

Writer's Handbook

Capitalization, p. 116

Abbreviations, p. 117

Numbers, p. 117

Punctuation, p. 118

Spelling, p. 122

Common Usage Errors, p. 124

CAPITALIZATION

- Capitalize the first word of a sentence and the pronoun *I*.

That boy and I look alike.

- Capitalize the names of people, including their titles if the title appears before the name.

Aunt Sarah

Dr. Dina N. Gold

Queen Elizabeth II

- Do not capitalize the name if it is used as a common noun.

My uncle is a dentist.

- Capitalize the days of the week, months of the year, and holidays.

Does Mother's Day fall on Sunday, May 8?

- Do not capitalize the names of the seasons.

Finally, winter ended and spring began.

- Capitalize geographical names: cities, states, countries, continents, bodies of water, landmarks, and regions.

We traveled to the Northeast and sailed on the Hudson River in New York State.

- Do not capitalize the name if it is used as a direction word.

The state of Florida is south of Georgia.

- Capitalize the names of structures, streets, businesses, and organizations.

The Department of Motor Vehicles is on Dell Avenue, past the Warner Bridge.

- Do not capitalize the name if it is used as a common noun:

There is a busy highway behind our house.

- Capitalize the first, last, and important words of a title of a work, such as a book, story, song, movie, or painting. (Words that do not need to be capitalized include *a, an, and, or, of, to, for, by.*)

“The Most Embarrassing Moment of My Life”

A Proofread Sample

the hottest ~~Day~~ of last ~~Summer~~ was July 10. on that ~~Day~~, my friends and I climbed mount monadnock. It is in the ~~Southwestern~~ part of new hampshire.

- Do not use abbreviations of place names in formal writing.

U.S.A. or U.S. (United States of America)

CA (California)

St. (Street)

- Do not use abbreviations for measurements in formal writing.

km (kilometer) in. (inch)

cm (centimeter) mi (mile)

A Proofread Sample

~~Dr.~~ ^{New York} Doctor Perkins arrived in ~~NY~~ ^{miles} at 9:30 ^{am.} He lives 2,000 ^{mi} away in the ~~UK.~~ ^{United Kingdom}

ABBREVIATIONS

An abbreviation is the short form of a word or phrase.

- Abbreviations of titles are acceptable in any type of writing.

Mr. (Mister)

Dr. (Doctor)

- Abbreviations for time are also acceptable in both formal and informal writing.

a.m. (*ante meridiem*)

p.m. (*post meridiem*)

NUMBERS

- Numbers from zero to nine are usually written as words. Numbers 10 and over are usually written as numerals.

six

60

- Some large numbers are usually written with a combination of words and numerals.

8.3 million

27 million

- Always use words, not numerals, to begin a sentence.

Thirteen students missed Monday's field trip.

- Use numerals to indicate amounts of money, decimals, percentages, chapters and pages, time, telephone numbers, dates, addresses, and statistics.

\$8.25 July 4, 2009

12:43 p.m. 42 percent

A Proofread Sample

My sister is ^{six}~~6~~ years old. She is
⁴⁴~~forty-four~~ inches tall. ^{Fourteen}~~14~~ friends
came to her birthday party.

PUNCTUATION

End Marks

- Use a period to end most sentences (statements, mild commands or requests, and indirect questions).

Help me, please.

I do not know how to begin.

- Use a question mark to end a direct question.

Why have you come?

Where are you going?

- Use an exclamation point only after a strong command, a sentence that expresses excitement, or an exclamation.

Close the door!

I couldn't believe my eyes!

How wonderful! Yikes!

A Proofread Sample

Did somebody ring the doorbell?
I wondered who it could be?
I opened the door! It was my Uncle
Theo! What a shock!

Apostrophes

- Add an apostrophe and -s to show possession by a singular noun (one owner).

Madison's hair is red, like her father's.

- Add just an apostrophe to show possession by a plural noun (more than one owner).

The neighbors' dogs are in the Donovans' yard.

- Add an apostrophe and -s to show possession by a plural noun that does not end with s.

Geese's honks came from the children's room.

- Use an apostrophe to stand for missing letters in contractions.

I'm sure I wouldn't do that if I were you. (I am; would not)

- Do not use an apostrophe to show possession with most pronouns.

That labrador is hers.

Which jars filled with pennies are theirs?

A Proofread Sample

Mitch Saltzman has been invited to three ^{parties} party's. He can attend only one friends' party. He will probably go to Jason's party because it's closest to the Saltzman's home.

Commas

- Use commas to separate three or more items in a series.
- Lunch was an egg, a salad, and an apple juice.**
- Use a comma to separate two or more adjectives before a noun if the adjectives modify, or describe, the same noun.

Taste one of these crisp, sweet apples.

- Use a comma before a conjunction in a compound sentence (complete sentences joined by *and*, *but*, or *or*).

The day turned hot, and we hoped to go swimming.

- Use a comma after an introductory phrase.

Living on the mountain, goats must be sure-footed.

- Use commas to separate an appositive from the rest of the sentence. (An appositive is a noun or noun phrase that identifies a pronoun or another noun in the sentence.)

Mr. Ramirez, the algebra teacher, found his missing coat.

- Use commas to set off any group of words that offers additional information.

Thomas Jefferson, who was an inventor as well as a statesman, designed his own home.

- Use commas to set off the name of someone being addressed.

I am glad to hear you're feeling better, Uncle Warren.

- Use commas to set off *yes*, *no*, and other interrupters and transition words.

No, the secret was not kept.

The thief, of course, had disappeared.

- Use commas to separate elements of addresses and dates.

The framers of the United States Constitution met in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, from May 17, 1787, until the end of that summer.

A Proofread Sample

The beautiful welcoming city of San Francisco California is always in danger from earthquakes. The worst one so far which had a magnitude of 8.3 on the Richter scale, lasted two days in April, 1906. Hundreds of people died.

- See the chart below for rules about when not to use a comma.

Semicolons

- Use a semicolon to separate two complete sentences that are closely connected in meaning (and not joined by *and*, *but*, or *or*).

He practiced the piano three hours each afternoon; he did not give up sports, however.

A Proofread Sample

The main ingredients are flour, sugar, butter, and spices nuts and bananas may also be added.

Colons

- Use a colon to introduce a list.

Listen to the noisy seashore: crashing waves, screeching gulls, and whistling wind.

Do not use commas...	Example
between adjectives that should stay together. If the adjectives make sense separated by <i>and</i> , insert the comma. If they sound odd, leave out the comma.	This gleaming red car has plush leather seats.
if an appositive is necessary to the meaning of the sentence.	The statesman Thomas Jefferson also designed buildings.
if a phrase or clause contains necessary information.	The home that Jefferson designed is called Monticello.
if only the month and year of a date are named.	The Constitutional Convention lasted until September 1787.

- Do not use a colon after an introduction unless that introduction is a complete sentence.

Listen to the seashore noises of crashing waves, screeching gulls, and whistling wind.

A Proofread Sample

The speakers are: Jaden, Vanessa, and Haley. These are the topics they will talk about: bicycle safety, first aid, and sports safety.

Punctuating Dialogue

Use quotation marks, other punctuation marks, and capital letters to show dialogue (the exact words of characters or people). Indent a paragraph each time the speaker changes.

- If the speaker is named first, put a comma before the opening quotation marks, and capitalize the first word of the speech. Put a period or other end mark inside the closing quotation marks.

Sophie said, “There’s something strange about this room.”

- If the speech is given first, put the end mark inside the closing quotation marks.

“Are you scared?” asked Roger.

- If the speech is interrupted, enclose each part within quotation marks. The second part of the speech is not capitalized.

“I get the funny feeling that we’re not alone,” Emma agreed, “and it makes me uncomfortable.”

A Proofread Sample

“What are you doing this summer?” asked Mo. Ann replied, “I am visiting Utah.” “I’m playing soccer,” Mo said, “with my friends.”

Punctuating Titles

- Use quotation marks to enclose titles of short works, such as short stories, articles, chapters, poems, and songs.

Our class read the story “Papa’s Parrot” by Cynthia Rylant.

- Use underlining or italic type for titles of longer works, such as books, magazines, newspapers, movies, and plays.

I enjoyed the book *Charlotte’s Web*.

A Proofread Sample

The musical “My Fair Lady” features the song “I Could Have Danced All Night.”

SPELLING

Adding Endings

- For most words, just add the ending without making spelling changes.

jump + -ed = jumped

rain + -ing = raining

- If a one-syllable word ends with a consonant preceded by a single vowel, and the ending begins with a vowel, double the final consonant. If the word has more than one syllable, double the final consonant only if the last syllable is stressed.

big + -est = biggest

begin + -er = beginner

limit + -ed = limited

- If the word ends with a final silent *e*, and the ending begins with a vowel, drop the final *e*. Keep the final *e* if the ending begins with a consonant.

hope + -ing = hoping

hope + -ful = hopeful

- If the word ends with a consonant and *y*, and the ending begins with any letter except *i*, change the *y* to *i*. If the word ends with a vowel and *y*, just add the ending.

try + -ed = tried

play + -ful = playful

A Proofread Sample

Larissa was choosing a stuffed pet.
She was having trouble deciding
between the furry bear and the
cuddley kitten. She cried out with
happyness when she saw the pig.

Making Plurals

- To make most nouns plural, add *-s*.

days

zoos

- If the noun ends with *s*, *ss*, *sh*, *ch*, *zz*, or *x*, add *-es*.

kisses

boxes

lunches

matches

- If the noun ends with a consonant and *y*, change the *y* to *i*, and add *-es*.

city/cities

fly/flies

- For some nouns, change a final *f* or *fe* to *ves*.

shelf/shelves

life/lives

knife/knives

leaf/leaves

- Some nouns change spellings in singular and plural forms.

tooth/teeth

man/men

foot/feet

woman/women

mouse/mice

child/children

- Some nouns keep the same spelling in singular and plural forms.

deer pants sheep scissors

A Proofread Sample

The ^{mice} ~~mouses~~ hid behind the ^{ve} ~~bookes~~ on the shelves. Only their ^{ve} ~~tailes~~ showed.

Tricky Letter Combinations

- Remember to put *i* before *e* except after *c*, or when it sounds like a long *a* as in *neighbor* or *weigh*. This rhyme may also help you remember whether to spell *ie* or *ei*: “*i* before *e* except after *c* when sounded as *ee*.”

believe	niece	weigh	field
receive	piece	thief	brief
neighbor	ceiling		

Exceptions

friend	weird	either	neither
species	protein	seize	

- Consult a dictionary or the lists below when deciding among *-er*, *-or*, and *-ar*.

-er (most common)	-or	-ar (least common)
answer	actor	calendar
brother	color	collar
enter	doctor	dollar
weather	motor	sugar

A Proofread Sample

The ^o ~~docter~~ ^a ~~reciev~~ed a ^a ~~calendor~~ that cost fifty ^o ~~dollers~~ and put it in her ^e ~~breifcase~~. Its ^o ~~auther~~ is her ^e ~~brothar~~.

Commonly Misspelled Words

- These words cause confusion mostly because writers may not remember whether to use one or two consonants in them.

accidentally	during	occurrence
accommodate	embarrass	opportunity
address	exaggerate	possession
already	generally	professional
balloon	hoping	recommend
basically	immediately	succeed
beginning	necessary	success
committee	occasionally	tomorrow
disappointed	occur	vacuum
discuss	occurred	welcome

A Proofread Sample

If you wish to ^c ~~sucee~~d, I ^o ~~recomm~~end that you find a new ^p ~~oportu~~nity ^m ~~im~~mediately.

COMMON USAGE ERRORS

Look for these errors in your writing (and listen for them in your speech). Try to correct them.

Should have, would have, could have

- “They should of been here hours ago.” Do not use *of* after *should*, *could*, and *would*. The correct verb forms are *should have*, *could have*, *would have*.

Avoid Double Negatives

- “He didn’t do nothing wrong.” Do not use two negative words together to emphasize the negative. These are correct usages: “He didn’t do anything wrong”; “He did nothing wrong.”

Lay, Lie

- “I want to lay down for a nap.” Do not use *lay* when you mean *lie*.

Compare the verbs and their forms in the chart below.

A Proofread Sample

Danielle shouldn't ^{have} ~~of~~ been ~~laying~~ ^{lying} in the sun without ^{no} ~~no~~ sunscreen.

Subject-Verb Agreement

The subject and the verb in a sentence must agree in number. A singular subject needs a singular verb, and a plural subject needs a plural verb. Most singular verbs in the present tense end in *-s* or *-es*.

The teacher stands by the board.

The students sit at their desks.

- The subject of a sentence may be either a noun or a pronoun.
- Singular pronouns: *I*, *you*, *he*, *she*, and *it*
- Plural pronouns: *you*, *we*, *they*

She plays soccer in the spring.

They play football in the fall.

Lay and Lie

Verb	Present Participle	Past Tense	Past Participle	Examples
lie (“to rest or recline”; does not take an object)	lying	lay	(has) lain	The dog wants to lie down. It lay sleeping on its blanket. It has lain there all morning.
lay (“to place or set”; <i>laying</i> takes an object)	laying	laid	(has) laid	Workers are coming to lay the carpet. They laid carpet in one room yesterday.

A Proofread Sample

I eats a sandwich for lunch. Then
Sam and I walks to class.

Common Pronoun Usage

- Personal pronouns take different forms if they are the subject or object within a sentence.

Subject	Object
I	me
he	him
she	her
we	us
they	them

He ran two miles.

Jenny mailed **him** a birthday card.

- Note:** *You* and *it* are the same as both subject and object.

A Proofread Sample

~~Her~~ went to the mall with ~~she~~
~~They~~ mother. ~~Them~~ shopped for school
clothes.

Modifiers

Adjectives and adverbs are words used to describe, or modify, other words.

Adjectives

- Proper adjectives are formed from proper nouns. They are always capitalized.

The Japanese outfielder became **very popular** with fans.

- Adjectives formed from common nouns are not capitalized.

She walked down the dusty street.
It was a beautiful day.

Adverbs

- An adverb is a word that modifies a verb, an adjective, or another adverb. Many adverbs, but not all, end in *-ly*.

Navin works **very quickly**.

A Proofread Sample

Friday was an ~~coldly~~ day. Ana ran
quick~~ly~~ all the way home.