Grammar Workshop
Common Grammar Mistakes.

JOSEPHINE BOYLE
JENNIFER RAMPULLA

ACADEMIC SUPPORT AND ACCESS CENTER
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

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*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.
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 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 vs. Their vs. They’re

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?
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
Colon

- Use a colon to join 2 independent clauses when you wish to emphasize the second clause.
  - Pothole repairs in Washington, DC have hindered travel around town: parts of Wisconsin, Massachusetts, and Nebraska Avenue are closed during the repairs.

- Use a colon after an independent clause when it is followed by a list, a quotation, appositive, or other idea directly related to the independent clause.
  - Sam went to the store for some groceries: eggs, fruit, milk and bread.
  - In his Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln urges Americans to rededicate themselves to the unfinished work of the deceased soldiers: "It is for us the living...”
  - I know the perfect job for him: a graphic designer.
Colon

- Use a colon at the end of a business letter greeting.
  - To Whom It May Concern:

- Use a colon to separate the hour and minute(s) in a time notation.
  - 12:00 p.m.

- Use a colon to separate the chapter and verse in a Biblical reference.
  - John 1:6
Parenthesis

- Parentheses are used to emphasize content. They place more emphasis on the enclosed content than commas.
- Use parentheses to set off nonessential material, such as dates, clarifying information, or sources, from a sentence.
  - Justice Antonin Scalia (1936-2016), was a Supreme Court Justice for 30 years and known for writing controversial opinions.

- Use parenthesis for in-text citations. The punctuation goes AFTER the citation to sandwich the text with the cited source.
  - Justice Antonin Scalia was born in Trenton, NJ in 1936 (Rampulla 236).

- Instead of parenthesis, you can use parenthetical commas around parenthetical words or phrases. Parenthetical words and phrases add extra information to a sentence without altering its basic meaning.
  - My nephew, who loves to build Legos, is visiting next week.
Dash

- Dashes are used to set off or emphasize the content enclosed within dashes or the content that follows a dash. Dashes place more emphasis on this content than parentheses.
  - Perhaps one reason why the term has been so problematic—so resistant to definition, and yet so transitory in those definitions—is because of its multitude of applications.
  - In terms of public legitimacy—that is, in terms of garnering support from state legislators, parents, donors, and university administrators—English departments are primarily places where advanced literacy is taught.
  - To some of you, my proposals may seem radical—even revolutionary.

- Use a dash to set off an appositive phrase that already includes commas. An appositive is a word that adds explanatory or clarifying information to the noun that precedes it.
  - The cousins—Tina, Todd, and Sam—arrived at the party together.
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:
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/