

Writer's Handbook

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CAPITALIZATION

- If a family title is preceded by an article (*a*, *an*, or *the*), a possessive noun (*David's*, *children's*), or a possessive pronoun (*his*, *my*, *their*, and so on), the title should not be capitalized. Otherwise, the title should be capitalized. This rule applies to most other titles of people, such as *king*, *doctor*, *judge*, and *mayor*.

My mom is a lawyer.

Uncle Norman is visiting.

I gave Dad a call.

- When a directional word refers to a definite geographical or political region, it should be capitalized. Otherwise, the word should not be capitalized.

The Civil War was fought between the North and South.

We traveled southeast for two miles.

- In titles with more than two words, capitalize the first and last word. Capitalize the words in between except for articles (*a*, *an*, *the*) and short prepositions, such as *of*, *for*, and *to*.

The Call of the Wild

- In the closing of a letter, capitalize only the first word.

Very truly yours,

ABBREVIATIONS

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

Mr. Fisher arrived at 1:15 p.m.

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

GA (Georgia) cm (centimeter)

- Two types of abbreviations are acronyms and initialisms. An acronym is a word formed from the first letter of several words. Initialisms are similar to acronyms but cannot be pronounced as words.

laser (light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation)

LOL (laughing out loud)

A Proofread Sample

Dr. ^{Pennsylvania} Doctor Gupta works in ~~PA~~. He takes the 7:45 a.m. commuter train from his neighborhood ^{miles} 24 ~~mi~~ away in ^{New Jersey} ~~NJ~~.

NUMBERS

- Numbers from zero to nine are usually written as words. Numbers 10 and higher are usually written as numerals. Some very large numbers are usually written with a combination of words and numerals.

nine 245 11.3 million

- Always use words, not numerals, to begin a sentence.
Fifteen students received awards.
- Use numerals to indicate decimals, percentages, chapters and pages, time, telephone numbers, dates, addresses, statistics, and amounts of money.

\$19.98 17.8 percent
July 17, 2013 1214 E. Lake St.

A Proofread Sample

Nevaeh's mother paid ^{\$4.50} ~~four dollars~~ and ^{one} ~~fifty cents~~ for ~~1~~ gallon of milk.

PUNCTUATION

Direct and Indirect Questions

- Certain kinds of statements are sometimes mistaken for questions and incorrectly punctuated with a question mark. Remember that in a question the main clause may begin with a helping verb such as *are*, *do*, *have*, or *can*. It may also begin with the word *how*, *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *whose*, or *why*. A question may also begin with a phrase containing one of those words, such as *about when*, *in what town*, *for how long*.

Indirect Question I was wondering where you got those sneakers.

Direct Question Where did you get those sneakers?

- This rule may sometimes be disregarded in informal or creative writing. For example, in written dialogue, a quotation such as "You like this?" may be punctuated with a question mark to show that it is spoken as a question.

Commas

1. If a sentence is made up of two independent clauses joined by the conjunction *and*, *but*, or *or*, use a comma before the conjunction.

Sabrina ran an excellent race, but Ruby was the stronger runner.

2. Separate items in a series with commas.

The band included a trumpet, a slide trombone, and kettledrums.

3. If a sentence begins with a subordinating conjunction, such as *because*, *although*, *since*, or *if*, use a comma to separate the subordinate clause from the independent clause.

Although we were tired, we finished the job.

4. Use a comma to separate an appositive from the noun it defines or explains. (An appositive is a noun or noun phrase that identifies a pronoun or another noun in the sentence.)

This is Cynthia, my cousin.

5. Use commas to separate the name of a person or group being addressed from the rest of the sentence.

The time has come, my friends, to say good-bye.

Eduardo, it's time to go.

6. Use commas to separate transition words and phrases such as “of course,” “however,” and “on the other hand” from the rest of the sentence.

You know, of course, that the rules are strict.

7. Use a comma between the name of a city and state or country. If the place name comes in the middle of a sentence, use a comma after the name of the state or country as well. This same rule applies to the month and year in a date.

I was in Tucson, Arizona, then.

8. Use a comma between the day and year of a date. If the date comes in the middle of a sentence, use a comma after the year as well. Do not use a comma if the date contains only the month and the year.

On March 12, 1972, they left.

It happened in May 2008.

9. When a quotation is followed by a phrase such as “he said” or “she asked,” use a comma after the quoted words unless they form a question or exclamation. When a quotation follows a phrase such as “he said” or “she asked,” use a comma after the phrase.

“Please have a seat,” she said.

“What time is it?” she asked.

He said, “Here’s the bus.”

Colons and Semicolons

- Use a colon in a complete sentence to introduce a list of items or a quotation.

Add the following fruit: apples, grapes, oranges, canteloupes, and bananas.

- When a sentence contains two sentences that are not joined by a conjunction such as *and*, *but*, or *or*, separate the two sentences with a semicolon.

He was tired; he hadn't slept well.

- When individual items in a series contain commas, use semicolons rather than commas to separate the items from one another.

The panel included Sidney Wong, a psychologist; Sheryl Day, Andrew Cassone, and Tina Rico, three high school students; and Kyle Adair, a journalist.

A Proofread Sample

The baseball team filled its roster with stars: Andrew Norton, catcher; Miguel Orosco, pitcher; and Juwan Rollins, shortstop.

Apostrophes

- To form the possessive of a singular noun, add an apostrophe and *-s*. For a plural noun that ends in *-s*, add only an apostrophe. If the plural noun does not end in *-s*, add an apostrophe and *-s*.

One boy's score was 17. Several others boys' scores were lower. Two women's scores were higher.

- Remember that possessive pronouns such as *its* and *hers* do not have apostrophes. *It's* always means "it is."

Give the dog its dinner.

- In a contraction, always put the apostrophe in the position of the missing letter or letters. For example, *we've* is "we have" with the letters *ha* missing. The apostrophe in *we've* appears where the letters have been left out.

does not = doesn't

A Proofread Sample

The boys' dont want to move into that house. It's bedrooms are too small to hold the boys' possessions.

Punctuating Titles and Dialogue

- Enclose the speaker’s exact words in quotation marks. If the speaker is named before the quotation, put a comma before the opening quotation marks. Put a period, question mark, or exclamation point inside the closing quotation marks if the sentence ends with the quotation.

He said, “Call me on Thursday.”

“Call me on Thursday,” he said.

“Why didn’t you call me?” he demanded.

“I just forgot!” I yelled.

- If a phrase such as “he said” or “she replied” interrupts a quotation, put quotation marks before and after both parts of the quotation.

“Where,” he asked, “are the people I invited to the party?”

“Unfortunately,” she answered sadly, “they got lost.”

- When writing the title of a short work such as a short story, poem, magazine article, or song, put the title in quotation marks.

Short Story “The Necklace”

Poem “Birches”

Article “A New Way to Get Fit”

Song “Achy Breaky Heart”

- When writing the title of a longer work such as a book, magazine, newspaper, movie, play, or symphony, underline the title if you are writing by hand. If you are using a computer, write the title in italics. The titles of ships and paintings are also underlined or written in italics.

Book The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn or *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Newspaper The New York Times or *The New York Times*

Movie Home Alone or *Home Alone*

Painting Mona Lisa or *Mona Lisa*

A Proofread Sample

“Did you finish reading “To Kill a Mockingbird” for class?” Reina asked.”

“I did not,” Max replied. “I played soccer with my brother instead.”

SPELLING

Compound Words

- Compound words, which are made up of two or more smaller words, may be written in one of three ways—open, as in *ice cream*; hyphenated, as in *son-in-law*; or closed, as in *paperback*. The only way to know how to write compound words correctly is to memorize them or to look them up in a dictionary.
- Here are some familiar compound words.

Open	Hyphenated	Closed
best man	all-purpose	backbone
fire engine	cross-country	background
fire escape	down-to-earth	basketball
police car	fair-minded	everything
roller coaster	grown-up	lifesaver
seat belt	second-rate	nevertheless
time frame	well-being	rainfall

Homophones

- When words sound alike but have different meanings, they may also be spelled differently. Be sure to use the appropriate spelling. If in doubt, check the dictionary.

- Here are some familiar words that sound alike but are spelled differently.

accept, except	groan, grown	rap, wrap
berry, bury	heard, herd	right, write
board, bored	hole, whole	shear, sheer
brake, break	hour, our	soar, sore
bridal, bridle	it's, its	stationary, stationery
buy, by	know, no	steal, steel
capital, capitol	main, mane	their, there, they're
coarse, course	muscle, mussel	threw, through
core, corps	passed, past	to, too, two
cymbal, symbol	peace, piece	vain, vane, vein
die, dye	plain, plane	ware, wear
fair, fare	pore, pour	weather, whether
foreword, forward	principal, principle	which, witch
forth, fourth	profit, prophet	yolk, yoke
foul, fowl	quarts, quartz	your, you're

A Proofread Sample

Last summer I got so ~~board~~^{bored.} I met a ~~hole~~^{whole} bunch of my mom's family and we went to ~~they're~~^{their} town. They took us to a ~~fare~~^{fair} with a roller~~coaster,~~[#] and we all ate ice~~cream.~~^{cream.}

GRAMMAR

Subject-Verb Agreement

- A present-tense verb whose subject is singular usually has an *-s* or *-es* ending added to its base form: *The girl smiles.* A present-tense verb whose subject is plural usually does not have an ending added to its base form: *The girls smile.*

James walks to school.

These flowers smell good.

- **EXCEPTION:** If the subject is the singular pronoun *I* or *you*, the verb does not have an ending added to its base form: *I smile.*
- Keep in mind that not all plural subjects end in *-s*. For example, *we* and *they* are plural subjects. A compound subject joined by *and*, such as *Manuel and Suzanne*, is also plural.

We dance well together.

Sam and Edgar live here.

- If a compound subject is joined by *or*, *either/or*, or *neither/nor*, the verb agrees with the subject that is nearer to it. (Two singular subjects joined by these conjunctions are *not* considered plural, as they are when joined by *and*.)

Seung or Diego always wins.

Neither Jasmine nor her brothers like bowling.

A Proofread Sample

They all walks to school. Neither Jake nor his friends likes to run.

Use of the Past Participle

- When a verb is preceded by *has*, *have*, or *had*, use the past participle form of that verb. The past participle form may be the same as the past form (*he said*; *he had said*), but often it is different (*she sang*; *she has sung*).

They have eaten.

- If you are not sure whether a verb has a past participle form that is different from its past form, look up the verb in a dictionary.
- Here are some familiar verbs whose past participle form is different from their past form.

Base Form	Past	Past Participle
blow	blew	blown
break	broke	broken
choose	chose	chosen
drink	drank	drunk
drive	drove	driven
fall	fell	fallen
fly	flew	flown
forget	forgot	forgotten
freeze	froze	frozen

Base Form	Past	Past Participle
give	gave	given
go	went	gone
know	knew	known
lie	lay	lain
ride	rode	ridden
ring	rang	rung
rise	rose	risen
see	saw	seen
sink	sank	sunk
speak	spoke	spoken
swim	swam	swum
take	took	taken
wear	wore	worn
write	wrote	written

A Proofread Sample

James ^{took} ~~take~~ his sister to the zoo.
 They ^{ate} ~~eat~~ fruit and ^{drank} ~~drinks~~
 cold lemonade. They ^{swam} ~~swimm~~ in
 the pool when they ^{came} ~~comes~~ home.

Subject and Object Pronouns

- The personal pronouns are listed below. Learn which ones are subject pronouns and which are object pronouns.

Subject Pronouns	Object Pronouns
I, you, he, she, it, we, they	me, you, him, her, it, us, them

- When a pronoun is used as the subject of a sentence, use a subject pronoun.

We and they are cousins.

- When a pronoun is an object of a verb or preposition, use an object pronoun.

Monty sat between Charlotte and me.

- When a pronoun follows *is*, *are*, or *was* (or any other form of the verb *to be*) and refers to the subject of the sentence, use a subject pronoun.

Hello? Yes, this is she.

- The pronouns *we* and *us* sometimes precede a noun for emphasis or clarity. If the noun is the subject of a verb, use the subject pronoun *we*. If the noun is the object of a verb or preposition, use the object pronoun *us*.

We girls are ready.

David helped us boys.

- Do not use any other personal pronoun, such as *them*, in this way.

Althea ate those brownies.

A Proofread Sample

My aunt and ^I ~~me~~ went to the
 movies. My mom met Susan and ^{us} ~~we~~
 there.

Reflexive and Intensive Pronouns

- There are only two correct uses for a pronoun that ends in *-self* or *-selves*:
 1. to refer to an earlier noun or pronoun in the sentence

Carlo served Luis and himself.

2. to emphasize a noun or pronoun that has already been mentioned

The queen herself was there!

- There is no such word as *hisself* or *theirselves*. Use *himself* or *themselves*.

He taught himself.

They taught themselves.

A Proofread Sample

Juan taught ^{himself}~~hisself~~ to play soccer.

Modifiers

- Adjectives and adverbs are both modifiers (words or word groups that add to the meaning of another word). Adjectives are used to describe nouns and pronouns. Adverbs are used to describe verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs.

She sings beautifully.

He was really kind.

- Add the *-er* ending to a modifier (or use the words *more* or *less* if the *-er* ending sounds awkward) when comparing two things. When comparing more than two things, add the *-est* ending (or use the words *most* or *least* if the *-est* ending sounds awkward).

Which of the two bags is heavier?

Of my three brothers, Sean is the most annoying.

- Don't use the words *more/less* and *most/least* with adjectives that have *-er* or *-est* added to their base form.

She is the nicest person.

A Proofread Sample

Emma, Grace, and Faith play piano ^{well}~~good~~. Grace plays ^{better}~~gooder~~ than her sisters. She learns new songs the ^{est}~~most~~ fast of everyone in her class.

Double Negatives

- Don't use two negative words to express one negative idea.

That won't do any good.

That will do no good.

A Proofread Sample

Han cannot have ~~no~~ ice cream.

Sentence Fragments

- To be a sentence, a group of words must contain a subject (which tells who or what the sentence is mainly about) and a predicate (which tells what the subject is or does). A sentence must also express a complete thought.

Fragment	Sentence
Is feeling fine.	Adam is feeling fine.
A very large crowd.	A very large crowd showed up.
Although Jo was late.	Although Jo was late, she got a seat.

A Proofread Sample

Although it was raining, Mark and I ^Walked to the store.

Run-on Sentences

- A run-on sentence is two or more complete sentences that are incorrectly run together as one. You can correct a run-on by adding a comma and coordinating conjunction or by turning each complete thought into a separate sentence.

A strong wind shook the trees, and raindrops pelted the windows.

**A strong wind shook the trees.
Raindrops pelted the windows.**

A Proofread Sample

The airplane passed overhead, the trees shook in the wind.

STYLE

Parallel Structure

- When you have a pair or series of items in a sentence, use the same grammatical form to express each item.

In summer I like hiking, playing baseball, and taking naps.

In summer I like to hike, play baseball, and take naps.

Consistent Tenses

- When telling a story or describing an event, don't switch from past tense to present or from present to past unless you have a good reason for doing so.

Nathan was a restless young man. One day he decided to drive across the country.

A Proofread Sample

Sean likes to write and ^{play} playing basketball. He played on a team with his friends and ^{scored} scores lots of points.