

# Grammar Guide

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•READY REFERENCE•  
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## Punctuation Rules

### A period is used...

- at the end of declarative sentences and mild imperatives.
- after initials and abbreviations.
- only once for a sentence ending with an abbreviation.

### A question mark is used...

- at the end of an interrogative sentence.

### An exclamation mark is used...

- after a word, phrase, or sentence showing strong feeling.

### A comma is used...

- to separate two or more adjectives of equal rank.
- to set off a direct quotation.
- to separate three or more words, phrases, or clauses in a series.
- to separate two independent clauses in a compound sentence.
- to set off a word, phrase, or dependent clause at the beginning of a sentence.

### A semicolon is used...

- to separate independent clauses very close in meaning but not separated by *and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, *for*, or *yet*.
- to separate items in a series when the series already contains commas.

### A colon is used...

- before a list of items or details.
- before a statement that summarizes the original statement.
- before a long, formal quotation or statement.

### Parentheses are used...

- to set off words, phrases, clauses, or sentences which are independent of the main part of the sentence.

### Quotation marks are used...

- to set off a direct quotation. (Single quotation marks are used for quotes within quotes.)
- to set off words, phrases, or sentences referred to in the sentence.
- to set off slang and foreign words or phrases.

## Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

- A personal pronoun must agree with its antecedent in person, number, and gender.
- Collective nouns are singular when the group is acting as a single unit.
- Collective nouns are plural when the members of the group are acting independently.

### Example:

The orchestra disagree on the selections for the concert.

## Subject-Verb Agreement

- Normally, when two or more subjects are connected by *and*, the subject is plural and requires a plural verb.  
*Fred and Dave like this class.*
- If the two subjects form a unit, the subject is then singular and requires a singular verb.  
*Chicken and dumplings is my favorite meal.*
- Two singular subjects joined by *or* are considered singular and require a singular verb.
- When one of the subjects is singular and the other is plural, the verb agrees with the subject that is nearer.
- The subject of the sentence is never affected by intervening phrases that might come between it and the verb.
- A collective noun that is singular requires a singular verb.
- If the collective noun indicates by its usage that the individual members are acting separately, then a plural verb is required.
- A plural noun that shows *weight*, *extent*, or *quantity* is singular and takes a singular verb.  
*Ten dollars is the price of this tape.*

## Rules for Titles

- All principal words in titles are capitalized. Do not capitalize prepositions, coordinating conjunctions, and articles unless they begin the title.
- Underline the titles of books, magazines, newspapers, and films. (Italics may take the place of underlining if you are using a word processor capable of doing it.)
- Quotation marks are used to enclose the titles of magazine articles, chapters of books, names of songs, and titles of poems.

## Capitalization Rules

- Capitalize names of particular persons, places, and things.
- Capitalize titles of rank when they come before a person's name.
- Do not capitalize the names of the seasons of the year unless they are personified.
- The words *north*, *south*, *east*, and *west* are capitalized only when they refer to sections of the country, not directions.
- The names of school subjects are not capitalized unless they are names of languages.
- All words that refer to a specific deity and sacred books are capitalized.

## The "Of" Error

- Do not substitute the preposition *of* for the auxiliary verb *have*. Common error forms are:  
*could of*  
*should of*  
You should use:  
*could have*  
*should have*