

Some tips about English

Pitfalls in Grammar

- Avoid ambiguity.

Partially from Craig & Hopper,
and from Strunk & White

*My mother told the secretary that **she** had made a mistake.*

Vague: *They asked me to join them at 6 o'clock in the morning, but **this** is something I do not like.*

Clear: *They asked me to join them at 6 o'clock, but early rising is something I do not like.*

- The modifier should be close to the word it modifies.

Vague: *The curtain rose on Carmen which is a very popular opera with lively music, a colorful cast of character, and a large chorus. **It** is made of a heavy brocade.*

Clear: *The curtain, which is made of a heavy brocade, rose ...*

The word *after* usually requires a participial phrase in the present perfect form.

Wrong: *After cleaning the mirror, the S/N increased.*

Correct: *After having cleaned the mirror, the S/N increases.*

Prepositional phrases at the beginning of a sentence are usually followed by a comma.

On the other hand, we confirm that NGC 3147 belongs to the class of true type 2 Seyfert galaxies.

- The following nouns ending in *o* add *es* when forming their plural forms.

Singular	Plural
<i>buffalo</i>	<i>Buffaloes</i>
<i>cargo</i>	<i>cargoes</i>
<i>embargo</i>	<i>embargoes</i>
<i>hero</i>	<i>heroes</i>
<i>mosquito</i>	<i>mosquitoes</i>
<i>potato</i>	<i>potatoes</i>
<i>tomato</i>	<i>tomatoes</i>

But piano → pianos; radio → radios

- Compound nouns written as one word add *s* or *es* to make their plurals.

leftover → *leftovers*

- Compound nouns consisting of a noun plus a modifier pluralize the modified word.

brother-in-law → *brothers-in-law*

runner-up → *runners-up*

- Letters, signs, and words as countable items add an apostrophe plus *s*.

one *c* → two *c*'s

one *but* → three *but*'s

in 1980 → in the 1980's (now the 1980s, or the '80s)

- Inanimate objects are not capable of possession.

Wrong: *the telescope's mirror*

Correct: *the mirror of the telescope*

- Note: But ok if objects are personalized, such as ships, or airplanes, or for idiomatic usage of money and time.

the spaceship's gyroscope

a night's observations; a dollar's worth; two months' vacation

- In a series of three or more terms with a single conjunction, use a comma after each term except the last.

planets, stars, and galaxies

We opened the dome, powered up the telescope, and keyed in the commands to start the observing session.

- Enclose parenthetical expressions between commas.
(Read Strunk & White for more.)

The best way to test the theory, unless there is no alternative, is to compare with observations.

Punctuation and Typographic Marks

Period . 句點	Parenthesis () 括號	Hyphen/dash – 連字號	Question mark? 問號
Comma , 逗點	Apostrophe ‘ ’ 撇號	En dash – 連接號	Exclamation point ! 驚嘆號
Colon : 冒號	Ampersand &	Em dash --- 破折號	Quotation mark ‘ ’ 引號
Semicolon ; 分號	Dollar \$	Minus –	Double quote “ ”
Asterisk * 星號	Caret ^	Slash /	Underscore _
Ditto //	Percent %	Backslash \	(Square) bracket [] 中括號
At @	Hash # 井字號	Tilde ~ 連接號	(Curly) brace { } 大括號
		Ellipsis ... 刪節號	Angle bracket < >

- Quote: comma or a colon (if more than a sentence)
 - One space after a period, a colon, or a question mark.
 - Quotation marks outside of end punctuation, except with colons
- Hyphen/dash – Connecting words
 - For the minus sign (a hyphen in math mode), \$-59\$
 - Medium en dash (as wide as an n) A range of numbers 8--12
 - Punctuation em dash --- as wide as an m
 - Parenthetical expression, = , (), : space (Elsevier) or no before and after

American versus British Style

- ❑ Spelling: color/colour; gray/grey; center/centre, etc.
- ❑ Words/Usage: sneakers/trainers; french fries/chips; cookie/biscuit; check/cheque; eggplant/aubergine; apartment/flat; first/ground floor; second/first floor; the Big Dipper/the Plough; elevator/lift; program/programme; -ize/ise, ...
- ❑ Punctuation
 - ✓ Double then single quotes within (A); Single then double (U)
 - ✓ Mr. (A); Mr (U)
 - ✓ 11:10 (A); 11.10 (U); 5/21/2021 (A); 21/5/2021 (U); 2021-05-21 (ISO)

Different Styles

- The Chicago Manual of Style
- The Associated Press Stylebook
- United States Government Publishing Office Style Manual, <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/GPO-STYLEMANUAL-2016>
- MLA

	Chicago	AP
Serial comma	A, B, and C	A, B and C
Initials in name	W. P. Chen	W.P. Chen
Abbreviation	PhD, PO Box, US, UN	Ph.D., P. O. Box, U. S., U. N.
Possessives	James's	James'