

VOCABULARY AND GRAMMAR

This section provides a range of common errors made with vocabulary and grammar. If you are uncertain about your grammar skills you should also obtain the book: ‘The Least You Should Know About English’, by Teresa Glazier (1998). It is available at the Barr Smith Library (BSL 808.042 G5531). This book contains twenty common grammar problems and allows a student to test himself or herself against each problem. Each problem then has 100 exercises along with solutions. This means a student can work by himself or herself to master the problem.

1. VOCABULARY

You need to pay careful attention to the meanings and the usage of the following words and phrases. Some of them look and sound very much the same, and therefore people often confuse and misuse them in speaking and writing.

Accept/except

Accept (verb): to consent to receive (a thing offered); to give an affirmative answer to (an offer or proposal); to tolerate, submit to

He *accepted* her proposal of marriage, (and it wasn’t even a leap year).

David Boon reluctantly *accepted* that his one-day international cricket career had come to an end.

Except (verb): to leave out or exclude

An admission fee is payable at the business expo, but students are *excepted*.

Except (preposition): with the exclusion of; other than; but.

Everyone *except* me was invited to the beach party.

Except (conjunction): if it were not for the fact that; only.

I would have been a great batsman, *except* I just kept getting out.

Aggravate/irritate

Aggravate (verb): to make worse; increase the gravity of.

The fact that she lied about her wrongdoing *aggravated* the trouble she was in.

Irritate: to annoy

Their constant talking really *irritated* the lecturer and other students.

Advice/advise

Advice (noun): counsel, opinion or information.

I gave them my *advice* on the way to tackle the assignment.
The students asked for his *advice* on the problem.

Advise (verb): to give advice, counsel.

Can you *advise* me on this matter?

Affect/effect

Affect (verb): To have an influence upon; to pretend; put on a false show; to simulate

The new legislation will *affect* small businesses.

He *affected* ignorance.

She *affected* an American accent.

Effect (noun): result. The noun *effect* is often, but not always, preceded by ‘the’ or ‘an’.

Introducing a new costing system had the *effect* of significantly changing the product costs.

Effect (verb): to bring about; accomplish. This is a less common usage and may be restricted to more formal contexts.

We have *effected* a number of improvements to the accounting system.

Alot

A misspelling of two quite separate words: *a lot*.

All ready / already

All ready (adjectival phrase): to have everything prepared.

With the food prepared and the table set, we were *all ready* for the guests to arrive.

Already (adverb): by this or a specified time; before; so soon.

He was *already* there when we arrived.

Are you leaving *already*?

Alternate/alternative

Alternate (verb): to pass back and forth from one state, action or place to another.

She *alternated* between enthusiasm and anxiety as she continued to research and write her thesis .

Alternate (adjective): happening or following in turns; every other one.

The doctor was required to work in the emergency ward on *alternate* Saturday nights.

Note: there is a difference in pronunciation between the verb *alternate* (emphasis on the first syllable) and the adjective *alternate* (emphasis on the second syllable).

Alternative (adjective): allowing or necessitating a choice between two or more things.

Your *alternative* course of action is to capitalise the expenditure as an asset.

Alternative (noun): another choice. Strictly speaking, *alternative* relates to one of only two choices, not more than two (derived from the Latin word *alter*, meaning ‘other (of two)’) but is now widely used with reference to three or more options or choices.

My only *alternative* is to resign.

Altogether/all together

Altogether (adverb): entirely; completely; in all.

I wasn't *altogether* sure that my answer was understood.

All together (two separate adverbs): at the same time; in the same place.

The students arrived *all together* at 5.15pm.

We keep our reference books *all together* on a separate shelf.

Assess/access

Assess (verb): to estimate or make a judgement on the quality, or size, or value of something.

The employer assessed the graduate's exam results, as well as his personality and *demeanour*, during the interview.

Access (noun): a way of approaching, reaching or entering; the right or opportunity to use or visit.

Builders have been constructing a wheelchair *access* to Bonython Hall.

An auditor has *access* to a company's accounting records.

Access (verb): to gain access to information

The hacker *accessed* the company's computing system and made illegal changes to the data.

Among/between

Among (preposition): in the midst of; surrounded by; pertaining to a group of more than two members.

Among the students enrolling in 1996, were some students who had taken a year off after leaving school.

Between (preposition): pertaining to two members; pertaining to more than two members or entities when they are considered as individuals.

If I had to choose *between* Commerce and Arts, I would choose Commerce.

The agreement *between* Queensland, NSW and South Australia was negotiated last year.

Amount/number

Amount (noun): the total of two or more quantities; applies to mass nouns.

During the holidays, she shovelled a large *amount* of garden soil into the new garden beds.

Number (noun): the total of two or more quantities; applies to count nouns.

She bought a *number* of rose bushes for the new garden.

Basically

The literal sense of *basically* is ‘concerning a base or basis, fundamentally’.

His argument has a superficial persuasiveness but it is *basically* flawed.

I believe she is *basically* a good person.

Basically has started to appear with monotonous regularity at the beginning of a sentence, where its presence is often entirely superfluous - it adds nothing to the sentence, for example ‘Basically, I don’t think he should have been offered the job.’ If you find yourself using this construction, think carefully about what the word means and whether you need to use it to express your meaning.

Because/the reason is

Avoid the construction ‘The reason is because...’ for example, ‘The reason her accent is so good is because her mother is French.’

The *reason is* and *because* mean the same thing, and thus the construction is redundant - in other words, a tautology.

The reason being

Incorrect form of the verb “to be”. The correct expression is ‘the reason is’ (present tense), or ‘the reason was’ (past tense).

Beside/besides

Beside (preposition): by the side of; next to.

Come and sit *beside* me.

It is also used in the expression *beside oneself*, meaning ‘extremely agitated’.

He was *beside* himself with grief.

Besides (adverb): in addition to; as well; moreover.

There were many others *besides* me who didn’t like that subject.

Biannual / biennial

Biannual (adjective): twice a year; usually six-monthly

The company accountant had to prepare *biannual* financial reports, the first in January and the second in July.

Biennial (adjective): every two years; lasting two years.

The Adelaide Festival is held on a *biennial* basis. It will be held in 1996 and the next one won’t be for another two years.

Bicentennial: every two hundred years.

Australia’s *bicentennial* celebrations on January 26th 1988 marked two hundred years since the first white settlers arrived by sea voyage.

The prefix bi- always refers to the idea ‘two’ but can be confusing because it is sometimes in the sense of doubling - ‘bicycle’ ‘bifocal’, and sometimes halving - ‘bisection’. This is particularly the case with biweekly, which sometimes means ‘every two weeks’ and sometimes ‘twice a week’. If you are in doubt about biweekly and bimonthly avoid them and use the fuller, more accurate descriptions, eg every two weeks, twice a month.

Bought/brought

Bought: past tense and past participle of the verb *to buy*.

She *bought* the cakes at the corner shop and paid for them with a cheque.

Brought: past tense and past participle of the verb *to bring*.

She *brought* the cakes that she had made herself, to the morning tea.

Can/may

Can (auxiliary verb): be mentally or physically able to.

He *can* run 10 kilometres in 38 minutes.

May (auxiliary verb): to be allowed or permitted to.

He can ride a Honda 750 motorbike, but his father says that he *may* not.

Casual/causal

Casual (adjective): informal; offhand; occasional

Her clothes were too *casual* for the office.

John's attitude to the exams was far too *casual*.

Causal (adjective): of, involving or constituting a cause.

Employers' complaints about the poor standards of graduates' communication skills was a *causal* factor in the introduction of the Communications Project.

Cite/sight/site

Cite (verb): to quote a reference or authority.

Make sure you *cite* all your references when you use the work of others, or their words or ideas in your essay.

Sight (noun): something seen, especially a spectacle; an unsightly, odd or ridiculous person; a guide to the eye on a weapon; optical instrument.

The purple-coloured, towering thunderclouds were an amazing *sight* as they advanced towards the coastline.

She looked a real *sight*, as she dragged herself like a drowned rat from the water.

Sight (verb): to get or catch sight of; to aim a weapon by means of sights.

Scanning the coastline through the binoculars, he *sighted* a lone windsurfer.
Make sure that you have your medical certificate *sighted* by the lecturer.
He *sighted* along the rifle barrel.

Site (noun): a geographical location, especially that of a building.

A hardhat must be worn by all construction workers entering this *site*.

Site (verb): to locate, to situate.

The medical school is *sited* next door to the Royal Adelaide Hospital.

Compare to/compare with

Compare to (verb + preposition): used when comparing two unlike things.

How can you *compare* apples *to* oranges?
He *compared* her skin *to* ivory.

Compare with (verb + preposition): used when comparing two like things.

How do you think these Granny Smith apples *compare with* these Red Delicious ones?

Complement/compliment

Complement (noun and verb): the addition of something that completes, makes up a whole.

We have a full *complement* of committee members today.
The mystery ball has *complemented* Shane Warne's bowling repertoire.

Compliment (noun and verb): refers to an expression of praise, respect or admiration.

He paid her the *compliment* of saying she was the best in the class.
They *complimented* her on her newly acquired skiing skills.

To avoid mistakes remember the *e* of *complement* is also in *complete*.

Consensus

Consensus (noun): opinion shared unanimously, a view generally held or accepted.

As the meaning contains the idea of a generally held opinion, it is redundant to say 'general consensus' or 'consensus of opinion' - that is, they are tautologies.

The spelling is always conSensus, never conCensus, as it is derived from the same root as *consent*, and not census.

Continuous/continual

Continuous (adjective): without break; uninterrupted.

The *continuous* noise from the generator kept him awake all night.
A *continuous* roll of paper

Continual (adjective): happening regularly; repeated frequently.

Our neighbours' *continual* late night parties forced us to move house.
These *continual* interruptions are getting on my nerves.

The fundamental difference in sense, which also applies to the adverbs continually and continuously, is that something *continual* stops from time to time, whereas something *continuous* does not stop until it reaches its natural end.

Counsel/council

Counsel (noun): advice; a lawyer or group of lawyers.

She always gave wise *counsel*.
The *counsel* for the defence.

Counsel (verb): to give advice, appropriate when the advice is serious and given by trained or professional counsellors.

He had been *counselled* by his lecturer and by the student counsellor, but still couldn't sort out his problems.

Council (noun): a group of people elected or chosen to conduct discussions, make decisions and carry out certain duties.

The student *council* meets every month.

Condone/condemn

Condone (verb): to forgive or overlook an offence or wrongdoing; to reluctantly sanction.

Her genuine remorse over the accident allowed her parents to *condone* her carelessness with their car.

Condone is often used incorrectly in the sense of ‘to give support to, to back up’.

Condemn (verb): to express utter disapproval of; censure; to find guilty, convict.

She was *condemned* for her irresponsible and dangerous driving.

Criterion/criteria

Criterion (noun): a standard, rule or test on which a judgement or decision can be based

Exam results were the only *criterion* for deciding whether the graduates should be interviewed.

Criterion is the singular form. Note that in the above sentence there is only one (singular) criterion - the exam results.

Criteria is the plural form of criterion.

Both the exam results and the competency of the written applications are the *criteria* for deciding whether the graduates should be interviewed.

Disinterested/uninterested

Disinterested (adjective): neutral; impartial; unbiased; not personally involved.

The fact that the judge personally knew two of the defendants made you wonder just how *disinterested* he really was.

Uninterested (adjective): lacking an interest, indifferent, bored.

I was quite *uninterested* in their holiday photos.

It appears that *uninterested* is no longer in frequent use, and *disinterest* is now often used in its place to mean ‘lacking interest’, which was in fact the original meaning of disinterested. Many people, however, object to its use in this sense.

Different from/different to/different than

Different from is the most frequently used form and the most acceptable. When talking about differences between things, it is the divergences between them that are being considered, and therefore the preposition denoting divergence (away) ‘from’ is preferred.

The use of the preposition 'to' should be restricted to use with the word *similar* - when talking about similarities, it is areas of convergence, or commonalities that are being considered, therefore the preposition denoting convergence 'to' (towards) is used.

Different than is the expression used by American speakers. Let's keep it that way.

Elicit/illicit

Elicit (verb): to bring or draw out.

He *elicited* the answer he wanted from the students by clever questioning.

Illicit (adjective): not permitted or approved by law

There was an *illicit* drug trade occurring on the campus.

Fewer/less

Fewer (adjective; comparative form of few): a smaller number of; relates to count nouns.

Each year, there are *fewer* and fewer spectators for these matches.

Checkout 2 is for those customers with *fewer* than 8 items.

Less (adjective; comparative form of little): a smaller quantity of; relates to mass nouns.

If you study consistently each week, you will need to spend fewer late nights cramming at the end of semester, and cause yourself *less* anxiety.

Using these building techniques, you will need fewer bricks and *less* mortar.

Flaunt/flout

Flaunt (verb): to exhibit ostentatiously; show off.

She *flaunted* her new-found wealth by buying expensive cars, clothes and jewellery.

Flout (verb): to show contempt for; disregard.

Swearing on the radio and television *flouts* the conventions of acceptable behaviour.

Hanged/hung

Hanged: past tense and past participle of the verb *to hang* - to execute or commit suicide by hanging.

When I was at school, my whole class was shocked when two classmates *hanged* themselves.

Hung: past tense and past participle of the verb *to hang* - to suspend.

We *hung* framed photos of our European trip on the wall.

Imply/infer

Imply (verb): suggest indirectly; to hint at

When she discussed the problem in detail and stressed that it was important, she *implied* that it would be in the exam.

Infer (verb): to deduce, or derive conclusions from evidence or premises.

I *inferred* from her emphasis on the problem, that it would be in the exam.

Note that it is the speakers or writers who *imply* while listeners or readers *infer*. Similarly the distinction is maintained with the nouns implication and inference.

Irregardless/regardless

Regardless (adverb): in spite of everything; heedless.

It soon began to rain but they carried on with their game *regardless*.

Regard-less is already the negation of *regard*, and thus *ir-regard-less* is a double negative. It has probably come about as a blend of irrespective and regardless. Don't use it.

It's/its

It's: contraction of 'it is' (pronoun + verb). ***It has no other usage ever.***

It's easy to tell the difference - the apostrophe 'stands in for' the missing *i*.

It's probably best to avoid contractions in academic writing. *It is* preferable to write it in full.

Its (possessive pronoun)

The company has published *its* financial report.

Try to understand and apply these two words correctly. Misuse of these two words is the most common error in writing. It is best to avoid contractions in academic writing, but the best way to

learn to use them correctly is to read the sentence out loud, and to hear whether your use of *it's* really means *it is*.

Loathe/loath

Loath (verb): to dislike someone or something greatly; abhor.

I must be getting old - I *loathe* all of this grunge 'fashion' and wouldn't be seen dead in it.

Loath (adjective): unwilling, reluctant.

I would be *loath* to move to Sydney, as it is too busy - full of people and traffic.

Lose/loose

Lose (verb): to mislay

It can be disheartening to *lose* your lecture notes before the exam.

Loose (adjective): not fastened, restrained, or contained; free.

The dog was let *loose* to roam in the backyard.

His shoelaces were too *loose*.

Loose (verb): to release, set free, undo.

They *loosed* a barrage of shots over our heads.

Loosen (verb): to make or become less tight.

She *loosened* her belt after the three course dinner.

Method/methodology

Method (noun): a means or manner of procedure, especially a regular and systematic way of accomplishing something.

Several *methods* of depreciation can be used to allocate the cost of an asset over its useful life.

Methodology (noun): a body of working methods, rules, principles; the theoretical study of working methods.

The post-graduate student had to defend the *methodology* used in designing and conducting the data collection and analysis.

Method tells us what tools are used; *methodology* tell us why and how such tools are used.

Militate/mitigate

Militate (verb): have a powerful influence or effect; to have force; to operate; usually followed by the preposition *against*.

His radical and controversial opinions *militated* against his chances for being elected president of the club.

Mitigate (verb): moderate, make less severe, violent or painful.

The judge's decision did little to *mitigate* the suffering of the bereaved parents.

The judge made comment about the stress the accused had been under, and said that these *mitigating* circumstances would be taken into account when the sentence was handed down.

Mischievous

The correct pronunciation of this word is [mis-chiv-us]. The mispronunciations [mis-cheev-us] and [mis-cheev-i-us] are often heard, and the word is often misspelt. Pay particular attention to the order and position of the vowels.

Neither

As an adjective or a pronoun *neither* is used with a singular verb.

Neither book is available.

Neither of the books is [not are] available.

Neither ... nor

When using the *neither ... nor* construction, a singular verb is used if both subjects are singular and a plural verb is used if both subjects are plural.

Neither her brother *nor* her sister *has* [not have] been invited.

Neither his parents *nor* his friends *have* been invited.

When a combination of singular and plural subjects occurs, the verb agrees with the subject that is nearest to it.

Neither his surfboard *nor* his rollerblades *have* been stolen.

Neither her running shoes *nor* her bike *has* been recovered.

Obsolete/obsolescent

Obsolete (adjective): no longer in use.

That batch of 1969 transistors is totally *obsolete*.

Obsolescent (adjective): becoming obsolete.

That model is still usable, but the industry considers it *obsolescent*, so you should consider upgrading soon.

Personal/personnel

Personal (adjective): private; individual.

That bag contains all my *personal* property, such as my lecture notes and text books.

Personnel (noun): employees of an organisation, considered collectively; the department that looks after staff matters.

The health and safety of all factory *personnel* should be carefully monitored.

Phenomenon/phenomena

Phenomenon (noun): an occurrence, a circumstance that is perceptible by the senses; an unusual, significant or unaccountable fact or occurrence; a marvel.

The aurora borealis is an extraordinary *phenomenon* that can only be seen at certain times of the year in the skies of the northern hemisphere.

Phenomena is the plural of phenomenon.

Point in time

Ugh! A horrible, pretentious piece of jargon meaning now. Just use *now* or *at the moment*.

Principal/principle

Principal (adjective): main; primary; of the most importance

The *principal* reason I moved to the city was to get a job.

Principal (noun): an amount of money invested or lent; a main participant in a situation; head of a school.

Amortisation on a loan or mortgage separates the amount of interest paid from the amount of *principal* paid.

The agent couldn't make the final decision on the lease negotiations. He had to contact his *principal*.

The *principal* put the whole class on detention.

Principle (noun): always a noun and refers to a fundamental truth or law; a rule or standard. The adjectival form is *principled*.

I won't be bribed. After all, I have my *principles*.

Rapt/wrapped

Rapt (adjective): engrossed or absorbed; seized with wonder or rapture.

They listened to the flamboyant and amusing speaker with *rapt* attention.

Rapt is also used as slang to describe feelings of extreme happiness, or pleasure, to be thrilled, as in “I was rapt when I won \$1000”.

Wrapped (past tense and past participle of the verb to wrap): to put round; cover or roll up in.

The rescuers *wrapped* the survivors in foil heat-retaining blankets to prevent hypothermia.

Stationery/stationary

Stationery (noun); paper, envelopes etc.

She ordered some *stationery* printed with her business name and address.

A mnemonic (memory device) is to remember *stationery* with an *e* - for *envelope*.

Stationary (adjective): not moving

The cattle were *stationary* and somnolent in the heat of the summer afternoon.

Substantial/substantive/substantiate

Substantial and substantive are *not interchangeable* - they have quite different meanings.

Substantial (adjective): of real importance or value, reliability or repute; having weight, force or effect; not imaginary; true, solid, real, of substance; large size or amount.

The company has made *substantial* progress in eliminating noxious emissions from its factory.
The injured driver was awarded *substantial* damages as a result of the accident.

Substantive (adjective): that stands of or by itself, having a separate and independent existence or status, not dependent upon nor subsidiary to, nor referable to something else.

“How sufficient and *substantive* this land was to sustain itself without any aid from the foreigner”.¹

“That Spain is not a *substantive* power; that she must lean on France or on England”.²

¹ The Oxford English Dictionary’s (2nd edn. 1989) example of *substantive* used correctly, quoting Francis Bacon (c.1626) talking about England.

² The Oxford English Dictionary.

A writer on contemporary English usage has said about *substantive* “to be substantive, something must be original, not derivative, and active, not re-active. The High Court’s Mabo decision would get by as substantive, I would say.”³

Substantiate (verb): to prove the truth of a charge, statement, claim; to give good grounds for.

All claims for reimbursement of expenses must be *substantiated* with documentary evidence.

Source/sauce

Source (noun): a person or document providing evidence; a place, person or thing from which something originates.

An important *source* of audit evidence is confirmation letters by third parties.

Sauce (noun): relish; liquefied semi-solid food stuff.

Sausages taste better eaten with tomato *sauce*.

Thankyou

A misspelling of two quite separate words: *thank you*. Note that *thank-you* can be used as an adjective (a *thank-you* note).

They’re/their/there

They’re: contraction of they are. Read your sentence aloud to hear whether your use of ‘they’re’ really means ‘they are’.

They’re giving the presentation this afternoon.

Their: third person plural possessive pronoun; belonging to them

It’s *their* house, *their* money and *their* life. Oh, and the cars are also *theirs*.

Note there is **never any** apostrophe in *theirs*.

There (adverb): at or in that place

They’re going to drive *there*.

There is/there are

³ Devine, F *The Australian Magazine* 1994.

Normally, *there is* should precede a singular noun, and *there are* a plural.

There is a motel with a vacancy.

There are two rooms available.

The use of the contraction *there's* followed by a plural is almost universal in informal speech, although unacceptable in formal speech and writing.

There's two good films on tonight.

To/too/two

To (preposition): in the direction of; towards; expressing what is reached, approached.

Walk down *to* the uni bridge and you'll see us there.

He put his ear *to* the keyhole to try and hear what was being said.

Too (adverb) also; as well; to a greater extent; more than a fitting or desirable amount; extremely.

Can I come *too*?

I have *too* much study to do this weekend.

You are *too* kind.

Two (noun): the number 2.

I only have to take *two* subjects this semester.

Until/till

Both words mean 'up to the time that, up to as far as'.

I will work *until* 5 pm.

Carry on *till* you reach the traffic lights, and then turn left.

They are interchangeable, although *until* is the more formal usage and *till* is used in speech. *Until* is usually more appropriate when it appears as the first word of a sentence, as in 'Until they turn off their stereo, I won't be able to sleep.'

Note the spelling: *until* has one and only ever one *l*

till has two *ls*

Where/were/we're

Where (adverb, pronoun, conjunction): in, at or to what place, point or position? In the place at which.

Where are you going?
The beach *where* we spent our holidays.
It is always raining *where* we live.

Were : the second singular (you) of the past tense, and the plural form of the past tense of the verb *to be*. It is also used as a subjunctive, in phrases expressing supposition, hypotheses, and desire.

I knew that you *were* there.
They *were* having lunch in the garden.
If I *were* you, I would be careful. I wish he *were* there now.

We're: contraction of we are.

Who

The pronoun *who* is normally used in reference to human beings (*which* being used for non-humans). However, it is acceptable to use *who* in referring to animals, to countries in certain contexts, and to a group made up of people.

Cats *who* refuse to eat tinned food. Iraq, *who* started the war. The band *who* plays the loudest.

Who/whom

The relative and interrogative pronouns *who* and *whoever* are subjective case, and *whom* and *whomever* are objective case. *Who* is used when it is the subject of a verb and *whom* when it is the object of a verb or preposition.

The manager *who* was promoted. (*The manager* is the subject)
The personnel manager *whom* you just saw. (*The manager* is the object, *you* is the subject)
The committee to *whom* I was reporting. (*The committee* is the object, *I* is the subject)

To decide whether *who* or *whom* should be used, rephrase the sentence:

It hasn't been decided who/whom they should promote.

Variation	Yes / no?
They should promote she.	no
They should promote her.	yes

Because the objective case *her* is correct, we know that the correct relative pronoun will be the objective case *whom*:

It hasn't been decided *whom* they should promote.

Confusion can also arise in the interrogative:

Who/whom made the presentation?

Who/whom did they ask for?

Variation	Yes / no?
Her made the presentation	no
She made the presentation	yes
They asked for she	no
They asked for her	yes

The correct usage can now be determined.

Who made the presentation? (Subjective case - *she* is the subject, therefore *who*)

Whom did they ask for? (Objective case - *her* is the object, therefore *whom*)

Whose/who's

Whose: of whom or of which; belonging to who.

Whose book is that?

The animals, *whose* owners had left them alone all weekend, were ravenous.

Who's: contraction of who is, or who has. Used only in informal speech.

Who's coming to dinner tonight.

Who's left all the lights on and the front door wide open?

You

You: second person *singular* and second person *plural* personal pronoun.

The use of the word 'you's', where an -s has been added to *you* to form the second person plural, is **completely unacceptable**. If you wouldn't use it in your writing, then do not use it in your speech either.

Your/you're

Your (second person possessive): belonging to you.

May I come over to *your* house tonight? I'd like to have a look at *your* notes and perhaps I may borrow *your* textbook?

You're: contraction of *you are*.

You're sure to notice the difference; the apostrophe 'stands in for' the missing *a*.

If in doubt, expand any *your/you're* to *you are*. If this expression makes sense, then the *you're* in question is actually *you are*. If it doesn't make sense, then the *your* is a possessive.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The material used in this chapter was compiled from several sources.

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2. PROBLEM VERBS

Lay/lie; Raise/rise; Set/sit; Hang/hang

Confusion arises when speakers and writers need to choose between lay or lie, set or sit, raise or rise, and hang (suspend) or hang (execute).

In the first three pairs, one verb is transitive, and the other is intransitive. With hang/hang, we are dealing with two different verbs, with different senses and different structures.

Lay, raise and *set* are transitive verbs - that is each needs a *direct object* to complete its meaning, to receive the action or motion which it expresses. The word 'transitive' comes from a Latin word meaning 'to pass over'. In other words, a transitive verb is passing over from the subject to the object - it is in *transit* from the subject to the object

She *raises* her voice.

Her *voice* completes the meaning of the verb; the action passes over from subject (*She*) to object (*voice*). *She raises* alone is incomplete, the statement is unfinished.

Lie, rise and *sit* are intransitive verbs - that is, they do not take a direct object.

An intransitive verb needs no direct object to complete its meaning; the action or motion is confined to the subject. An intransitive verb isn't in transit to anywhere - it doesn't need to move to, or relate to, anything else to complete its meaning.

He *sits*.

The action seems complete, the statement is finished.

More often than not, other words or phrases will accompany intransitive verbs such as *he sits*, *she rises*, or *the dog lies*. These are not direct objects, but adverbs or prepositional phrases. For example, he sits in the front seat (prepositional phrase), she rises at 6am (prepositional phrase), the dog lies asleep (adverb).

We can determine which is which by deciding on what meaning we need to convey.

	Verb	Direct Object?	Verb type
You'd better lie down.	lie	no	intransitive
I'll lay that carpet tomorrow	lay	yes (that carpet)	transitive
On weekends, I rise at a later time	rise	no	intransitive
They raised the flag	raise	yes (the flag)	transitive
Please sit down.	sit	no	intransitive
Please set the table	set	yes (the table)	transitive

On the following two pages, the different forms of these eight problem verbs are listed, with examples given of their use in the present tense, the past tense, and their past participle.

Meaning	Simple/ base form	Past tense	Past Participle
to rest in a horizontal position	lie	lay	lain

Present - *I want to lie down for a while. The cat lies in the shade of the tree.*

Past tense - *He lay injured where he fell. She lay asleep, curled on her side.*

Past participle - *They have lain in the sun for too long.*

To place on a surface, or in the proper or specified place	lay	laid	laid
--	-----	------	------

Present tense - *The decorator suggests we lay carpet in the living room and lay tiles in the hall.*

Past tense - *He laid his arm around her shoulders.*

Past participle - *We have laid our coats on the settee.*

Move from a lower position to a higher one	rise	rose	risen
--	------	------	-------

Present tense - *The audience rise to their feet, the applause is thunderous.*

Past tense - *The smoke rose from the bonfire.*

Past participle - *The dough has risen.*

To put or take into a higher position; increase the amount of	raise	raised	raised
---	-------	--------	--------

Present tense - *They raise money for charity.*

Past tense - *She raised her arm to protect her face.*

Past participle - *Edmund Hilary was the first to have raised the flag on Mt Everest.*

To be in the position, more or less upright, with the body supported by the buttocks.	sit	sat	sat
---	-----	-----	-----

Present tense - *Please sit in this chair.*

Past tense - *They sat in the garden.*

Past Participle - *They had sat quietly all afternoon reading their books.*

Meaning	Simple/ base form	Past tense	Past Participle
To put, lay or stand something in a certain position or location	set	set	set

Present tense - *Please set the table*

Past tense - *He set the porcelain vase carefully on the mantelpiece.*

Past participle - *The umbrella had blown over in the wind, but someone had set it upright again.*

Execute or commit suicide	hang	hanged	hanged
---------------------------	------	--------	--------

Present tense - *Take that rope away from her neck, before she hangs herself.*

Past tense - *The prisoners were hanged for treason.*

Past participle - *It was eventually discovered they had convicted the wrong man, but he had hanged himself in his cell the year before.*

To suspend	hang	hung	hung
------------	------	------	------

Present tense - *Just hang your hats on the stand here.*

Past tense - *We hung the painting above the fireplace.*

Past participle - *We discovered that the previous owner had hung new curtains throughout the house.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The material for this section was compiled from the following sources:

Waldhorn, A & Zeiger, A (1967) *English Made Simple*, W H Allen, London.

Eunson, Baden (1994) *Writing Skills*, The Communication Skills Series, John Wiley & Sons, Milton, Queensland.

3. Prepositions

A preposition shows the relationship between a noun or a pronoun and some other word in the sentence.

Water *under* the bridge

Age *before* beauty

Common prepositions

about	below	for	out	under
above	beneath	from	outside	underneath
across	beside	in	over	unlike
after	between	inside	past	until
against	beyond	into	regarding	up
along	but	like	round	upon
among	by	near	since	with
around	concerning	next	through	within
as	despite	of	throughout	without
at	down	off	till	
before	during	on	to	
behind	except	onto	toward	

Compound prepositions

according to	in addition to	next to
along with	in accordance with	on account of
apart from	in case of	on top of
because of	in favour of	out of
by means of	in front of	regardless of
contrary to	in place of	with regard to
due to	in spite of	with the exception of

except for	instead of	
------------	------------	--

Ending a sentence with a preposition

You might have come across the so-called ‘grammatical rule’ that you shouldn’t end a sentence with a preposition.

For example, the question “Which subjects did you enrol *in*?” has the preposition *in* at the end of the sentence.

It is the case that the preposition usually precedes the noun or pronoun to which they are attached (it is in the *pre* position).

It was *under* the desk

They drove *to* Melbourne

Enter *through* the Victoria Avenue gates

But, it certainly does not have to be in this position. For example, the question “Which subjects did you enrol *in*?” and “In which subjects did you enrol?” are both perfectly acceptable, although the latter is more formal and is preferable in academic writing.

Consider the following sentence:

Mr Forbes, who entered the presidential race a complete political novice, suddenly emerged as the man *of* whom everybody was afraid.⁴

The writer has chosen to embed his preposition in the sentence, thus avoiding ending the sentence with *of*. It is formally correct. It would also be possible to say:

Mr Forbes...suddenly emerged as the man whom everybody was afraid *of*.

However, you must guard against **doubling up** on the prepositions in such a sentence.

Wrong: Mr Forbes.... suddenly emerged as the man *of* whom everybody was afraid *of*.

⁴ *Advertiser*, 22 January, 1996.

This faulty doubling-up of the preposition in sentence construction occurs quite frequently in students' assignments, so you need to be aware of how to avoid it.

Wrong: It was the manager *to* whom he was referring *to*.

Right: It was the manager *to* whom he was referring. (formal)

Right: It was the manager he was referring *to*. (conversational)

Phrasal Verbs

You may also wonder what to do with the preposition in phrasal verbs. Phrasal verbs are formed from either a verb + preposition, or an adverb + preposition. In these cases, they *cannot* be separated, so the preposition may well be the last word of the sentence

What is he up *to*?

It isn't worth worrying *about*.

This is the type of behaviour that I will not put up *with*.

A reliable rule is that the preposition should be placed where it sounds most natural.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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4. PLURALS

When you speak or write, you regularly refer to singular and plural forms of persons, places, things, qualities or concepts. That is, you refer to either one, singular thing, or to two or more, plural things. For example, you may be speaking about one company or business where you worked during the summer holidays, or you might be writing about several companies or businesses that you have read about in the newspapers over the holidays.

In grammar, these persons, places, things, qualities, or concepts are collectively called nouns. You will also learn how to form the plural of nouns, because in your speaking and writing you must often answer the question, 'is there one person, place, thing, quality or concept, or more than one?'

A) Add -s

Regularly, the plural of nouns is formed by adding *-s* to the singular.

SINGULAR

report, essay

office

student

tutorial

PLURAL

reports, essays

offices

students

tutorials

B) Add -es

Singular nouns which end in *-s*, *-ss*, *-x*, *-z*, *-sh*, or *-ch*, form the plural by adding *-es*.

SINGULAR

class, kiss, business

tax, fax

dish, wish

church, search

PLURAL

classes, kisses, businesses

taxes, faxes

dishes, wishes

churches, searches

C) Change -y to -i and add -es.

Singular nouns ending in *-y* and preceded by a consonant, form the plural by changing the *-y* to *-i* and adding *-es*.

SINGULAR

company
 vanity, reality
 methodology
 exigency

PLURAL

companies
 vanities, realities
 methodologies
 exigencies

Note: Singular nouns ending in *-y* and preceded by a vowel, form the plural by adding *-s*: delay-delays; chimney-chimneys; key-keys;

D) Add -es - sometimes!

Some singular nouns ending in *-o* preceded by a consonant, form the plural by adding *-es*.

SINGULAR

hero, zero
 potato, tomato

PLURAL

heroes, zeroes
 potatoes, tomatoes

But, there are many exceptions to this: solo-solos; halo-halos; piano-pianos.

E) Add -s.

Singular nouns ending in *-o* preceded by a vowel, form the plural by adding *-s*.

SINGULAR

curio
 cuckoo

PLURAL

curios
 cuckoos

F) Change -f or -fe to -v and add -es.

Singular nouns ending in *-f* or *-fe* generally form the plural by changing the *-f* to *-v* and adding *-es*.

SINGULAR

thief, self
 life, wife, knife
 loaf, calf

PLURAL

thieves, selves
 lives, wives, knives
 loaves, calves

But there are many exceptions to the generalisation: cliff-cliffs; safe-safes; belief-beliefs.

Note: The plural of *roof* is nowadays spelt *roofs* (rather than *rooves*), but can be pronounced either as [rufs] or [ruves].

G) Change an inside vowel.

A few nouns form their plural by changing an inside vowel.

SINGULAR**PLURAL**

man	men
woman	women
tooth	teeth
foot	feet
mouse	mice
goose	geese

H) A very few nouns form their plurals by adding *-ren* or *-en*; child-children; ox-oxen.

I) Compound nouns.

Compound nouns form their plurals by adding *-s* to the most important word of the compound.

SINGULAR	PLURAL
passer-by	passers-by
good-bye	good-byes
mother-in-law	mothers-in-law
court-martial	courts-martial
attorney-general	attorneys-general

Note: Compounds written without hyphens regularly add *-s* to form the plural: pickpocket-pickpockets; spoonful-spoonfuls; stepmother-stepmothers.

J) Foreign nouns - native declension

Foreign nouns, unless they have been thoroughly naturalised (see K), form their plurals according to their native declension. The following foreign nouns are used with their native plurals.

SINGULAR	PLURAL
	LATIN
Addendum	addenda
Alumnus	alumni
Datum	data
Erratum	errata
Appendix	appendices
Medium	media
Stratum	strata
	GREEK
analysis	analyses
basis	bases
crisis	crises
phenomenon	phenomena
criterion	criteria

K) Foreign nouns in frequent use - native plural and their English plural.

Foreign nouns in regular use in English generally have two plural forms - their native plural and their English *-s* or *-es* plural. These words are now accepted as English and are used with their English plurals.

SINGULAR	ENGLISH PLURAL	FOREIGN PLURAL
	LATIN	
apparatus	apparatuses	apparatus
aquarium	aquariums	aquaria
formula	formulas	formulae
millennium	millenniums	millennia

ultimatum	ultimatums	ultimata
GREEK		
automaton	automatons	automata
gymnasium	gymnasiums	gymnasia
hippopotamus	hippopotamuses	hippopotami
octopus	octopuses	octopodes
lexicon	lexicons	lexica

L) Some nouns have two plural forms, each form with its own meaning.

SINGULAR

index

die

genius

PLURAL

Books have *indexes*.

Numbers have *indices*.

Tool machinists use *dies*.

Gamblers throw the *dice*.

Geniuses are people of exceptional ability.

Genii in Roman mythology are guiding spirits for a person from birth to death.

M) Some nouns are used only in the plural.

alms	blues	dregs
athletics	billiards	economics
bellows	commons	forceps
glasses		

N) You can use an apostrophe to form plurals of *letters, numbers and words used as terms*.

Be aware that this is the **ONLY** time you can use apostrophes to form plurals. Nowadays this usage varies considerably, with some people opting to omit the apostrophe.

Dot your i's and cross your t's.

I can't tell his 2's from his 7's.

Mind your p's and q's.

There are no if's or but's about this.

THE FINAL ANALYSIS

If you are in doubt, as occasionally you are sure to be, as we all are, please consult your **dictionary**. It is the best reference book you can use. It is much more reliable than the spell checker on the word processor - the spell checker can mislead you because it cannot not recognise the difference between plurals and possessives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Collins English Dictionary (1979) William Collins Sons & Co Ltd, Oxford.

5. DOUBLE NEGATIVES

A double-negative construction is one where two negative modifiers are used: either one is redundant, or one cancels the other out, making the statement a positive one (which is probably not what the writer or speaker wished to convey).

Wrong: Although the lecturer talked for 50 minutes, I *never* learned *nothing*.

Right: Although the lecturer talked for 50 minutes, I *never* learned anything.

Right: Although the lecturer talked for 50 minutes, I learned *nothing*.

Consider the wrong meaning that this double-negative sentence conveys:

If the Australian Cricket Board *cannot* convince the players that security cover is *not* adequate, the Australians may withdraw from the tournament.⁵

What is the sense this sentence is trying to convey? Does the ACB know the security cover is not adequate, but cannot convince the players - in which case the players would be insisting on proceeding with the tour, not withdrawing.

Does the ACB know that the security cover is adequate, but cannot convince the players that it is so - in which case the players may withdraw from the tournament.

I think the second sense is that which the writer intended to convey, in which case the sentence should read:

If the ACB *cannot* convince the players that security cover *is* adequate, the Australians may withdraw from the tournament.

The adverbs *but*, *hardly*, *never*, *only*, *scarcely*, have negative meanings, and when used in sentences require no other word of negation.

Wrong: We did not hardly have time to read the questions.

Since *hardly* has a negative meaning, combining it with *did not* produces a faulty double negative.

Right: We did not have time to read the questions.

Right: We hardly had time to read the questions.

6. THE APOSTROPHE

The apostrophe has three uses:

- 1) to show possession or ownership in nouns and indefinite pronouns.
- 2) to show that one or more letters have been omitted from a word.
- 3) to form plurals of letters and numerals.

1. Apostrophes to show the possessive case

- A) With **singular nouns**, the apostrophe plus an s (-'s) is placed at the end of the word to indicate possession.

Australia's economy
a week's salary
a company's annual report

- B) With **plural nouns**, only an apostrophe is placed at the end of the word to indicate possession.

the two countries' economies
two weeks' salary
two companies' annual reports

- C) If a **plural noun** does not need an -s suffix to form a plural - for example, *children*, *sheep*, *mice*, *women* - then the plural noun behaves like a singular, taking -'s.

The children's bikes
The women's refuge

- D) When **singular nouns** end in -s, add -'s to indicate possession.

John Dawkins's education policy
Barry Jones's lecture
The business's fleet of vehicles

⁵ Robert Craddock, *Sunday Mail*, January 21, 1996.

- E)** When **plural nouns** end in *-s*, add the apostrophe alone to indicate possession
 The sunglasses' case (sunglasses is a word used in the plural)
 The Richmonds' house (Michael and Catherine Richmond are referred to in the plural as 'the Richmonds')
 Both the businesses' gross profit margins
- F)** **Indefinite pronouns** include *anybody, anyone, everybody, everyone, everything, neither, nobody, no-one, some and somebody*. When indicating the possessive, these behave like singulars, even if plural reference is obvious.
 That book could be anyone's.
 Everybody's property usually means nobody's property.
- G)** In **compound words or word groups**, add the *-s* only to the last word.
 Her sister-in-law's phone number
 the comrades-in-arms' morale
 the plant manager's schedule
- H)** When two or more words show **individual or separate possession**, add *-s* or an apostrophe to each of them.
 H.G's and Roy's different comedy styles
 Victoria's and Natalie's results
 The managing director's and the factory manager's parking spaces
 George's and Elizabeth's reign (they reigned separately)
 The Thomases' and the Johnsons' properties
- I)** When two or more words show **joint or combined possession**, add *-s* or an apostrophe only to the last word.
 Julia and Mathew's wedding
 Laub and Pankman's sale
 William and Mary's reign (they reigned jointly)
 the Thomases and Johnsons' fence

2. Use apostrophes to show omission or contraction.

Can not - can't	You are - you're
Will not - won't	I am - I'm
Shall not - shan't	We are - we're
Does not - doesn't	Let us - let's
Do not - don't	Who is/ has - who's
Are not - aren't	It is - it's
We will - we'll	
We have - we've	

Other commonly used phrases where an apostrophe indicates omission include:

- o'clock - of the clock
- ne'er-do-well - never-do-well
- '96 - 1996

3. YOU CAN USE AN APOSTROPHE TO FORM PLURALS OF LETTERS, NUMBERS, AND WORDS USED AS TERMS.

Note that the usage of apostrophes for this purpose varies considerably. Some people have dropped the apostrophe completely.

Mind your p's and q's

The x's equal the y's

The 1960's have been called the hippie years.

Add up all the yes's and see whether they exceed the no's.

MISUSING APOSTROPHES

A) Apostrophes *are not used* to form plurals of normal words.

Vegetable's for sale - *Wrong!*

The employers' are not happy - *Wrong!*

Key's cut while you wait - *Wrong!*

Fresh pea's - *Wrong*

B) Apostrophes *are not needed* in verbs.

He talk's - *Wrong!*

The dog barks' - *Wrong!*

C) Apostrophes *are not needed* to show possession in personal pronouns. Pronouns such as *his, hers, its, ours, yours* and *theirs* are already in possessive case and do not require an apostrophe to show possession.

The cars were their's - *Wrong!*

What is mine is your's - *Wrong!*

The team has to improve it's performance - *Wrong!*

D) Avoid using the apostrophe to form the possessive of nouns that stand for inanimate objects.

People can make a mess of the sense of a sentence when using compound possessives.

Reword the phrase using 'of the' to make the sense quite clear.

The value of the company's buildings (*not* the company's buildings' value)

The cost of the business's vehicle fleet (*not* the business's vehicle fleet's cost)

the location of the apostrophe (*not* the apostrophe's location)

the trees of the forest (*not* the forest's trees)