ENGLISH GRAMMAR · UNITS 1–24 · QUICK REFERENCE

English Grammar & Punctuation

Grades 6–12 · College · 8 pages

Parts of speech · sentence parts, phrases and clauses · sentence types · Reed–Kellogg diagrams · tenses, mood and voice · agreement · pronoun case · modifiers · parallelism · punctuation · capitals · confused words · usage · editing checklist

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1 THE EIGHT PARTS OF SPEECH

Part	What it does (course definition)	Ask	Examples
Noun	names a person, place, thing, or idea	Can *a, an, the* go before it?	*shepherd, Bethlehem, courage*
Pronoun	takes the place of a noun	Which noun does it stand for?	*I, him, whose, each, myself*
Verb	shows action or being	Does it change for time?	*build, pray, is, seem*
Adjective	modifies a noun or a pronoun	What kind? Which one? How many?	*brave, three, the, Roman*
Adverb	modifies a verb, an adjective or another adverb	How? When? Where? To what extent?	*gladly, soon, there, very*
Preposition	shows how a noun or pronoun is related to another word	Does an object end the phrase?	*in, over, of, through*
Conjunction	joins words or groups of words	Equal parts, or a clause tied on?	*and, but, either … or, because*
Interjection	shows feeling	Can it stand alone with ! or a comma?	*Oh, Alas, Hurrah, Behold*

The **job in the sentence** decides: *Light the lamp* (verb); *a light rain* (adjective); *the light of the world* (noun); *Look up* (adverb); *up the hill* (preposition).

One sentence, all eight parts

Alas,	*the*	*weary*	*sailors*	*and*	*their*	*captain*	*rowed*	*slowly*	*toward*	*the*	*rocky*	*shore.*
interj.	adj.	adj.	noun	conj.	pron.	noun	verb	adv.	prep.	adj.	adj.	noun

The, *a* and *an* are **articles**, a kind of adjective; *their* is a possessive pronoun (some books call it an adjective). An interjection stands apart with ! or a comma: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock" (Revelation 3:20, KJV).

MEMORY TRICK **Eight jobs in order**

New **P**ilgrims **V**isit **A**ncient **A**bbeys, **P**ray, **C**hant, **I**nquire: noun, pronoun, verb, adjective, adverb, preposition, conjunction, interjection.

Nouns

Kind of noun	Examples
Common · proper	*river · the Jordan*
Concrete · abstract	*bread, bell · mercy, courage*
Collective (one group)	*flock, choir, jury, family*
Compound	*grandfather, high school, son-in-law*
Count · mass	*eggs, chores · flour, snow*
Possessive	*the ox's yoke, the boys' boots*

Plurals

Plural rule	Examples
most: add **-s**	*lamps, kings*
-s, -sh, -ch, -x, -z: **-es**	*boxes, churches*
consonant + y: **-ies**	*cities* (but *days*)
-f, -fe: often **-ves**	*loaves, wives* (but *roofs*)
irregular	*children, mice, oxen, teeth, geese*
same both ways	*sheep, deer, swine*

Personal pronouns

Person	Nominative	Objective	Possessive
1st sing.	I	me	my, mine
2nd	you	you	your, yours
3rd sing.	he, she, it	him, her, it	his, her, hers, its
1st plural	we	us	our, ours
3rd plural	they	them	their, theirs

KJV: *thou, thee, thy, thine*; plural *ye*. Generic *he* means anyone: "Train up a child in the way he should go" (Proverbs 22:6, KJV).

Other pronouns

- **Reflexive, intensive**: *myself, ourselves …* **Demonstrative**: *this, that, these, those.* **Interrogative, relative**: *who, whom, whose, which, what, that.* **Indefinite**: *each, everyone, both, all, none.*

MEMORY TRICK

23 helping verbs (Traditional)

Helping + main verb = **verb phrase** (*has been singing*). The chant: *am, is, are, was, were, be, being, been · has, have, had · do, does, did · may, might, must · can, could · shall, should · will, would.*

Adjectives & adverbs

- **Articles**: *a* before a consonant sound, *an* before a vowel sound: *a university*, *an hour*. Many adverbs end in *-ly*, but not all (*soon, very*); some *-ly* words are adjectives (*a friendly dog*).

Prepositions (common)

- *about, above, across, after, against, along, among, around, at, before, behind, below, beneath, beside, between, beyond, by, down, during, except, for, from, in, inside, into, like, near, of, off, on, onto, out, over, past, since, through, to, toward, under, until, up, upon, with, within, without.*

Conjunctions

Conjunction	Words	Joins
Coordinating	*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*	equal parts
Correlative (pairs)	*both … and, either … or, neither … nor, not only … but also, whether … or*	equal parts
Subordinating	*after, although, because, if, since, unless, until, when, while*	a dependent clause

FANBOYS (Traditional): **F**or **A**nd **N**or **B**ut **O**r **Y**et **S**o.

2 SENTENCE PARTS & COMPLEMENTS

A sentence

- A **sentence** is a group of words that expresses a complete thought. It needs a **subject** (whom or what it is about) and a **predicate** (what the subject does or is).
- **Simple subject** = the main word of the complete subject; **verb** (simple predicate) = the main word of the complete predicate.

Finding the subject

- Find the verb first, then ask *who?* or *what?* before it.
- Cross out prepositional phrases: the subject is never inside one. *One (of the apples)* ***is*** *ripe.*

Subjects and predicates

Part	Example (bold = the part)
Complete subject	***The tall oak by the gate*** *fell.*
Compound subject	***Ruth and Naomi*** *walked home.*
Compound predicate	*Ruth* ***gleaned and threshed*** *the barley.*
Understood subject	*(**You**) Shut the door.*
Inverted order	*Over the hill* ***rode*** *the* ***riders****.*
Expletive *there*	*There* ***are*** *two* ***wells****. (there* is not the subject)

MEMORY TRICK **Arrow or equals sign?**
An **action** verb is an arrow: *Ruth → barley* (DO). A **linking** verb is an equals sign: *David = king* (PN); *lamb = gentle* (PA).

Six sentence patterns

Pattern	Example
S – V	*The baby slept.*
S – V – DO	*Mother baked bread.*
S – V – IO – DO	*Mother baked us bread.*
S – LV – PN	*Paul was a tentmaker.*
S – LV – PA	*The figs were sweet.*
S – V – DO – OC	*The town elected Ben mayor.*

Tests

- **Linking or action?** Try *is* in its place: *The soup* ***tasted*** *salty* (linking); *Ben* ***tasted*** *the soup* (action).
- **Indirect object?** It sits between the verb and the DO with *to/for* understood: *gave (to) Ruth bread. Gave bread* ***to Ruth*** is a prepositional phrase.

The five complements

Complement	After	Answers	Example
Direct object (DO)	action verb	whom? what?	*Ruth gleaned* ***barley****.*
Indirect object (IO)	action verb, before a DO	to or for whom/what?	*Boaz gave* ***Ruth*** *bread.*
Predicate nominative (PN)	linking verb	renames the subject	*David became* ***king****.*
Predicate adjective (PA)	linking verb	describes the subject	*The lamb was* ***gentle****.*
Objective complement (OC)	a direct object	renames or describes the DO	*They named the boy* ***John****. Rain made the road* ***muddy****.*

A **complement** completes the verb. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." (Genesis 1:1, KJV): two direct objects. "God is love." (1 John 4:8, KJV): a predicate nominative.

3 PHRASES, VERBALS & CLAUSES

Phrase or clause?

- A **phrase** lacks a subject and its verb: *in the morning*, *to help Father*. A **clause** has both: *when the cock crowed*, *Peter wept*.

MEMORY TRICK **Pair or spare**
A **clause** has the pair (subject + verb); a **phrase** is spare: it never has both.

Phrases

- **Adjective phrase** (prepositional) modifies a noun: *the house* ***on the rock***. **Adverb phrase**: *built* ***on the rock***. **Appositive**: *Paul,* ***a tentmaker***. **Verb phrase**: *had been sleeping*.

Verbals (verb forms used as other parts of speech)

Verbal	Form	Works as	Example
Participle	*-ing* (present) or *-ed/-en* (past)	adjective	*the* ***barking*** *dog;* ***Tired*** *from the climb, Ruth rested.*
Gerund	*-ing*	noun	***Swimming*** *is good exercise.*
Infinitive	*to* + plain verb	noun, adjective or adverb	*Ben wants* ***to learn****. A time* ***to plant****. Eager* ***to help****.*

Is an *-ing* word a gerund? Replace it with *it*: ***Swimming*** *is good → It is good* (gerund). With a helping verb it is the main verb: *is swimming*.

Clauses

- **Independent** clause: expresses a complete thought; can stand alone: *the river rose*.
- **Dependent** (subordinate) clause: has a subject and verb but cannot stand alone: *because the river rose*.

Relative pronouns

- A **relative pronoun** begins an adjective clause, relates it to a noun, and does a job inside the clause: subject, object or possessive.
- Careful writers use *who/whom* for persons, *which* for things, *that* for either. The KJV also uses *which* for persons, normal English in 1611: "Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13, KJV).

Three kinds of dependent clauses

Dependent clause	Job	Often begins with	Example
Adjective clause	modifies a noun or pronoun	*who, whom, whose, which, that, where, when*	*The barn* ***that Grandfather built*** *still stands.*
Adverb clause	modifies a verb, adjective or adverb	*after, although, because, if, since, unless, until, when, while*	***When the bell rang,*** *we ran.*
Noun clause	subject, object, PN, object of a preposition	*that, whether, if, what, who, whoever, how, why*	"For I know that my redeemer liveth" (Job 19:25, KJV)

4 SENTENCE TYPES & SENTENCE ERRORS

Four kinds of sentences

Kind (purpose)	Does	Ends	Example
Declarative	tells	.	"Jesus wept." (John 11:35, KJV)
Interrogative	asks	?	"The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" (Psalm 27:1, KJV)
Imperative	commands or requests	. or !	"Call me Ishmael." (Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 1851)
Exclamatory	shows strong feeling	!	"O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!" (Psalm 8:1, KJV)

Four sentence structures

Structure	Clauses	Example
Simple	1 independent	*The ice cracked.*
Compound	2+ independent	"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever." (Isaiah 40:8, KJV)
Complex	1 independent + 1 or more dependent	"When I was a child, I spake as a child" (1 Corinthians 13:11, KJV)
Compound-complex	2+ independent + 1 or more dependent	*When the storm passed, the birds sang, and we went outside.*

MEMORY TRICK **Count the clauses**
Only independent clauses: one = **simple**, two or more = **compound**. Add a dependent clause: **complex** (one independent) or **compound-complex** (two or more).

Three sentence errors

Fragment lacks a subject, a verb or a complete thought: *Because the river rose.*

Run-on two sentences with nothing between: *The river rose the bridge closed.*

Comma splice two sentences joined by a comma alone: *The river rose, the bridge closed.*

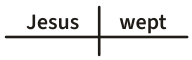
Four ways to fix a run-on or splice FIX IT

The river rose. The bridge closed. — *period*
The river rose; the bridge closed. — *semicolon*
The river rose, so the bridge closed. — *comma + FANBOYS*
Because the river rose, the bridge closed. — *make one dependent*

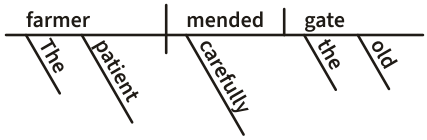
⚠ Common slips
- *However, therefore, then* are not conjunctions: *X rose, however the* (splice) ✓ *rose; however, the*.
- A long phrase or a lone dependent clause is still a fragment.

5 DIAGRAMMING BASICS (REED–KELLOGG)

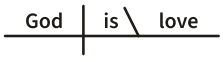
The map
- **Baseline**: subject | verb (the **divider** crosses the line).
- Direct object after a short **upright** line; predicate nominative or adjective, and an objective complement, after a line **slanting back** toward the subject.
- Modifiers on **slanted lines** under the word they modify; a prepositional phrase on a slant with its object on a level line.
- Indirect object on a level line under the verb, joined by an empty slant.



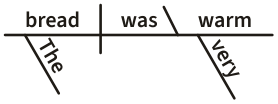
"Jesus wept." (John 11:35, KJV): subject | verb.



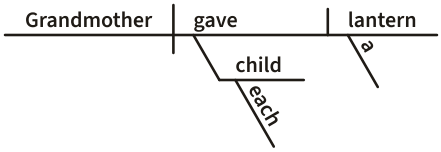
The patient farmer mended the old gate carefully. Adjectives under the nouns, the adverb under the verb.



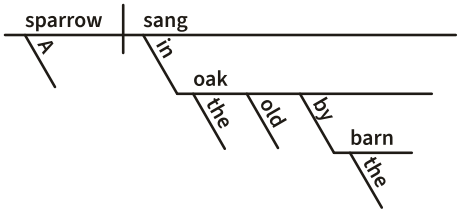
"God is love." (1 John 4:8, KJV): the slant line points back to the subject.



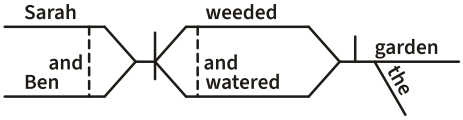
The bread was very warm. Very modifies the adjective *warm*.



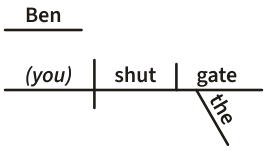
Grandmother gave each child a lantern. Indirect object under the verb.



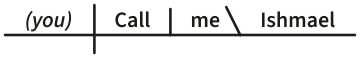
A sparrow sang in the old oak by the barn. Adverb phrase under *sang*, adjective phrase under *oak*.



Sarah and Ben weeded and watered the garden. Compound parts fork.



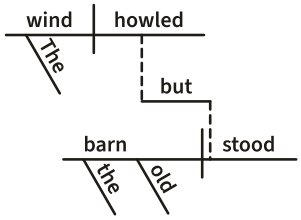
Ben, shut the gate. Understood (you); direct address on its own line.



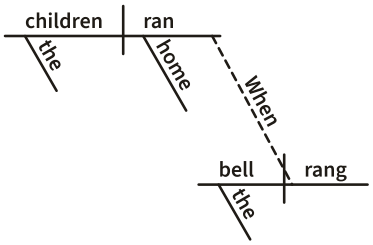
"Call me Ishmael." (Melville, *Moby-Dick*): DO *me*, objective complement *Ishmael*.

How to diagram
1. Find the verb; put it after the divider.
2. Find the subject (ask *who?* or *what?*).
3. Find any complement: DO, IO, PN, PA or OC.
4. Hang single-word modifiers under their words.
5. Hang each prepositional phrase under the word it modifies.
6. Give each clause its own baseline and join them.
7. Check: every word appears once; an understood word goes in parentheses.

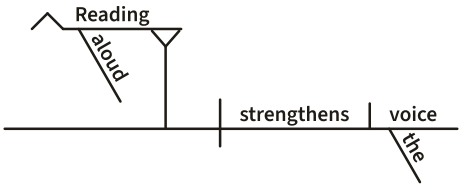
6 DIAGRAMMING CLAUSES & VERBALS



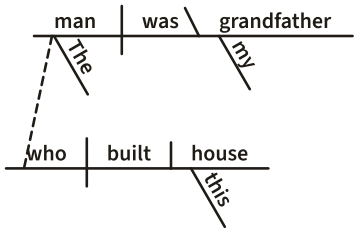
The wind howled, but the old barn stood. Compound: a dashed step with the conjunction joins the verbs.



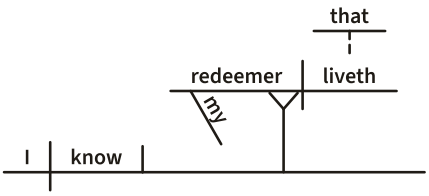
When the bell rang, the children ran home. Adverb clause: the conjunction rides a dashed line.



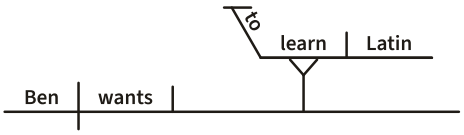
Reading aloud strengthens the voice. Gerund phrase on a stilt as the subject.



The man who built this house was my grandfather. Adjective clause: dashed line from noun to relative pronoun.



"I know that my redeemer liveth" (Job 19:25, KJV). Noun clause on a stilt as the DO; *that* only introduces it.



Ben wants to learn Latin. Infinitive phrase on a stilt as the direct object; *to* on the slant.

Also

- **Semicolon**: a dashed step with no word. **Interjection**, *there*: a line above the subject. **Appositive**: in parentheses. **Participle**: a bent line under its noun.

7 VERBS: PRINCIPAL PARTS & TENSES

Four principal parts

- **Present** *walk* · **present participle** *(is) walking* · **past** *walked* · **past participle** *(has) walked*.
- **Regular** verbs add *-d* or *-ed*; **irregular** verbs are learned by heart.

MEMORY TRICK **The past stands alone**

The past needs no helper: *I **saw**, she **went**.* The past participle always has one: *I **have seen**, she **has gone**.* Never *I seen*, *had went*.

The six tenses of *walk*

Tense	Simple	Progressive form	Use
Present	*I walk*	*I am walking*	now; habit; general truth
Past	*I walked*	*I was walking*	finished before now
Future	*I will walk*	*I will be walking*	later
Present perfect	*I have walked*	*I have been walking*	done at some time before now, or still going on
Past perfect	*I had walked*	*I had been walking*	done before another past time
Future perfect	*I will have walked*	*I will have been walking*	done before a future time

Perfect: *has, have, had, will have* + past participle. **Emphatic**: *I did walk*. Formal: *I shall, we shall* for the future.

Irregular patterns

- *sing, sang, sung* · *bring, brought, brought* · *take, took, taken* · *put, put, put*. There is no *brang*, *brung* or *drownded*.

Consistent tense

- Keep one tense unless the time really changes. *✗ Ben **opened** the door and **sees** a fox. ✓ Ben **opened** the door and **saw** a fox.*

Irregular verbs: present · past · past participle (with *has, have, had*)

Present	Past	Past part.	Present	Past	Past part.	Present	Past	Past part.	Present	Past	Past part.
be	was, were	been	do	did	done	grow	grew	grown	sing	sang	sung
begin	began	begun	draw	drew	drawn	know	knew	known	sink	sank	sunk
bite	bit	bitten	drink	drank	drunk	lay	laid	laid	sit	sat	sat
blow	blew	blown	drive	drove	driven	lead	led	led	speak	spoke	spoken
break	broke	broken	eat	ate	eaten	lie	lay	lain	steal	stole	stolen
bring	brought	brought	fall	fell	fallen	ride	rode	ridden	swim	swam	swum
build	built	built	fly	flew	flown	ring	rang	rung	take	took	taken
burst	burst	burst	forget	forgot	forgotten	rise	rose	risen	teach	taught	taught
buy	bought	bought	freeze	froze	frozen	run	ran	run	tear	tore	torn
catch	caught	caught	get	got	got, gotten	see	saw	seen	throw	threw	thrown
choose	chose	chosen	give	gave	given	set	set	set	wear	wore	worn
come	came	come	go	went	gone	shake	shook	shaken	write	wrote	written

8 MOOD, VOICE & TROUBLESOME VERBS

Voice

Voice	Subject	Example
Active	does the action	*Ben broke the window.*
Passive (be + past participle)	receives the action	*The window was broken (by Ben).*

A **transitive** verb has a direct object (*Ruth **carried** the basket*); an **intransitive** verb has none (*The child **slept***); only transitive verbs have a passive. Prefer the active; use the passive when the doer is unknown or unimportant: "Ask, and it shall be given you" (Matthew 7:7, KJV).

MEMORY TRICK **By whom?**
Passive test: can you add *by someone* after the verb and still make sense? *The gate was left open (by someone)*: passive.

Three moods

Mood	Use	Example
Indicative	states a fact or asks a question	*The wheat is ripe.*
Imperative	gives a command or request	*Close the gate.*
Subjunctive	a wish; an untrue condition; a demand in a *that* clause	*If I **were** you … I ask that he **be** here.*

Subjunctive in prayers and fixed sayings: "Hallowed be thy name." (Matthew 6:9, KJV) "Thy kingdom come." (Luke 11:2, KJV) "God bless us every one!" (Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 1843).

Shifts
- A **shift** is a needless change in tense, voice or mood. *X **Mix** the flour; then you **should add** eggs. ✓ **Mix** the flour; then **add** eggs.*

Troublesome verbs

Verb	Means	Principal parts	Object?
lie	rest, recline	lie, lying, lay, lain	never
lay	put, place	lay, laying, laid, laid	always
sit	be seated	sit, sitting, sat, sat	never
set	put, place	set, setting, set, set	always
rise	go up, get up	rise, rising, rose, risen	never
raise	lift something	raise, raising, raised, raised	always

Lay is also the past of *lie*: *Today I **lie** down; yesterday I **lay** down; I have **lain** here.*

MEMORY TRICK **Put, place, lift**
If *put*, *place* or *lift* fits, use **lay**, **set** or **raise**: they need an object. Otherwise use **lie**, **sit** or **rise**.

9 AGREEMENT

Subject and verb
- A verb agrees with its subject in **number**: singular with singular, plural with plural. *The lamb **runs**. The lambs **run**.*

Subject–verb agreement

Rule	Example
Ignore words between subject and verb	*The box (of apples) **is** heavy.*
Subjects joined by *and*: plural	*Bread and milk **are** here.* (one thing: *Bread and butter **is** …*)
or, nor, either … or, neither … nor: the **nearer subject rule**	*Neither the boys nor their father **was** late.*
Singular: *each, either, neither, one*, and every *-one, -body, -thing* word	*Each of the girls **has** a lamp.*
Always plural: *both, few, many, several*	*Several **were** absent.*
all, any, most, none, some: follow the *of* noun	*Some of the pie **is** gone. Some of the pies **are** gone.*
Collective noun: one unit → singular; members acting separately → plural	*The choir **sings** well. The choir **are** taking their seats.*
Inverted order, *there*, *here*: the subject follows the verb	*There **are** three eggs. Here **comes** the train.*
Plural form, singular meaning; one sum	*The news **is** good. Ten dollars **is** enough.*
A linking verb agrees with its subject, not the PN	*The best part **was** the songs.*
who/that clause: agrees with the antecedent	*one of those men who **work** hard*

Pronoun and antecedent
- A pronoun agrees with its **antecedent** in number and gender: *The geese flapped **their** wings. Ruth fed **her** calf.*
- Joined by *and*: plural. By *or*, *nor*: the nearer one: *Neither Ruth nor Naomi lost **her** way.*

Everyone … his
- For men and women together, traditional English uses **his** (*Everyone must do **his** best*) or **his or her**: "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God." (Romans 14:12, KJV)
- Or make it plural: *All the students brought **their** slates.* Casual *Everyone did their best* is not careful writing.

MEMORY TRICK **Cover the phrase**
Put your finger over the *of* phrase and read again: *Neither (of the girls) forgot **her** hymnal. One (of the cows) **has** a calf.* (Exception: *all, any, most, none, some* follow the *of* noun.)

10 PARALLEL STRUCTURE

The rule
- **Parallel structure** uses the same grammatical form for ideas of equal importance: words with words, phrases with phrases, clauses with clauses.
- Good style: "A time to be born, and a time to die;" (Ecclesiastes 3:2, KJV). "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," (Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, 1859).

Make it parallel FIX IT
X Ruth likes sewing, to bake, and long walks.
*✓ Ruth likes **sewing**, **baking** and **walking**.*
three gerunds
X She not only sings but also the piano.
*✓ She **not only sings** but also **plays** the piano.*
correlatives

MEMORY TRICK **Match the first one**
Whatever form the first item takes (*-ing*, *to* + verb, a clause), give it to every item in the list, and to the words after *both … and*, *either … or*, *not only … but also*.

11 PRONOUN CASE & REFERENCE

Three cases

Case	Used for	Forms
Nominative	subject; predicate nominative	*I, he, she, we, they, who*
Objective	DO, IO, object of a preposition	*me, him, her, us, them, whom*
Possessive	ownership; before a gerund	*my, his, her, its, our, their, whose*

*It is **I**.* (PN after *be*). *We were glad of **his** coming* (before a gerund).

Who or whom?

- *Who* (nominative) = subject or PN; *whom* (objective) = object. Take the case from the job **inside its own clause**: *Give it to **whoever** asks* (subject of *asks*). *The man **whom** we met* (object of *met*).

Pronoun case pitfalls

Trouble spot	Test	Right
Compounds	drop the other noun	*Ben and **I** went.* (*I went*) · *for Ruth and **me*** (*for me*)
After *than* or *as*	finish the clause	*taller than **I** (am)*; *likes Ben more than (she likes) **me***
We or *us* + noun	drop the noun	***We** boys swam.* · *a gift for **us** girls*
After *between, except, like*	objective after a preposition	*between you and **me***
-self words	only to reflect or stress	*X Ben and myself ✓ Ben and I*

MEMORY TRICK

He = who, him = whom (Traditional)

Answer the question with *he* or *him*. *(Who/whom) called? He* called → **who**. *(Who/whom) did you call?* I called *him* → **whom**. **M**atches **m**.

Clear reference

- **Ambiguous**: *X When Tom met Ben, he smiled.* (Which one?) *✓ Tom smiled when he met Ben.*
- **Vague** *this, which, it, they*: *X They say it will rain. ✓ The almanac says it will rain.*

12 MODIFIERS

Adjective or adverb?

- After a **linking** verb, an adjective: *I feel **bad**.* After an **action** verb, an adverb: *He played **badly**.*
- *Good* is an adjective; *well* is an adverb, except when it means *healthy*: *The choir sang **well**. Grandfather is **well**.*

Degrees of comparison

Positive	Comparative (2)	Superlative (3+)
tall	*taller*	*tallest*
careful	*more careful*	*most careful*
good, well	*better*	*best*
bad, badly	*worse*	*worst*
many, much	*more*	*most*
little (amount)	*less*	*least*

One syllable: *-er, -est*; three or more: *more, most*; two: by sound (*happier*, *more famous*).

Errors to avoid

- **Double comparison**: *X more taller*. Lewis Carroll broke the rule for a joke: "Curiouser and curiouser!" cried Alice (*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 1865).
- **Double negative**: *X We don't have no bread. ✓ We have no bread* or *We don't have any bread. Hardly* and *scarcely* are negatives: *X can't hardly*.
- **Absolute adjectives** (*unique, perfect, complete*) do not take *more*: *✓ more nearly perfect*.

Logical comparisons

- Compare like with like: *X Ben's horse is faster than Tom. ✓ faster than **Tom's***. Leave the subject out of the group: *✓ taller than any **other** boy*.

Misplaced and dangling modifiers

Problem	Wrong	Right
Misplaced	*We almost ate the whole pie.*	*We ate almost the whole pie.*
Squinting	*Running often strengthens the heart.*	*Running strengthens the heart often.*
Dangling	*Walking to church, the rain began.*	*Walking to church, we felt the rain begin.*
Only	*Ben only ate the plums.*	*Ben ate only the plums.*

MEMORY TRICK

Who is doing it?

An opening *-ing* or *to* phrase must be followed at once by the person who does it. If the next word cannot walk to church, the phrase **dangles**.

13 CAPITALIZATION

Capitalize	Examples
first word of a sentence and of a quoted sentence; *I*	*Mother said, "It is ready."*
people, places, nations, languages	*Abigail, Boston, Spain, Latin*
proper adjectives	*Roman, Christian, Swiss*
God, the Lord, the Bible, Scripture and its books	*Genesis, the Gospels*
days, months, holidays (not seasons)	*Sunday, March, Easter*; *spring*
titles with or as a name	*Uncle Ned, Mother*; *my mother*

Capitalize	Examples
regions, not directions	*the South*; *drive south*
events, periods, documents	*the Reformation, the Magna Carta*
organizations, ships, buildings	*the Red Cross, the Mayflower*
titles of works: first, last, important words	*The Wind in the Willows*
languages, numbered courses	*Latin, Algebra I*; *history*

Pronouns for God may be capitalized or not; the KJV does not. Be consistent. *god* (false gods) and *gospel* (the good news) are lowercase.

MEMORY TRICK

One particular

If the word names **one particular** person, place, thing, day or event, it gets a capital: *a river / the Jordan River*; *my aunt / Aunt Ruth*.

Lowercase

- *a, an, the*, short prepositions and conjunctions inside titles (*The Pilgrim's Progress*); *the president* without a name; *sun, moon, earth* in ordinary use.

14 COMMAS

Twelve comma rules

#	Use a comma …	Example
1	between three or more items in a **series**, and before *and* (**serial comma**)	*bread, cheese, and apples*
2	before a coordinating conjunction joining two **independent clauses**	*The rain stopped, and we ran outside.*
3	after an **introductory** word, participial phrase, two prepositional phrases, or adverb clause	*Yes, I'll come. When the bell rang, we ran.*
4	around a **nonrestrictive** (nonessential) clause or phrase	*My uncle, who farms in Ohio, wrote.*
5	around an **appositive** that is not needed to identify	"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ," (Romans 1:1, KJV)
6	to set off a noun of **direct address**	"Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1, KJV)
7	around **interrupters** and conjunctive adverbs	*The plan, however, failed.*
8	between **coordinate adjectives** (test: reverse them or put *and* between)	"Our master was a good, kind man." (Anna Sewell, *Black Beauty*, 1877)
9	in **dates** and **addresses**, and after the year or state mid-sentence	*On July 4, 1776, in Boston, Massachusetts, …*
10	between a **speaker tag** and a quotation	*Mother said, "Supper is ready."*
11	before a **contrast** or a short **tag question**	*It was Ben, not Tom. You fed the hens, didn't you?*
12	after the greeting and closing of a **friendly letter**	*Dear Grandmother, … Your loving grandson,*

Restrictive or not?

- **Restrictive** (essential): needed to tell *which one*; no commas. *The man **who called** is here.* **Nonrestrictive**: extra information; commas. *Mr. Hale, **who called**, is here.*
- American usage: *that* for restrictive clauses, *which* (with commas) for nonrestrictive.

⚠ Never put a comma

- between a subject and its verb: *X The tall man in the gray coat, is our pastor.*
- between a verb and its object, or after a conjunction: *X We bought, bread and, milk.*
- between two independent clauses alone (comma splice), or before a restrictive clause.

MEMORY TRICK **Name it or leave it out**

A comma is not a breath mark. Before you write one, name its rule (1–12). No rule, no comma.

15 OTHER PUNCTUATION

Semicolons, colons, dashes and more

Mark	Use	Example
; semicolon	joins two closely related independent clauses; before a conjunctive adverb; between series items that contain commas	*The sun set; the stars came out. We waited; however, no one came. Dover, Delaware; Salem, Oregon; and Troy, New York*
: colon	after a complete sentence, to introduce a list, an explanation or a long quotation; also 6:30, John 3:16, *Dear Sir:*	*Bring three things: a lamp, a rope and a knife. X The colors are: red and blue.*
— dash	a sudden break, or words set off for emphasis	*The answer—if there is one—lies in the hills.*
– en dash	ranges of numbers and dates	*pages 10–14; 1861–1865*
- hyphen	compound adjectives before a noun; numbers 21–99; fractions used as adjectives; *self-, ex-, all-*	*a well-built house* (but *the house is well built*); *twenty-one*; *a two-thirds vote*
( ) parentheses	an aside less important than the sentence	*The ark (a large boat) had three decks.*
[ ] brackets	your words inside a quotation	"He [Paul] wrote often."
… ellipsis	words left out of a quotation	"In the beginning God created … the earth."

No hyphen after an *-ly* adverb: *a carefully built wall*. Use the dash sparingly: one pair per sentence at most.

Apostrophes

Apostrophe	Example
singular noun: add **'s**	*the ox's yoke, James's coat*
plural ending in s: add **'**	*the girls' coats*
irregular plural: add **'s**	*the children's toys, men's shoes*
joint ownership: last name only	*Ruth and Boaz's field*
separate ownership: each name	*Ruth's and Naomi's cloaks*
contractions	*can't, it's, o'clock, '76*
lowercase letters as words	*mind your p's and q's*

Never in possessive pronouns: *its, hers, ours, yours, theirs, whose*. Not for plurals of numbers or years: *the 1800s*. Traditional exceptions: *Moses' law, Jesus' disciples*.

Quotation marks

- Around a speaker's **exact words** and the titles of **short works** (poems, songs, chapters, articles).
- American style: **periods and commas inside**; colons and semicolons outside; ? and ! inside only when they belong to the quotation.
- A quotation inside a quotation takes **single** marks: *Ben said, "Mother told me, 'Be home by six.'"*
- Begin a new paragraph for each new speaker.

Dialogue

- Split quotation: the second part keeps a small letter if the sentence goes on: *"Supper," said Mother, "is ready."*
- An exclamation inside the quotation replaces the comma: "Bah!" said Scrooge, "Humbug!" (Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*).

Italics (underline by hand)

- Titles of **long works**: books, newspapers, magazines, long poems, plays, films, ships: *Moby-Dick*, *The Pilgrim's Progress*.
- Words used as words and foreign words: *the word* and; *et cetera*.
- The **Bible** and its books are capitalized but not italicized: *Genesis, the Psalms*.

16 COMMONLY CONFUSED WORDS

Words	Meaning
accept / except	receive · leaving out
affect / effect	to influence (verb) · a result (noun)
all ready / already	all prepared · by now
all together / altogether	in a group · completely
allusion / illusion	a reference · a false image
among / between	3 or more · 2
amount / number	mass · count
bring / take	toward · away from the speaker
can / may	ability · permission
capital / capitol	city, money, letter · the building
complement / compliment	completes · praise
conscience / conscious	sense of right · awake, aware
council / counsel	a group · advice; to advise
desert / dessert	dry land; to abandon · sweet course
emigrate / immigrate	leave a country · enter one
farther / further	distance · degree, more
fewer / less	count · mass
imply / infer	speaker suggests · hearer concludes
its / it's	belonging to it · it is
lead / led	metal; to guide (now) · guided
loose / lose	not tight · misplace, fail to win
passed / past	went by (verb) · earlier; beyond
principal / principle	chief; head of school · a rule, truth
quiet / quite	silent · completely, very
stationary / stationery	not moving · writing paper
than / then	compares · tells when
their / there / they're	belonging to them · that place · they are
to / too / two	toward · also, too much · 2
who's / whose	who is · belonging to whom
your / you're	belonging to you · you are
weather / whether	sky · if
advice / advise	noun · verb
eminent / imminent	famous · about to happen
precede / proceed	go before · go on
each other / one another	two · more than two (formal)
disinterested / uninterested	impartial · bored
like / as	preposition (+ noun) · conjunction (+ clause)
who / that / which	persons · either (restrictive) · things (nonrestrictive)
lie / lay	recline · put (takes an object)

MEMORY TRICK **Contraction test**
For *it's, they're, you're, who's*, say the two words: *it is, they are, you are, who is*. If they fit, keep the apostrophe; if not, use *its, their, your, whose*.

MEMORY TRICK
Classroom sayings (Traditional)
Dessert: two s's, a second helping. The princi**pal** is your **pal**; a princip**le** is a ru**le**. The capit**o**l has a d**o**me.

MEMORY TRICK **A for action, E for end**
Affect is the **a**ction (verb); **e**ffect is the **e**nd result (noun): *The frost affected the crop; the effect was a small harvest.*

17 USAGE PITFALLS

Avoid	Write
could of, should of	*could have, should have*
irregardless	*regardless*
try and finish	*try to finish*
the reason is because	*the reason is that*
between you and I	*between you and me*
these kind of	*this kind of, these kinds of*
off of; where … at	*off; where*
alot, anyways, nowheres	*a lot, anyway, nowhere*
suppose to, use to	*supposed to, used to*
brang, brung; drug (dragged)	*brought; dragged*
ain't	*am not, isn't, aren't*
very unique	*unique*
due to the fact that	*because*
at this point in time	*now*

Dialect in fiction is not a model: "but that ain't no matter." (Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*, 1884).

Points of style

- Use **strong verbs** and concrete nouns: *The horse **bolted*** beats *The horse moved quickly*.
- **Concise**: as few words as clearness allows; cut *in order to*, *literally*, *very*.
- **Split infinitives** (*to boldly go*) and a **preposition at the end** (*What is it for?*) are not errors, but formal writing avoids a split that sounds clumsy.

18 QUICK EDITING CHECKLIST

#	Check	
1	**Sentences**	each has a subject, a verb and a complete thought; no fragments, run-ons or comma splices
2	**Agreement**	verbs with subjects; pronouns with antecedents (*each … his*)
3	**Pronouns**	right case (*I/me, who/whom*); one clear antecedent each
4	**Verbs**	right principal parts (*saw, has seen*); tense, voice and mood consistent
5	**Modifiers**	next to the word they modify; nothing dangling; no double negatives
6	**Parallelism**	lists and pairs in the same form
7	**Commas**	name the rule for each; pairs around interrupters
8	**Apostrophes**	in possessives and contractions; none in *its, hers, ours, whose*
9	**Capitals & words**	proper nouns; *its/it's, their/there, affect/effect*
10	**Style**	cut needless words; strong verbs; active voice
11	**Aloud**	read it aloud, slowly, from a printed copy

MEMORY TRICK **COPS (Traditional)**
A last pass: **C**apitals, **O**verall look, **P**unctuation, **S**pelling.