



Five Basic Tips to Help Improve Your Grammar

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1. Learn Your Apostrophes

Apostrophes can make a huge difference in the way a sentence is perceived, either as possessive or as a contraction.

EXAMPLE

The dog put it's paw in my hand; its very furry.

When there is an apostrophe in **it's**, it is the contraction **it is** and shows no possession. In the example, the incorrect form reads "The dog put it is paw in my hand" Corrected, this phrase is "The dog put its paw in my hand.

Next, "its very furry" is the possessive form of **its**; however, there is nothing to possess. The correct form is "it's", saying, "It is very furry". A quick way to test this is by inserting **it is** into the sentence, and if it reads correctly, it is most likely right.

2. There, Their, and They're

Perhaps one of the most common grammar mistakes is the misuse of the words there, their, and they're. A few easy rules to remember will remedy this issue.

1. Use **There** when referring to a place, either concrete or abstract.
 - a. Does it make sense if you replace it with **Here**?
2. Use **Their** to show possession of a noun by more than one person.
 - a. Does it make sense if you replace it with **Our**?
3. Use **They're** as a noun and verb. It is a contraction of **They** and **Are**, and must only be used as a subject.
 - a. Does it make sense if you replace it with **They are**?

3. Use Semicolons to Link Independent Clauses

To avoid choppy sentences separated by periods, use a semicolon.

EXAMPLE

I went to the store today. I bought a lot of food. Apples were on sale.

Where could a semicolon fit here?

A semicolon cannot be used to make this into one sentence; however, it can be used to break it into two better sentences.

I went to the store today; I bought a lot of food. Apples were on sale.

OR

I went to the store today. I bought a lot of food; apples were on sale.

4. **Parallel Structure: Using the Same Patterns of Words**

Correcting problems with parallel structure can improve the flow and readability of an entire paper. Here, an example is provided to show parallel structure with groups of words.

Incorrect:

I enjoy running, lifting, and to play basketball.

Correct:

I enjoy running, lifting, and playing basketball.

OR

I like to run, lift, and play basketball.

It is correct to use “to” before all verbs in a sentence or before the first verb. All verbs in a sentence should use the same tense. In this case, all should use the –ing form or the infinitive “to” form. Do not mix forms.

5. **Comma Use**

Here are a few quick tips for gaining better control over your commas.

1. Use a comma before coordinating conjunctions (but, and, yet, so, etc.) that join independent clauses
 - a. I wanted to go hiking, but it was too cold.
2. Use a comma after introductory clauses, phrases, and words before main clauses.
 - a. While I was running, a dog walked by.
 - b. Having finished the test early, I went to lunch.
 - c. Well, the car is parked.
3. Use a comma in the middle of a sentence to set off clauses, phrases, and inessential words.
 - a. That day, which was Fat Tuesday, was the only day I could sleep.
 - b. The professor of this class is interesting. The material, on the other hand, is not.
 - c. Thank you for coming in. Today, however, we do not need help.
4. Use commas in a series
 - a. Apples, oranges, and bananas were on sale.
 - b. The coach promised to win the game, go to the playoffs, and win the Super Bowl.
5. Use commas to separate main sentence structure from quotations that you integrate.
 - a. The professor stated, “Profit is essential to sustainability”.

Following these five simple tips may allow you to quickly improve basic grammar mistakes. Often, **proofreading** your paper multiple times can do wonders, so be sure to **leave enough time** for this. In addition, **have a peer read over your paper**, and see what he or she thinks. Even **read your paper aloud** and listen for flow. For any other revisions, or if you just need a hand with structure, come to the Writing Center!