - *accept, except*
- *a* and *an*
 - Use *a* when the first letter of the following word has a consonant sound (e.g., *doughnut*, *eulogy*).
 - Use *an* when the first letter of the following word has a vowel sound (e.g., *honor*, *apple*).
- Add *-s* to most singular nouns to make them plural (e.g., *book* → *books*).
- Add *-es* to singular nouns ending in *s*, *z*, *sh*, and *ch* (e.g., *quiz* → *quizzes*).

Types of Academic & Career-Based Writing

- Types of writing include the following:
 - **Expository:** Informative writing that explains a specific topic or idea
 - **Persuasive:** Argumentative writing that attempts to convince the reader to accept a specific opinion or viewpoint
 - **Research paper:** Writing that requires research and in-text citations for support of a main idea
 - **Literary-based writing:** An analysis and response to a literary work
- Whatever you are writing, even if it is a career or technical piece, you should follow the writing process and use the tips in this guide. Career-based writing includes:
 - Reports
 - Emails
 - Letters
 - Advertising
 - Presentations
 - Proposals

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