Grammar Workshop
Common Grammar Mistakes

JOSEPHINE BOYLE
WILLEM OPPERMAN

ACADEMIC SUPPORT AND ACCESS CENTER
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

OCTOBER 27, 2016

*Sources consulted: Purdue OWL and Grammarly Handbook
Who, Which or That?

Who: refers to people
That and Which: refer to groups or things

Examples:
- Sara is the one who rescued the dog.
- Peyton Manning is on the team that won the Superbowl.
- Marc works for a reputable company, which specializes in commercial real estate.
Who, Which or That?

That: introduces an **essential clause** (also known as a restrictive or defining clause). Essential clauses add information that is vital to the point of the sentence.

- I do not trust products that claim "all natural ingredients" because this phrase can mean almost anything.
- We would not know the type of products being discussed without the that clause.

Which: introduces a **nonessential clause** (also known as a nonrestrictive or nondefining clause), which adds supplementary information.

- The product claiming "all natural ingredients," which appeared in the Sunday newspaper, is on sale.
- The product is already identified. Therefore, which appeared in the Sunday newspaper is a nonessential clause containing additional, but not essential, information.

Tip! **Essential clauses DO NOT** have commas introducing or surrounding them, whereas **nonessential clauses** are introduced or surrounded by commas.
Affect (verb): an action word that means to produce a change in or influence something. Use it when trying to describe influencing someone or something rather than causing it.

- How does the crime rate affect hiring levels by local police forces?
- The weather conditions will affect the number of people who come to the county fair this year.
Affect vs. Effect

Effect (noun); an event that means a change that occurred. When an "s" is added, "effects" means personal belongings.

Effect can be used as a noun when you are talking about a result.
- What effect did the loss have on the team?

Effect can be used if it follows one of these words: "into", "on", "take", "the", "any", "an" as well as "or."
- The prescribed medication had an effect on the patient's symptoms.
- In analyzing a situation, it is important to take the concepts of cause and effect into consideration.

Effect can be used as a verb in one situation - if you want to describe something that was caused.
- The new manager effected some positive changes in the office. (This means that the new manager caused some positive changes to take place in the office.)
Then vs. Than

Then: has an element of time. For example, it can mean "next" or "at that time."
- We ate dinner and then went to a Broadway show.
- Broadway tickets were a easier to get back then.

Than: conveys a comparison.
- Computers are more expensive than books.
- Nathan is taller than John.

Tip! Both "than" and "comparison" have the letter "a" in them, and "then" and "time" both have the letter "e."
There: refers to a specific place or location.
- It can also function as an adverb to mean the opposite of “here.”
- Finally, it can also act as a pronoun to provide a segue to a noun or phrase.

Examples:
- “We ran from the juice shop to the restaurant over there.”
- “I want to sit at the table over there.”
- “There isn't an open table left in the place.”
There vs. Their vs. They’re

Their: a possessive adjective, meaning that something belongs to “them.”
- Their yard is overgrown with weeds.
- Their trip to the Bahamas was cancelled due to the storm.
- Tip! If you're still not sure about the correct use of “their,” put “our” in its place. “Our” is another plural possessive adjective, and the sentence should still make sense if you substitute it.

They’re: a contraction for “they are”
- Monica and Rachel are hungry. They’re going out to dinner.
To vs. Too vs. Two

To: used as a connection word in a sentence.
- John is going to the hospital to visit Mary.

Too: used in place of the word “also” or it can mean a lot.
- Sam is going to the hospital to visit Mary, too.
- There are too many visitors in Mary’s hospital room.

Two: references the number 2.
- There are two visitors in Mary’s hospital room.
Is it ok to end a sentence with a preposition?

- You should NOT end a sentence with a preposition when the sentence would mean the same thing if you left off the preposition.
  - Where are you at? (WRONG) because “Where are you?” means the same thing.

- There are many sentences where the final preposition is part of a phrasal verb, so it is OK.
  - Susie is going to throw up!
  - Where did you grow up?
Starting sentences with conjunctions

Is it ok to start sentences with coordinating conjunctions such as and, but, for, nor, or, so, yet?

• YES! This is a common grammar myth and a stylistic choice.

• There are actually several reasons to start a sentence with a coordinating conjunction:
  ○ Creates the tone of an afterthought
  ○ Creates smoother transitions between sentences
  ○ Moves an argument forward
Some FAQs

- Don’t say considered as – say considered to be
  - Ex: This is considered to be the best school for politics.
  - English is considered a difficult language.

- Research is a plural, non-countable noun
  - Always incorrect: a research, researches
  - Correct: the research, research articles, a piece of research

- “One type of” is followed by a singular noun
  - Ex: One type of bread is rye bread.

- Much more: non-count noun. Many more: count noun
  - Ex: I ate much more food than you.
  - Ex: I ate many more pizzas than you.
Discussing Potential Situations/Things

You have two options:

- Give a hypothetical example: “a (singular noun)”
  - Ex: A higher level of water would kill us.
  - Ex: An apple would be a healthier choice

- Speak generally about many examples (plural nouns)
  - Ex: Higher levels of water will kill us.
  - Ex: Apples would be a healthier choice.
Need Additional Help?

- Visit the Academic Support and Access Center: Mary Graydon Center, Room 243, 202-885-3360
  - We recommend that you book an appointment online first:
Need Additional Help?

Helpful Online Resources

- **American University Writing Lab Tips:**
  http://www.american.edu/ocl/asac/Writing-Lab-Writing-Tips.cfm
- **Purdue Online Writing Lab (Owl):**
  owl.english.purdue.edu
- **UNC Writing Center:**
  writingcenter.unc.edu
- **The George Mason University Writing Center:**
  http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/
- **Grammarly Handbook:**
  http://www.grammarly.com/handbook/