

A GUIDE TO USING GOOD GRAMMAR

THE WRITE ADVICE

SPECIAL EDITION

UWF WRITING LAB

GOT A GRAMMAR QUESTION? GRAMMAR HOTLINE



(850) 474-2129

RADIO GRAMMAR

It's *GrammarTime* with Mamie Hixon on
WRNE Radio 980 AM
Mondays at 6:30 a.m.

(Grammar for Students and Professionals)

NEWSPAPER GRAMMAR

Read the bi-weekly language column in the
Independent Voice newspaper:
GrammarWatch
by Mamie Hixon, the Grammar Guru
(Advice on English language use)

PUNCTUATING with PURPOSE

- There is one difference between us •
- There is one difference between us ; we have different religious beliefs.
- There is one difference between us : our religious beliefs.
- There is one difference between us - our religious beliefs.

Don't Trust Your Spell Checker

By Mamie Webb Hixon, Writing Lab Director

Don't trust your spell checker. A spell checker recognizes misspellings only when the spelling given does not exist in American English. Standard spellings such as *incontinence* (for *inconvenience*), *mines* (for *mine*), *curse* (for *course*), and *enemas* (for *enemies*) are not detected by a spell checker because these words do in fact exist. Don't depend on your spell checker to find these and other mistakes with homonyms, for instance; for, as its name suggests, a spell checker checks spelling. You'll have to proofread and find your own mistakes.

SPELL CHECKER

I have a spell checker. / It came with my PC.
It plainly marks *four* my *revue* / Mistakes I cannot *sea*.
I've run this poem *throw* it / I'm sure *your* pleased *too no*;
Its letter perfect in *it's* weigh. / My checker *toll*ed me *sew*.
Pennye Harper

The following sentences were taken from actual business documents and college papers. And, yes, each writer used a spell checker.

- With friends like these, who needs *enemas*?
- The *affects* of Alzheimer's disease. . . .
- The committee has *enclose it's* minutes for your *revue*.
- He is a *cereal* killer.
- I identified the purse as *mines*.
- This change is the result of operating instructions from our headquarters; we are sorry for any *incontinence* this new operation may have caused you.
- This policy is for *ten-year* professors only.
- Over the *curse* of my college career. . . .
- UWF has a *guess* speaker for commencement.
- Over two hundred *extinguished* guests are invited to the program.
- Other *curses* with intensive writing expectations are. . . .

YOU'VE GOT MAIL!

- E-mail or e-mail?
- Both spellings are correct.
- Email and email are also correct.

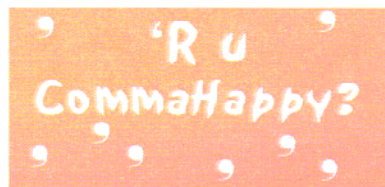


The 10 Most Common Errors in Speech and Writing

1. just between you and I
2. in regards to/with regards to
3. irregardless
4. This is her/him.
5. real good
6. There's several reasons.
7. The university will celebrate it's anniversary.
8. had went, had came, had did
9. alot
10. a interesting experience

Inside

"Whom's Doom"	3
Grammar Checkers	3
The Plain English Movement	4
The Split Infinitive	4
Tips for English-as-a-Second-Language Users	5
Politically Correct English	5
Ending a Sentence with a Preposition	6



Avoiding Random Acts of Commas

By Troy Urquhart

When I ask writers about their placement of commas, I'm often told that the sentence "needed a pause there" or that it "was a long sentence." While these ideas are well intentioned, they are absolutely wrong. Writers often construct long sentences (such as this one) that include a number of dependent clauses and that are correctly punctuated without the inclusion of even a single comma. Consider *Out of the black limousine with mirrored windows stepped a tall young woman with flaming red hair that fell well below her shoulders and a handsome six-year-old boy in a cowboy suit decorated with silver sequins.* Conversely, short sentences often require commas for clarity: *We ate bacon and the guests ate ham* is unclear and should be recast as *We ate bacon, and the guests ate ham.* Further, even though readers are taught to pause when encountering a comma, the inverse is not true; commas should be placed according to grammatical rules, not to create a dramatic pause. So, when writing, keep a grammar handbook such as *Real Good Grammar, Too* or *Elements of Style* nearby, and place your commas deliberately, not randomly.

Students, Faculty, and Staff, Lend Me Your Ears The Loan/Lend Controversy

By Brian Hansen

The latest edition of *Webster's International Dictionary* notes that *loan* is now both a verb and a noun; likewise, Fowler's *Modern English Usage* observes that *loan* has been passing for a verb since the 19th century. But here at the Writing Lab, we're a conservative bunch; we stand on tradition and strive to combat the degeneration of the English language at the hands of dictionary publishers. And, as far as we're concerned, a *loan* (noun) is still the thing we receive when someone *lends* (verb) us something.

Would You Loan or Lend Me Money?

By Chris Bui

Perhaps Shakespeare should have written "Neither a borrower nor a loaner be." Even he knew that *loan* is not a verb, or else he might have written "Friends, Romans, countrymen, loan me your ears." *Loan* is a noun that is often mistaken for a verb. So do not use *loan* as a verb; instead, use *lend*. For example, banks give loans, or they lend money. **So be a lender, not a loaner.**

Using Words Such As *Like*

By Troy Urquhart

Today's writers seem to like *like* like they like no other word. However, this affinity for *like* leads, in many cases, to overuse and misuse of the word. Consider this example from the February 2 edition of *The Times*: *Mr. Ashcroft met with the heads of Justice Department agencies like the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Drug Enforcement Administration.* Clearly, the writer does not intend agencies like (i.e., similar to) the FBI and the D.E.A., but he means to include those particular agencies in the group with which Mr. Ashcroft met, so the sentence should be recast: *Mr. Ashcroft met with the heads of Justice Department agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Drug Enforcement Administration.* The use of *like* denotes a comparison to a similar item (*He acts like a child*), but it does not include that item; the use of *such as* provides a representative example of a group.

The principal expelled the student for three principle reasons.

One of the underlined words in the above sentence is incorrect. Do you know which one?

Call the Writing Lab (474-2129) for the answer.

Who Cares about Correct Grammar and Punctuation as Long as Your Creative Writing Is Creative and Interesting?

By Chris Bui

Some writers feel that grammar and punctuation have little to do with their creative work, but what good is the work if it is hard to read? Grammar and punctuation help readers understand the text. A reader might not know what noun an adjective describes if the adjective is misplaced; perhaps a reader might not know a character is speaking because quotation marks have been omitted. Any creative piece written without the proper use of grammar and punctuation rules may be difficult for readers to comprehend. Take the following sentence: *David Copperfield said Tom Sawyer is a good book.* Without the proper underlining or italicization and quotation marks, a reader might not know the speaker or the title of the book. So correct grammar and punctuation are not tortures used to suppress a writer's creativity. Instead, they are used to help readers understand and appreciate it.

Expect your reader to read your ideas, not your mind.

—Anon

When my students respond to a grammatically correct sentence by saying "That don't sound right!" I say, "I think it do."

—Mamie Hixon

So I'm like, "Who needs this grammar stuff?"

By Betty Hooten, Instructor
Department of English and Foreign Languages

During the past several years, I've read quite a few articles about the value – or rather the lack of value – of teaching grammar as a collegiate course. They all say about the same thing – DON'T BOTHER. The problem is that I want to bother. Judging from the 20 or 30 grammar and punctuation errors that my own students often make on their 500-word essays, I conclude that the need for teaching grammar at the university level still exists.

LIN 2670 Practical Grammar is necessary for the betterment of student writing. I am sold on this fact, and students should be, too. Perhaps I need to call upon the Grammar Lady, Mary Newton Bruder, who maintains her own Web site to Stamp Out Bad Grammar. As a grammar cop, she's a little touchy these days about personal pronoun abuse. Frankly, so am I. If I get one more essay like the first ones, I may have to be sworn in as one of Bruder's deputies.

Who Knows About *Whom*?

By Heather Stadelhofer

Many students wish Ernest Hemingway had never written *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. After all, if Hemingway's novel didn't exist, then grammarians would allow the word *whom* to disappear from the English language, right? Well, as tempting an option as banning *whom* might be, it is not a very practical one. Though many rules govern pronoun case, it helps to remember that *who* serves that same purpose as *he*, and *whom* equates with *him*.



"Whom's Doom"

By Mamie Webb Hixon
The Grammar Guru

In informal spoken English, usage is relaxed, and speakers tend to use *who* in almost all spoken situations.

Who you gonna call? Ghostbusters!
Who would you like to speak to?
He is a person who we all respect.
Who do you believe – the politicians or the media?

In fact, many writers and speakers don't use *whom* any more. Here are the myths explaining why:

MYTH 1: *Whom* has become obsolete; it's just not used anymore in formal speech or writing.

FACT 1: Careful writers and speakers still use *whom*.

MYTH 2: Only Northerners use *whom*.

FACT 2: *Whom* is no more a Northern pronoun than are the other objective case pronouns: *me*, *him*, *her*, *them*, and *us*. *Whom* is used in objective case instances – the direct object or indirect object of a verb, and the object of a preposition.

MYTH 3: It's difficult to distinguish between *who* and *whom*.

FACT 3: Actually, distinguishing between *who* and *whom* is quite easy if you follow these 4 steps:

1. Substitute *he* for *who*, and *him* for *whom*.

Whom (Him) do you believe – the celebrities or the tabloids?

2. Isolate the clause(s) in which the *who/whom* is functioning.

Whom (Him) do you believe?

3. Using only the clause in which the *who* or *whom* is functioning, place these words in their natural sentence order – subject-verb pattern. This step may be omitted when the words in the clause are already in this pattern.

You do believe him.

4. Read or write the sentences correctly.

Whom do you believe – the celebrities or the tabloids?

GRAMMAR CHECKERS

Be especially skeptical of grammar checker programs. They are not always accurate. Remember, they can only mechanically match what they are programmed to do. The Grammar Checker didn't find the mistakes in this sentence. Can you? *Thanks to employees whom participated in the Children's Festival.*

The reason I want to try and improve my grammar and writing skills, and learn to write real good, is because I'm trying to get my bachelors degree.

Can you find the 10 mistakes in the above sentence? Call the Grammar Hotline at 474-2129 for the answer.

WHICH SPELLING IS CORRECT?

- supercede
- superceed
- supersede

Call the Writing Lab (474-2129) for the answer.

**Guilty
As Charged -
Using Legalese!**

The Plain English Movement

By Susan W. Harrell, J.D.
Director, Legal Studies Department, UWF

We have all heard the old adage "Ignorance of the law is no excuse," a concept which places a burden on each citizen to learn the law. The burden is unreasonable only because legal jargon and a complicated writing style prevent citizens from understanding the law. In the 1970's, the Plain English Movement started as a consumer-protection effort, which promoted the passage of laws by calling for consumer documents to be written in understandable language. You probably won't be surprised to learn that lawyers were not the first to support the Plain English Movement. Complex language is customary for lawyers. Legalese, as it is called, is similar to a foreign language. It was created by lawyers and judges over many centuries. Legalese is still used in law schools and is perpetuated by many lawyers and judges in their daily work. While the use of legalese facilitates communication among lawyers because they know the language, it also frustrates others who try to read and understand legal documents.

Since the movement, government agencies, state legislatures, and even presidents of the United States have passed laws and set policies requiring or encouraging the use of simple, clear language when creating law. While many federal regulations, forms, and information brochures have been rewritten in plain English, there are some segments of the legal profession that have not responded to this need. Many lawyers learned legal writing in law school and do not want to take the time necessary to learn a completely different style of writing. Senior lawyers are busy and want to impress their clients with the professional image which legalese has upheld for generations. Many lawyers use the old adage "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" as a justification for continuing the use of legalese. But if complicated language for lawyers is easy, "plain speak" ought to be a slide.

If you'd like to learn more about plain English, check out the following sources:

- <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk>
- <http://www.plainlanguagenetwork.org>
- Richard C. Widick's *Plain English for Lawyers*, 4th Edition
- Jefferson D. Bates's *Writing with Precision*
- Alan L. Dworsky's *The Little Book on Legal Writing*, 2nd Edition

To Split or to Not Split

By Heather Stadelhofer

For years, English teachers have admonished students not to split infinitives, and now the *Oxford English Dictionary* has changed the rule saying that a writer can, in fact, decide to split an infinitive with one word. What does that statement mean? It means you can write "not to split" or "to not split." Though either version is now acceptable, careful writers will want to avoid the split in case their readers do not know the *OED*'s most recent grammatical ruling. [And, student writers, you especially should **try to not unnecessarily use split infinitives** because your professors may not allow them.]

10 Grammar Rules

1. Try to **not** split an infinitive.
2. Verbs **has** to agree with their subjects.
3. Each pronoun must agree with **their** antecedent.
4. Don't use commas, which aren't necessary.
5. **Its** important to use **apostrophe's** correctly.
6. **Don't** use **no** double negatives.
7. About **sentence fragments**.
8. **When dangling**, don't use participles.
9. Use a modifier **only** to describe what is intended.
10. Be **real** careful about using adjectives and adverbs **correct**.

**Hooton's Mnemonic
Devices and Other Shortcuts**

By Elizabeth Hooton

Affect/Verb = AV (audiovisual, Veterans Administration)
I before E except after C (*receive*) or when sounded like A as in *neighbor* and *weigh*

Nonrestrictive = not necessary = commas

Triteness comes from the Latin *tritus*, past participle of verb meaning "to wear out."

Principal is a pal; principle is a rule.

To know, know, know him is to love, love, love him — parallelism at its finest

A dash is more emphatic than parentheses.

Denotation = Dictionary Meaning

Who is a subject pronoun. If a clause already has a subject, don't use *who*.

Learn to put yourself into your writing, but leave "you" out of it.

Judy Young

Using Politically Correct (PC) And Non-sexist Language

By Mamie Webb Hixon, Writing Lab Director

- Avoid** gender-biased pronouns. With generic antecedents such as *person* or *student*, use his or her and he or she: *A student should make good grades if he or she studies hard.*
- Avoid** using trendy "pronouns" such as *s/he*, *he/she*, *s[he]*, *s/his*, or *(s)he*.
- Use** the phrases *his or her* and *he or she* sparingly to risk writing sentences such as *If any employee needs his or her decal, he or she must bring his or her receipt with him or her.*
- If necessary, **recast** the sentence by changing the singular antecedent to a plural.
A student should make good grades if he or she studies hard.
Students should make good grades if they study hard.
- Alternate** between the singular masculine and feminine pronouns if the result is not confusing or cumbersome.
The American worker is the most productive person in the whole world: he's a taxpayer, and she's also a consumer.
- Replace** masculine or feminine pronouns with one or you, when appropriate: *You should make good grades if you study hard.*
- Substitute** other words for "man" words.

Sexist Usage	PC Usage
<i>businessman/woman</i>	<i>business associate/person</i>
<i>mankind</i>	<i>people, human beings, humanity</i>
<i>mailman</i>	<i>mail carrier</i>
<i>manmade</i>	<i>manufactured, artificial</i>
<i>chairman</i>	<i>chair or chairperson</i>
<i>salesman</i>	<i>sales associate</i>
<i>fireman</i>	<i>fire fighter</i>
<i>policeman</i>	<i>police officer</i>

Use moderation, however, to avoid usage such as these:
Person the lifeboats
Personhole cover
- Substitute** gender-neutral words for gender-biased words.

Sexist Usage	PC Usage
<i>stewardess</i>	<i>flight attendant</i>
<i>waiter/waitress</i>	<i>server</i>
<i>actor/actress</i>	<i>actor</i>
- Include both male and female reference points.

Sexist Usage	PC Usage
<i>You and your spouse</i>	<i>You and your guest</i>
<i>Dear Sir/Dear Sirs</i>	<i>Dear Sir or Madam or</i>
<i>(for an all-male organization only)</i>	<i>Dear Madam or Sir</i>
<i>employees and wives</i>	<i>employees and guests/</i>
	<i>companions/partners</i>
<i>Naval Officers' Wives Club</i>	<i>Naval Officers' Spouses Club</i>
- Use** women and men instead of girls and boys or gals and guys when referring to adults.

"Stay tuned to the current terminology by which racial and ethnic groups refer to themselves. Usage changes (e.g., from "black" to "African-American" and "Oriental" to "Asian)." National newspapers and television news are good indicators of current usage. Also, ask people what term they prefer."

– Florida Atlantic University flyer
on "Bias-Free Communications"

The Trouble with Articles (Helpful Hints for Speakers of English as a Second Language)

By Helen Richards

Have you ever been reading a sentence and all of the sudden, WHAM!, you run smack into a noun? Those pesky nouns have always been a problem, but now the grammar police have come up with an advanced warning system. It's known as an article, and it lets you know that a noun is approaching. Just watch how it works:

Sentence without article *Did you take candy?*

Sentence with article *Did you take the candy?*

Notice in the first sentence that the verb *take* ran smack into the noun *candy*. However, the article in the second sentence signaled that a noun was approaching, and a collision of words was avoided.

Because all nouns are not created equal, two types of articles are available for use: the definite article and the indefinite article. "What's the difference?" you ask. The definite article is the word *the*. It knows without a doubt what noun is approaching; thus, it is definite. The indefinite articles, the words *a* and *an*, really don't care what noun is approaching, so the articles don't bother to check. That's why *a* and *an* are called indefinite articles; they didn't bother to look, so they are unsure or indefinite. Note the difference in the two types of articles:

Did you take the cookie? This is a definite article in action. Notice it wasn't just any cookie. It was *the cookie*.

Did you take a cookie? This is an indefinite article. Notice how it didn't tell you which one. It didn't care which cookie, just *a cookie*.

The trouble with articles is that uncountable nouns are particularly menacing and frighten away indefinite articles. That is why you will never find an indefinite article preceding an uncountable noun. On the other hand, definite articles are not easily intimidated and can be used with countable nouns. Here are a few examples of the uncountable nouns and how definite articles, not indefinite, will warn the approach:

The air is polluted but not *An air is polluted.*

The sand is hot but not *A sand is hot.*

I live in the South but not *I live in a South.*

So the next time you are reading a sentence, look for those articles because they are there to warn you that a noun is approaching.

Capitalizing and Punctuating for Effect

By Livvy Mullins

How do you decide to punctuate your sentences? Are you often unsure about which words require capitalization? Stop worrying, and visit the Writing Lab. In the Lab, you'll learn that punctuation and capitalization serve specific purposes in your writing. Neither is used simply for effect or decoration. Consider the following sentences:

The President has aids.

The President has AIDS.

The era of the ERA is not over.

Hernandez sat on the stoop listening to his boom box above him a tenant of the building appeared at the window with a bucket of water.

Hernandez sat on the stoop listening to his boom box; above him, a tenant of the building appeared at the window with a bucket of water.

Without the proper punctuation and capitalization, the meaning of these sentences is changed considerably.

How's Your Sentence Sense?

Can you correct this run-on?

That that is is that that is not is not is it not it is.

Call the Writing Lab (474-2129) for the answer.

Fragments

By Amy Woodland

No doubt about it. The fewer the fragments, the better your paper. Fragments are not always easy to recognize. **Students rarely having recognized their mistakes. Continue about their papers without noticing that a sentence is incomplete.** Reading a paper plagued by fragments becomes difficult. **Even for an instructor.** Students, finish your thoughts! **And while you're at it.** Finish your sentences.

There are six fragments in the passage above. Notice that the first two are intentional. Good, seasoned writers often use intentional fragments for rhetorical effect. For instance, intentional fragments are used in narratives and other kinds of writing to suggest a character's thoughts as in the passage above: *No doubt about it.* Other types of intentional fragments such as these below appear in writing to record conversation or a natural form of expression.

Bon voyage.

What a mess!

No smoking.

Out of sight, out of mind.

The more, the merrier.

So much for the history of the problem.

Now for some possible solutions.

The Writing Lab's paper reading service is available for all UWF students. *Any major, any class.*

A Preposition Is a Word You Shouldn't End a Sentence With

By Mamie Webb Hixon, Writing Lab Director

A preposition is a word you shouldn't end a sentence with. The warnings against ending a sentence with a preposition are aimed at superfluous prepositions like *at* in *Where's the book at?* or *Where do you live at?* not prepositions like these, some which are used idiomatically:

Where are you from?

He lives in a town I've never heard of.

Whom are you talking to?

At this retirement center, the patients are well cared for.

Sure, all could be reworded to remove the "postposed" preposition at the end of the sentence, but to what end? Meaning, and sometimes economy and clarity, could be lost.

So is it wrong to end a sentence with a preposition? You decide – should you risk clarity, meaning, and economy just to remove these terminal prepositions?

We have asked registered voters whom they plan to vote for.

What was wrong with me? What was I afraid of?

Most underachievers have talents and strengths they're not aware of.

I might change my mind if you ask me to.

He thought he had nothing more to live for.

All students had turned their papers in.

I haven't decided what to major in.

Editing Your Own Papers

Jason Glass

Nothing undermines a writer's credibility more than careless errors. Even if your ideas are great, your professors may not see past your mistakes. Fortunately, there are several ways to avoid grammatical and mechanical errors in your papers:

1. **Give yourself enough time to edit your papers.** Any paper that you finish five minutes before it is due will certainly be full of careless mistakes, and professors can tell if you have procrastinated.
2. **Read your papers aloud.** Many errors which go undetected while you read your paper silently become obvious when you read it aloud. This suggestion might seem boring, but you can add some zest to your oral reading by practicing your British accent while reading your papers.
3. **Have a friend read your papers.** Often, a fresh pair of eyes will catch errors that yours do not.

- After you write a paper and proofread it, **allow your writing to "simmer"** for at least two days: then read the paper again. You may be surprised at how many errors you find during the second or third reading.
- For any specific grammar questions, **call the Grammar Hotline at 474-2129**. We can always help.

Is **Ain't** A Word?

By Mamie Webb Hixon

Is **ain't** a word? Of course, it's a word. It resides in the dictionary along with other "words" such as *irregardless*, *enthused*, and *complected*, and it has been used by reputable speakers and writers. So why the stigma? Why are *ain't* users called dumb, stupid, illiterate, sub-literate, ignorant, and uneducated? Why are there such far-reaching, serious, almost career-damaging consequences of using *ain't*? More often than not, those so-called uneducated people who use *ain't* also use *irregardless*, *enthused*, *complected*, *hissself*, *in regards to*, *had of*, and an array of other substandard expressions – it comes with the territory.

Ain't bears the stigma it does because many *ain't* users don't limit their use to the first-person negative question *Aren't I?* They use *ain't* in all instances – *You ain't*, *they ain't*, *he ain't*, *she ain't*; the list goes on. Your decision to use *ain't* should be a deliberate, intentional one. Its usage should be masterfully incorporated and rhetorically executed for the desired effect. If you use *ain't* thoughtlessly or carelessly without regard to content, then you may not only incur the wrath of your reader or listener, but you may also undermine your own credibility as a writer. **Now, ain't that the truth!**

"Our attitude about *ain't*," says Martha Kolln in *Understanding English Grammar*, "is an issue about manners, not grammar. If the network newscasters and the [P]resident of the United States and English teachers began to use *ain't* on a regular basis, its status would change very quickly." She continues: "The linguist Paul Roberts made the idea of usage very clear when he said that teachers and newscasters and presidents don't avoid *ain't* because it's nonstandard; it's nonstandard because such people avoid it."

Laying It on the Line

By M. Gretchen Harris

Perhaps it is time to lay down the rules I found lying around regarding the usage of *lie* and *lay*. *Lay* means "to place or put something," while *lie* means "to rest or recline."

I will lay my books down for the night.
While John was laying carpet, he found fifty dollars lying under the couch.

An especially troublesome verb form is *lay*. Not only is it the present tense form meaning "to put," but it is also the past tense of *lie*, meaning "to rest."

I'll lay the keys on the kitchen table.
John lay awake last night thinking about how he would spend the fifty dollars.

<i>lie (to rest)</i>	<i>lay (to put)</i>
<i>lies</i>	<i>lays</i>
<i>laying</i>	<i>laying</i>
<i>lay</i>	<i>laid</i>
<i>(have) lain</i>	<i>(have) laid</i>

Another especially troublesome form of *lie* is *lying*, the present participle of *lie*. *Lying* may be used with both animate and inanimate objects.

The scissors are lying on the desk.
Tourists are lying on the beach getting sunburned.

May I Have an "M," Please?

By The Grammar Guru

So you're a contestant on *Wheel of Fortune*? How are you going to request your consonants and vowels? "May I have a *a*, please?" "May I have an *a*, please?" "May I have a *s*, please?" "May I have an *s*, please?"

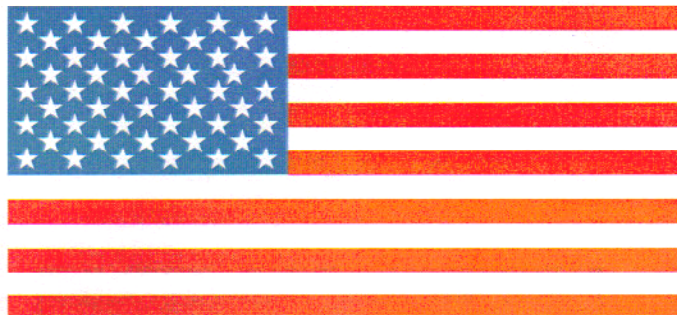
Just follow these simple rules:

Use a before letters and words with an initial consonant sound: "May I have a *u*, please?" The letter *u* is a vowel, but when pronounced, it has an initial consonant sound.

Use an before letters and words with an initial vowel sound: "May I have an *s*, please?" The letter *s* and several other consonants have an initial vowel sound (*f*, *h*, *l*, *m*, *n*, *r*, *s*, and *x*).

With words and initialisms, the same principles apply:

a university	an understanding
a historical occasion	an honorary degree
a master's degree	an MBA degree
a Saturday game	an SAT score of 1000
a one-hour appointment	an ordinary person



United We Stand.

Pronouns – There's No Substitute for Them

By Mamie Webb Hixon

Pronoun reference rules dispel all these myths and myths about pronouns.

MYTH 1: If the reader or listener knows what you're referring to, then there's no problem.

That's the problem. How is a writer to know? How is a speaker to know?

Example: If a student is absent, can he make it up?
(What's it?)

MYTH 2: They could be anybody.

That's the problem: *They* could be anyone; *it* is without a definite antecedent.

Example: At my school, they require students to wear uniforms. (Who is *they*?)

MYTH 3: A pronoun refers to the closest or closer antecedent.

"Closer antecedent" implies that there are two possible antecedents, a situation which creates ambiguity.

Example: Marcy seldom writes to Marclyn when she is away at college. (Who is *she*? Which one is away at college?)

MYTH 4: *It's* is a possessive pronoun.

It's is a contraction for *it is*. The singular possessive pronouns are *her* (feminine), *his* (masculine), and *its* (neuter):

The woman had *her* day in court.

The man had *his* day in court.

The college had *its* day in court.

MYTH 5: Possessive pronouns, like possessive nouns, should be spelled with an apostrophe.

These possessive pronouns are not spelled with an apostrophe: *ours*, *yours*, *his*, *hers*, *its*, and *theirs*.

MYTH 6: A pronoun may substitute for a complete sentence or idea.

A pronoun is a pro noun – for a noun. Using a pronoun to substitute for a sentence or an idea may cause confusion and miscommunication.

Example: I spilled ink on the bedspread, which created a problem. (What created the problem – the bedspread or spilling ink on the bedspread?)

Be sure that each of your pronouns has an antecedent.

You may not always be present to clear up the ambiguity.

Every man should help his wife with _____ housework.

Fill in the blank with a third-person pronoun.

Call 474-2129 for the answer.

A/lot Is Two Words

By Mamie Webb Hixon

A LOT is two words! I repeat: **A LOT** is two words.

Despite the overwhelming popularity of spelling this article-noun combination as one word, *alot* is still not recognized in dictionaries, in handbooks, or on computer spell checkers as one word. And despite the appearance of this non-word everywhere – on business marquees, in newspapers, in business letters, in memorandums, and in high school and college students' papers – *alot* is not a correct spelling.

Think about it! If *a lot* were one word, doesn't it stand to reason that the article *a* could be combined with almost any noun to yield other nonsense words such as *alittle*, *abunch*, *afew*; the list is inexhaustible. Perhaps, those who insist on spelling *a lot* as one word are thinking about words such as *apiece* and *anew*, which are in fact spelled as one word. The only one-word *a lot* is *allot* – spelled **allot**.

What Is "Good English"?

"Good English" is most likely to be familiar to the greatest number of people; it is the English used in textbooks, published documents, reputable magazines and newspapers, and academic and business writing. "Good English" is not only the yardstick by which the distance between what is said and what is meant is measured; it is also the template the communicator may use to improve the accuracy and the credibility of his renderings. Though there is no governing board of linguists or grammarians, or even a blueprint for writing or speaking, careful writers and speakers try to conform to the dicta of authorities: standard usage handouts with prescriptive rules of grammar, standard dictionaries with usage notes based on common practice and universal acceptance, and general conservative usage used by most educated people.

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The Write Advice is a publication of the University of West Florida's Writing Laboratory.

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