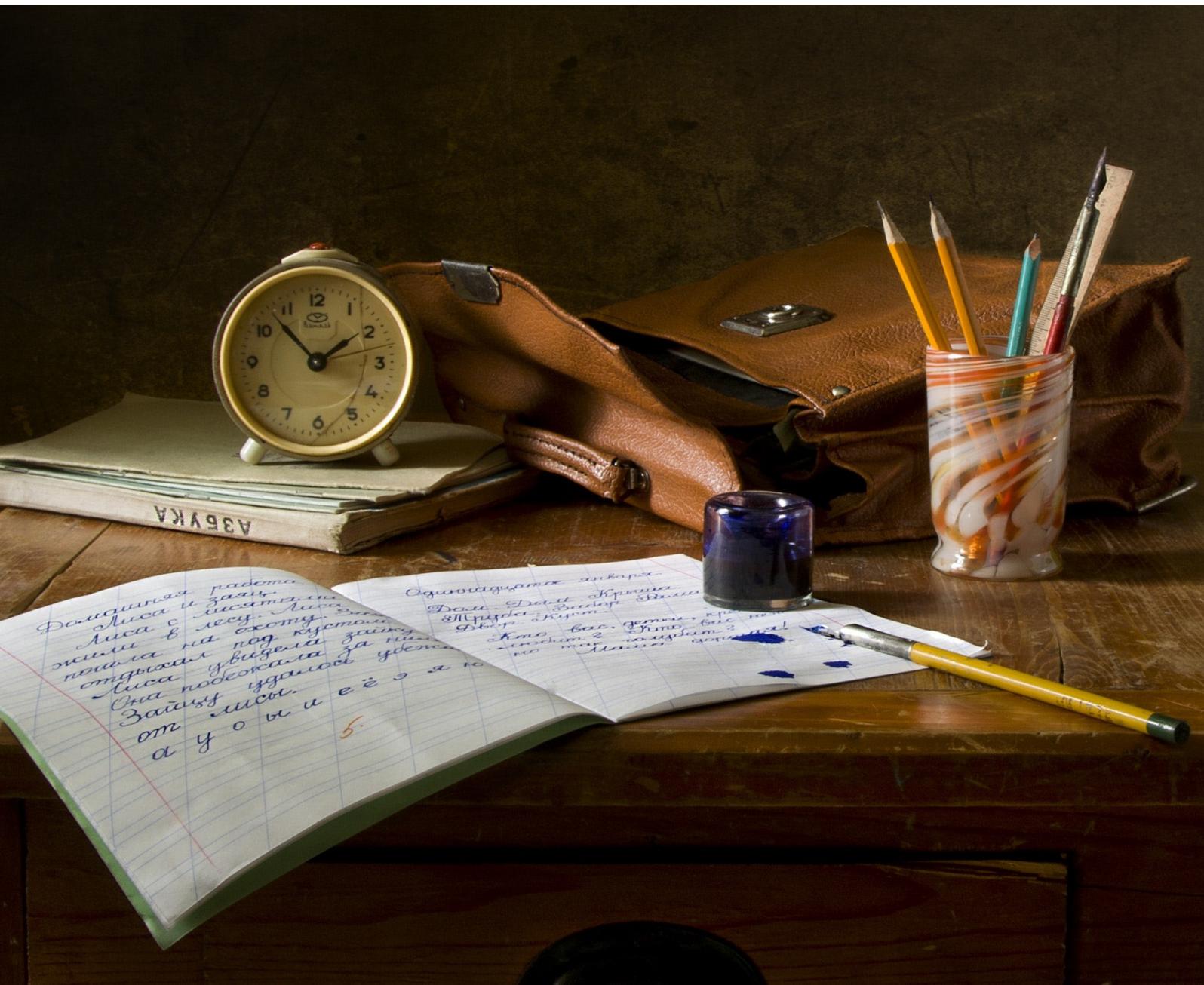


10

COMMON GRAMMAR MISTAKES

WRITERS MAKE



Grammatical Error #1

Misplaced Commas

A comma, in the most basic sense, **is a small break** or a **pause**. Just like when you speak and you take a second to breathe or connect an idea in your mind, you use a comma to create that pause in your sentence.

There are multiple ways you use a comma, the most common being when you want to:

- List attributes or actions
 - e.g., “I like hamburgers, pizza, and chicken wings;” or
 - “he’s smart, trustworthy, and independent.”
- Connect independent clauses
 - e.g., “he went to his house, and then he took a nap;” or
 - “if she had told me that, I’d have not done it.”
- Emphasize contrast
 - e.g., “he was sweating, despite he was sitting on a chair.”
- To make a small clarification
 - e.g., “my friend, who I’ll call Johnny, is pretty cool.”

The problem with commas is that writers seem to use them too lightly, sprinkling them too often in the wrong places. Writers either forget to use the comma when they should (which can include the Oxford comma) or they use it when it’s not necessary.

Here’s a list of the most common grammatical errors with commas I’ve seen and that you need to keep an eye on:

Noun and Verb

Never put a comma between both the subject and the verb.

- **Incorrect:** The man, looked at the sky in contempt.
- **Correct:** The man looked at the sky in contempt.

Two Nouns

Never put a comma between two nouns (unless you’re listing them, in which case you can).

- **Incorrect:** The manager, and the employees become confused when given mixed directives.
- **Correct:** The manager and the employees become confused when given mixed directives.

Two Verbs

Never put a comma between two tied verbs — like when a subject is doing two things at the same time.

- **Incorrect:** Lynda is the CEO, and manages the entire company.
- **Correct:** Lynda is the CEO and manages the entire company.

Two Independent Clauses

Never put a comma between two independent sentences (or clauses); you must keep them separated with a full stop or a semicolon, not with a comma (like in this sentence).

- **Incorrect:** The marketing team ran a meeting, Lynda missed it.
- **Correct (with semicolon):** The marketing team ran a meeting; Lynda missed it.
- **Correct (with period):** The marketing team ran a meeting. Lynda missed it.
- **Correct (with conjunction):** The marketing team ran a meeting and Lynda missed it.

Comparisons

Any comparison must be separated with a comma.

- **Incorrect:** The more you write the more you earn.
- **Correct:** The more you write, the more you earn.

Conjunctions

If you have two **independent sentences**, you can use a comma before the “and” and “or” conjunctions.

If the sentences **depend on each other**, you can't use a comma before these conjunctions.

Here's how this looks like:

Independent Clause

- **Incorrect:** I love to write but it tires me.
- **Correct:** I love to write, but it tires me.

Dependent Clauses

Example #1

- **Incorrect:** I write a lot, and I make a lot of money.
- **Correct:** I write a lot and I make a lot of money.

Example #2

- **Incorrect:** Mary is a great writer, but a bit stubborn.
- **Correct:** Mary is a great writer but a bit stubborn.

Grammatical Error #2

Where's the Semicolon?

Think about the semicolon as a punctuation mark **more powerful than a comma**, but **not as serious as a full stop**. It's like you get a mix of both worlds, without having to compromise anything.

The main usage for semicolons is *when you have two independent clauses* (remember that a clause is a fancy way of referring to a sentence) that you want to tie without having to resort into a comma or a full stop. It's as simple as that.

- **Incorrect:** Marketing and sales teams must work together, any company can benefit from that alignment.
- **Correct:** Marketing and sales teams must work together; any company can benefit from that alignment.

You can also use a semicolon when you want to make a list of objects (although I highly recommend you avoid this and use bullet points).

Next time you go around writing two independent sentences, **use the semicolon**. It will surprise how versatile it is and how much it improves your writing — you will also look like someone who knows how to write as most people don't even know how to use one.

Grammatical Error #3

Wrong Parallelism

The best way to create useful parallelisms in your content is through the use of an em-dash (“—”). With an em-dash, you can nest one idea next to the other without interrupting the bigger one.

A comma works when your parallelism is small. An em-dash, in contrast, is stronger — like when you put on the emergency brake in your car.

Whenever you want to create a parallel sentence, **use an em-dash**. You will make your writing much clearer and stronger without distracting people.

Grammatical Error #4

Abuse of the Passive Voice

The best rule of thumb any writer ever come around the use of passive voice comes from George Orwell, who once said: “*Never use the passive where you can use the active.*”

You can use the passive voice, *but only when you have no other option at hand.*

When a sentence could make use of the active verb — that is, when the subject does something — then use it. Your readers will appreciate it, even if they don’t realize it.

Whenever you write a sentence with passive voice, **go back immediately and rewrite it in the active voice.** In the great majority of the cases, you will be able to make the switch without ruining the reading experience.

In some cases, however, it will make sense to use the passive voice. The passive voice, after all, exists in the case a subject receives the action of a given verb.

If you want to *highlight the passive effect of the subject being done something to it*, then it works just fine.

You can also use it when the subject of the verb is unknown (like in the example above) or you are being openly generic. In any other case, the active voice will be your best bet, so use it.

Grammatical Error #5

Watch Out for the Homophones

To start, homophones are two or more words that have the **same pronunciation** but **carry different meanings** or spellings.

Some common homophones I see frequently misused are:

- Affect, effect
- Compliment, complement
- Farther, further, father
- Flair, flare
- Here, hear
- Knight, night
- Into, in to
- Its, it's
- Lose, loose
- Made, maid
- Peak, peek, pique
- Resent, recent
- There, their, they're
- To, too
- Where, were
- Who's, whose
- Your, you're

To solve this grammar error, you want to re-read everything you read twice: after you've finished the first draft, and before you publish your piece.

Also, you should use a grammar checker like [Grammarly](#), as I will later explain, so you can find those mistakes in just a few clicks.

Grammatical Error #6

Be Careful with the Homographs

Homographs, a close cousin to the homophone, are words that are **spelled the same** — but not necessarily pronounced the same — and which **have different meanings**.

Some of the most common homographs I've seen are:

- Attribute
- Bar
- Content
- Contact
- Contract
- Convert
- Effect
- Even
- Extract
- Impact
- Import
- Incline, inclined
- Leave
- Lose
- Notice
- Objective
- Record
- Refund
- Subject
- Suspect
- Tie

The only solution I can suggest is that whenever you use any of the homographs above, make sure you're being clear and specific in the way you word a sentence (like in that case, where "word" means "to express").

If you can use another word to describe that homograph, then do it. If you're in doubt, use [Power Thesaurus](#) to find a synonym for that word.

Grammatical Error #7

Abuse of Adverbs

Adverbs have a good reason to exist: they modify or qualify a verb, noun, or adjective, adding depth to your ideas.

More often than not, however, adverbs shouldn't be used.

There are three problems with adverbs:

1. They kill the descriptive qualities of a writer
2. They are redundant
3. They dilute the message of a sentence

Adverbs Problem #1: Lack of Originality

Adverbs are the best tool for the lazy writer; they make their writing less creative and detailed.

Whenever you can make a specific description of the way something is being done, use analogies and other literary devices, not adverbs.

Adverbs Problem #2: Redundant

Another problem with adverbs is that they can be misused in cases where they're self-explanatory.

If you're writing a sentence where the adverb is an extension of the verb it modifies, then avoid using the adverb altogether.

Adverbs Problem #3: Dilute the Message

Finally, an adverb makes the message contained within a sentence less powerful and clear.

The less you write, the more powerful your message. Avoid using adverbs that dilute your ideas.

Remember: adverbs are fine as long as they're not killing your descriptive qualities, self-explanatory, or diluting your message.

Grammatical Error #8

Prepositions at the End of Words

Prepositions are words that express “spatial or temporal relations” (*in, under, towards, before*) or that mark different “semantic roles” (*of, for*).

Some of the most commonly used prepositions (including phrasal instances) are:

- of
- in
- for
- on
- over
- to
- before
- from
- with

It's well known among writers that prepositions should never go at the end of words. The rationale behind this idea is that it looks sloppy and unprofessional.

Unless your goal is to look colloquial and informal, you should always aim to **use the prepositions before the end of sentences.**

There will be cases, however, the correct use of prepositions will look a bit too formal. People aren't used to hearing people use prepositions before the end of words, so writers become afraid if they use them correctly people will be turned off.

In such case, the only solution is to think about your audience and client. If the audience isn't formal, you can use the informal and "incorrect" preposition. If the client also has an informal tone, then again, you can take the wrong route. Otherwise, I recommend you stick to using the prepositions before the end of words.

Grammatical Error #9

Don't Dangle Those Modifiers

A dangling modifier is a word or phrase that modifies a previous sentence...when the reader isn't sure the exact object the used modifier is trying to modify.

The two simplest ways to fix the problem of dangling modifiers include:

- Adding the subject immediately after the modifier, like in the example above
- Making the sentence both active and with a simple “noun + verb” structure

My favorite solution is the latter, as it makes your writing much clearer and concise.

Whenever you see yourself using an introductory phrase that modifies the subject, make sure you're not using a dangling modifier that doesn't modify anything.

Grammatical Error #10

Wrong Use of Conjunctions

Conjunctions are those silly little words that show a local relationship between object, phrases, clauses, and sentences.

“Conjunction” seems like a big brainy word, but they’re some of the most commonly used words, including the following pairs:

- And / Or
- Not / But
- Either / or
- Neither / nor
- Both / and
- That

The most common conjunctions mistakes come with the either, neither, both, and that combinations mentioned above.

Let's take a look at each of them in detail:

Either / Or

The problem with the first combination of conjunctions — the either / or pair — is that writers use them to describe one or more than two objects, when they’re used to describe two and only two objects.

Remember that the either conjunction goes next to two and only two objects — no less and no more.

Neither / Nor

The problem with the misuse of the neither / nor pair comes in different shapes, including:

1. When a writer uses either the “neither” or “nor” separately
2. They use them with one or more than two clauses
3. They use them to negate a sentence 🤔

Here are some examples to illustrate these problems:

- **Incorrect:** I can neither eat pizza or hamburgers.
- **Incorrect:** I can't neither eat pizza, hamburgers, nor bagels.
- **Incorrect:** I can't neither eat pizza nor hamburgers.
- **Correct:** I can neither eat pizza nor hamburgers.

Remember that neither and nor go together when you negate something; if you use the "not" then you can't use the neither conjunction.

Also, neither is the negative of either, so the same rules mentioned above for the latter apply for the former.

Both / And

The problem with conjunctions "both / and" is similar as in the previous two cases: writers use them with more than two clauses or mix "both" with the conjunction "or" (in such case, you'd use the "either" conjunction).

- **Incorrect:** I can both eat pizza, hamburgers, or bagels.
- **Incorrect:** I can eat both pizza or hamburgers.
- **Correct:** I can eat both pizza and hamburgers.

Remember that the both conjunction is positive and can only be used with not more than two objects.

That

The problem with the "that" is that the writer uses it when he shouldn't, or he doesn't use it when he should.

While you could technically use the "that" in the incorrect sentence, it looks awful, so it's best avoided.

How to Fix All Your Grammar Mistakes

If you want to fix all your grammar mistakes once and for all, there's one tool you can use: **Grammarly**.

With [Grammarly](#), your only job is to copy and paste your content in its app — web or otherwise — and get the grammar fixes the tool automatically

Obviously, Grammarly isn't foolproof. Sometimes the grammar mistakes you make are on purpose (because, let's say, you're using slang or something like that) or it corrects something that doesn't connect with your style.

You need to check each mistake closely, making sure the corrections are relevant.

At the end of the day, however, you will see Grammarly will save you hours of countless editing and make your writing pristine like a professional writer.

Go to [Grammarly](#) today and [check it out for free](#).

WANT MORE WRITING ADVICE?

Come back to [Content Fiesta](#) for more tips on developing persuasive content for your marketing campaigns.

[GO BACK TO CONTENT FIESTA](#)