This Quick Reference Guide was created to address some of the more common writing mistakes in grammar, punctuation, and usage. Please note there are several style guides—The Associated Press Stylebook, The Chicago Manual of Style, The MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing, and The Oxford Guide to Style, to name but a few—so it’s best to choose one style in order to keep your writing consistent. (Keep in mind many style guides are revised periodically to accommodate changes in customs and usage.)

Chappaqua Central School District
66 Roaring Brook Road, Chappaqua, NY 10514
April 2012
## Difficult Verbs

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Today I . . .</th>
<th>Yesterday I . . .</th>
<th>Many times I have . . .</th>
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# Difficult Verbs

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Subject/Verb Agreement

The subject of a sentence does the action. The verb is the action or state of being the subject does.

The *car* ran off the rain-soaked road.

\[ \text{subject} \quad \text{verb} \]

The subject and verb need to agree in number. If there is a singular subject, the verb needs to be singular as well.

The *child* with the big stack of books *is* my neighbor.

\[ \text{(singular)} \quad \text{(singular)} \]

The *children* wearing the green jackets *are* from my school.

\[ \text{(plural)} \quad \text{(plural)} \]

The phrase after the subject does not affect the verb.

The *principal*, as well as the teachers, *is* responsible for safety.

When the sentence begins with *there*, the subject comes after the verb.

There *are* many hard-working *teachers* in our schools.

There *is* an *atmosphere* of serious business in her classroom.

With *or* or *nor*, choose the verb that goes with the subject closer to it.

Neither Sue nor *Tom* *is* going to the meeting.

Either Mr. Stevens or his *students* *are* going to take photographs.

These pronouns require a singular verb: *each, each one, either, neither, one, everyone*. The phrase after the subject does not affect the verb.

*Each* (of the girls) *is* going to build a model airplane.

*Every one* (of the boys) *takes* a turn doing the dishes.
Subject/Verb Agreement

In these examples an amount is considered as one unit.

*Five years is* a long time to wait for retirement.
*Eight miles is* too far to walk.

The following nouns are singular: *mumps, measles, news, mathematics, economics.*

*Measles is* a disease we want to avoid in our schools.

The following nouns can be either singular or plural depending on the meaning: *athletics, acoustics, gymnastics, politics, statistics.*

*Politics is* an area worthy of examination.
(body of knowledge)
The *politics of school funding are* intense.
(activities, qualities)

The verb is determined by the noun that comes after these subjects: *all, any, half, most, none, some.*

*Half of the class is* going on the field trip.
*Half of the chemicals are* available for the demonstration.

Please note that the object of the preposition is never the subject of a sentence.

*A number of students are* coming to the game.
(a number = plural)
*The number of suspensions is* small.
(the number = singular)
The *criteria for the position are* listed on the announcement.
(plural)
*A criterion frequently used for grades is* class participation.
(singular)
Pronoun Agreement

A pronoun is used to replace a noun or another pronoun.

The teacher said she would collect the tests later.

A singular or plural pronoun is selected to match the word to which it refers. The following words are singular: each, either, neither, one, everybody, another, anybody, everyone, nobody, somebody, someone.

Everyone must learn to wait his or her turn.
Each of the students has finished his or her lunch.

It has become increasingly acceptable to use the plural “their” to refer to a singular noun that does not have a gender.

Everyone must learn to wait their turn.

A good alternative might be to rewrite the sentence.

Students must learn to wait their turns. (plural)

With or or nor, match the pronoun with the noun nearer to it.

Neither the teacher nor the students were wearing their jackets.
Neither Cassie nor Maria has turned in her report.

Some plural nouns are used as singular.

The United States is proud of its accomplishments in space.
Chappaqua Central Schools is proud of its excellent students.

Match the pronoun with the noun after these words: all, any, half, most, none, some.

None of the children ate their vegetables.
## Capitalization

<table>
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<td>un-American</td>
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<td>summer, fall</td>
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<td>turn north</td>
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<td>the senior prom</td>
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<td>an area high school</td>
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<td>the interstate highway</td>
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<td>Heinz ketchup</td>
<td>ketchup and mustard</td>
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<tr>
<td>the New York Yankees</td>
<td>our baseball team</td>
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<tr>
<td>the Internet, the Web</td>
<td>website, email</td>
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</table>

### Family words and titles

Capitalized when they precede a name or are used in place of a name, unless they are preceded by a possessive noun or pronoun such as my, your, his, Richard’s, etc.

Then **Mother** showed **Uncle Jim** the pin that her **aunt** had worn.

### Professional titles

Capitalized only when they are used with a name (Doctor Smith, Mayor Gonzalez) or in place of a name.

“Say, **Governor**, I heard **Senator Wiley** claim you were not even a **mayor** before being elected.”

### Quotes

Capitalized if your own words serve only to introduce the quote using a speaker’s tag and a comma.

Thomas Huxley called science “**trained** and organized common sense.”

According to Thomas Huxley, “**Science** is nothing but trained and organized common sense.”
Commas

A comma may not be used to separate two complete sentences. The result is a run-on sentence.

I have a dog, his name is Spot.
(complete) ↑ (complete)

comma splice

You may use a semi-colon, a comma plus a conjunction (and, but, or), or a dependent adverb (after, even though, though, although, if, because, since, when, while, before, so that, whenever).

I have a dog, and his name is Spot.

Listing

Comma test: If the word and can be inserted between two adjectives, use a comma.

Today’s letter to the editor is a short, powerful explanation of the situation.

(a short AND powerful explanation)

Series

Use a comma before the end conjunction.

We have teams in football, volleyball, basketball, and track.

Interrupters

Use a comma to set off a short interruption.

We will, of course, provide all testing materials except a pencil.

It is essential, however, that students submit their orders before 10:30 a.m.
Commas

The Appositive Phrase (Parenthetical Aside)

Comma test for the appositive phrase: Use commas if the explanatory material can be put in parentheses or deleted without changing the meaning of the sentence.

My teacher, *noticing I was having trouble*, came over to help with the problem.

(noticing I was having trouble) is extra information that can be removed.

My teacher came over to help with the problem.

Theodore Roosevelt, *a popular president*, was a graduate of Horace Greeley High School.

Introductory Phrase or Clause

Yes, our test results have improved since last year. *(word)*

First, be sure you have the mandatory student insurance for extracurricular activities. *(word)*

In addition, we will sell bag lunches to students selected for this activity. *(phrase)*

Following this announcement, yearbooks will be on sale in the cafeteria. *(phrase)*

Faced with a difficult decision, we asked students and parents to express their views. *(phrase)*

To apply for this program, please contact the guidance counselor. *(phrase)*
Commas

The Dependent Adverb Clause

A comma is used when a dependent adverb (after, although, as, as if, as long as, as though, because, before, if, since, so that, unless, until, when, where, while) is used in the beginning of a sentence or in the middle of a sentence.

While I didn’t agree with his politics, I had to applaud his passion.

I didn’t agree with his politics, although I had to applaud his passion.

Dates and Addresses

Make sure you put a comma after a full date when it is part of a sentence.

On August 14, 1946, our school was opened to students for the first time.

A comma is not needed for month and year only.

This policy was established in July 1993.

Use a comma after a full address contained within a sentence.

Send your request to Horace Greeley High School, 70 Roaring Brook Road, Chappaqua, New York 10514, as soon as possible.
Dashes and Hyphens

Dash

Distinguish a dash (two strikes of the - key) from a hyphen (one strike of the - key, used for hyphenated modifiers such as small-town girl).

For Emphatic Pause.

We can sum up our purpose in one word — dedication.

Students, teachers, parents, and staff members — we all work together to make our school successful.

For Interrupters (act as parentheses).

Seven Bridges MS — newly built in 2003 — was designated one of the ten most beautiful buildings in Westchester.

Hyphens

Compound adjectives are composed of two or more words that modify a noun and must be hyphenated. They act as a single word to describe their noun.

The slow economy has made it hard for low-wage workers.

\[ \text{adjective} \quad \text{compound adjective} \]

Compound adjectives are only hyphenated if they come before the noun they describe.

That was a fast-paced lecture vs That lecture was fast paced.
Apostrophes

To show that one or more letters or numbers have been omitted.
   isn’t, she’ll, it’s, class of ‘88

To show the plural of a letter or a number.
   A’s
   8’s (sometimes 8s)
Note: An apostrophe is not used for decades (the 1990s) or acronyms (APPRs).

To show ownership or an “of” relationship.
   (Note: The owner is the part BEFORE the apostrophe.)
   the student’s jacket = the jacket of the student
   the students’ project = the project of the students
   the Joneses’ house = the house of the Joneses (plural)
       but note, Mr. Jones’s house.
   anybody’s guess = the guess of anybody
   somebody else’s responsibility = the responsibility of somebody else
   Yesterday’s topic = the topic of yesterday
   six weeks’ grade = the grade of six weeks
   my great-grandfather’s watch = the watch of my great-grandfather
   New York’s teams = the teams of New York
   Jim, Sally, and Willie’s presentation = the presentation of Jim, Sally, and Willie together
   Lawanda’s and Tyler’s grades = the grades of Lawanda and the grades of Tyler separately

A singular noun ending in s is made possessive as follows:
   the dress’s style
   Mr. Jones’s book
Colons and Semicolons

Colon

To introduce a list.
The following tests will be given on Tuesday: vocabulary, reading comprehension, and spelling.

For emphasis.
Everyone on our staff shares a common goal: learning.

To introduce a statement or question.
Repeatedly ask yourself this question: What can I do to help students learn?

To introduce a quotation.
Christa McAuliffe emphasized the importance of our profession: “I touch the future. I teach.”

Semicolon

In compound sentences that have no connecting word.
James is a leader in our school; his outstanding ability is recognized by everyone on the staff.

In compound sentences with connecting words such as however, also, as a result, besides, for example, furthermore, in addition, instead, meanwhile, moreover, nevertheless, similarly, then, therefore.

He was absent yesterday; however, he did not bring a note.

Note: When however does not join compound sentences, a semicolon is not used. (She was not, however, one of the finalists.)
Words Frequently Confused

**affect, effect:** *Affect* is generally a verb meaning to influence. (How will this affect us?) *Effect* is generally a noun meaning the result. (Among the effects of budget cuts will be larger classes.)

**all ready, already:** *All ready* means each person or thing is ready. (We are all ready for the field trip.) *Already* tells when. (He has already finished his work.)

**among, between:** *Among* is used for more than two people or things (among the people in your group). *Between* is used for only two people or things (between you and me).

**anxious, eager:** *Anxious* means worried or uneasy (anxious about her grades). *Eager* means expectant, often with an air of excitement (eager for vacation).

**bad, badly:** *Bad* is used with the verb feel. (We feel bad about losing the game.) (Her cold made her feel bad.) *Badly* tells how and is used with an action, not a feeling. (They played tennis badly.) A helpful test is to substitute a synonym — *miserable* for *bad* and *miserably* for *badly*.

**because:** *Because* should not be used after *reason is*. (The reason he arrived early is that [not *because*] he needed to make up his algebra test.)

**bring, take:** *Bring* is used to convey something to the person speaking. (Bring your permission slip with you the day of the field trip. — said by someone at school) *Take* is used to convey action away from the person speaking. (Take your permission slip to school today. — said by someone at home)

**capital, Capitol:** *Capital* refers to the city that is a governmental center (Albany, the capital of New York), an upper case letter (starting a sentence with a capital), or wealth in the form of money or property (capital to start a business). *Capitol* refers to the official building in which state or federal lawmakers conduct business (a field trip that includes a tour of the Capitol [capitalized] while the legislature is in session).

**choose, chose:** *Choose* rhymes with ooze. (Choose your electives for next year.) *Chose* rhymes with hose. (She chose band as her elective.)
Words Frequently Confused

complement, compliment: As a verb, complement means to complete or balance. (Homework complements classroom work.) As a noun, complement means something that completes or balances. (The salty nuts are a complement to the bland cheese.) As a verb, compliment means to praise or congratulate. (We compliment you on an outstanding performance.) As a noun, compliment means a tribute or something kind said or done in praise. (The ceremony was a compliment to his achievements.) (Staff members received many compliments on the yearbook.)

comprise, compose: Comprise means to consist of or to be made up of. It is used to denote that the whole is made up of smaller parts. (The water molecule comprises two atoms of hydrogen and one atom of oxygen.) Do not use the word of with comprise. Compose means to make up or to make. It is used to denote that parts make up the whole. (Two atoms of hydrogen and one atom of oxygen compose the water molecule.)

continual, continuous: Continual refers to something that happens again and again (continual discipline referrals for fighting). Continuous refers to something that doesn’t stop happening (continuous noise from the heating system).

council, counsel: Council is a group that advises (the student council). Counsel means to advise (to counsel students about their behavior).

disinterested, uninterested: Disinterested means unbiased (a disinterested person to review the case). Uninterested means unconcerned or having no interest (the problem of uninterested students).

e.g., i.e.: The abbreviation e.g. means for example. (We need supplies, e.g., markers, pencils, tissues, paper towels.) The abbreviation i.e. means that is. (He is a leader in our school, i.e., students look to him for direction.)

every day, everyday: Every day means each day. (Every day I do the attendance report.) Everyday means daily. (Cafeteria duty is an everyday occurrence.)
Words Frequently Confused

farther, further: *Farther* refers to measureable, physical distance. (He lives farther from school than I do.) *Further* refers to additional time, quantity, or degree. (Let’s discuss this further.)

fewer, less: *Fewer* is used with items that can be counted (fewer students than last year). *Less* is used with bulk quantities that are usually not counted (less time and effort) (less money).

good, well: *Good* is an adjective used to modify a noun (object). (It was a good baseball game.) *Well* is an adverb used to modify a verb (action). (I played tennis well.) Linking verbs are the exception. They are verbs used as connectors between a direct relation of the subject and verb. (Dinner smells good.)

imply, infer: *Imply* means to suggest. A writer or speaker implies. (Is he implying something?) *Infer* means to draw a conclusion. A reader or listener infers. (I inferred that I was to call the parent.)

incidents, incidence: An *incident* is something that has happened, an event. *Incidents* are multiple happenings. (We have had a number of traffic incidents). *Incidence* means frequency and is not made plural. (We have a low incidence of absenteeism.)

its, it’s: *Its* shows possession, and *it’s* is a contraction for it is. Example: Slang has its place, but it’s not in the classroom. Note that possessive pronouns like *its* and *whose* never take an apostrophe.

loose, lose: *Loose* rhymes with *goose*. (Don’t leave your papers lying around loose.) *Lose* rhymes with *use*. (Students who lose their books must pay for them.)

nauseated, nauseous: *Nauseated* means sick. (The child went to the office because he was nauseated.) *Nauseous* means sickening or disgusting. (The chemical reaction gave off a nauseous odor.)

principal, principle: As a noun, *principal* refers to the head of a school or money that earns interest. As an adjective, *principal* means main (the principal reason for our decision). *Principle* is a noun meaning rule or standard. (The principle of fairness is the basis for our classroom rules.)
Words Frequently Confused

**only:** The word *only* serves as an example of the power of the English language to express nuances of meaning. Consider the shifts in meaning achieved simply by the placement of the word *only.*

- *Only* he witnessed the incident on campus last night.
- He witnessed *only* the incident on campus last night.
- He witnessed the *only* incident on campus last night.
- He witnessed the incident on campus *only* last night.
- He witnessed the incident on campus last night *only.*

**stationary, stationery:** *Stationary* means not movable (a stationary cabinet), and *stationery* refers to the paper and envelopes used to write letters (school stationery).

**than, then:** *Than* is used in a comparison (taller than his mother). *Then* tells when. (Then he left.)

**that, which:** *That* is used with information that is essential to the meaning of a sentence. (I need the report that we worked on yesterday.) *Which* is used with information that could be put in parentheses or left out without destroying the meaning of the sentence. A comma is used with *which.* (He did a good job on his project, which was a major grade for the six-week period.)

**their, there, they’re:** *Their* shows possession (their house). *There* tells where (over there) or refers to the existence of something. (There are several reasons.) *They’re* is the contraction for they are. (They’re late.)

**to, too, two:** *To* is used to mean in the direction of (to the office), and it is also used with a verb (to graduate from high school). *Too* tells how much or to what degree (too many tardies). *Two* is a number (two people on duty).

**who, which, that:** *Who* is used in reference to people. *Which* refers to nonliving objects or to animals, never to people. *That* may refer to animals, people, or nonliving objects. It is often preferable to omit the word *that*, as in the example: This is the class *(that)* I like best.

**who, whom:** *Who* is used only when it is the subject of the verb. (Who paid for the meal?) *Whom* is never the subject of the verb and is also always used after prepositions. (Sara gave the tickets to whom?)

**your, you’re:** *Your* shows possession (take your jacket). *You’re* is the contraction of you are. *(You’re* going to be late!)

17
## Commonly Misspelled Words

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<td>Familiar</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulfill</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temperature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Usage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incorrect</th>
<th>Correct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>alot ...</td>
<td>a lot (large amount)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alot ...</td>
<td>allot (to give out)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alright...</td>
<td>all right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anyways ...</td>
<td>anyway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between you and I ...</td>
<td>between you and me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to conference with students</td>
<td>to confer with students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>could of, would of</td>
<td>could have, would have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>different than</td>
<td>different from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enthuse, enthused</td>
<td>motivate, enthusiastic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from you and I ...</td>
<td>from you and me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hopefully, we will ...</td>
<td>We hope to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>irregardless ...</td>
<td>regardless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>if I was in charge</td>
<td>if I were in charge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel badly about it</td>
<td>I feel bad about it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the tallest of the two sisters</td>
<td>the taller of the two sisters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>orientate</td>
<td>orient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reference this in your letter</td>
<td>refer to this in your letter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In-text Citations

A brief list of what needs to be credited or documented:
1. Words or ideas presented in a magazine, book, newspaper, song, TV program, movie, web page, etc.
2. When you copy the exact words or a unique phrase

A brief list of things that do not need documentation or credit:
1. Writing your own lived experiences, observations, thoughts, and conclusions about a subject
2. When you are using “common knowledge,” which can usually be found in at least three sources
3. When you are using generally-accepted facts (e.g., Pollution is bad for the environment.)

(from Purdue Online Writing Lab)

1) Indirect quotation: A summary or paraphrase of someone else’s ideas, even if they are in your own words, still needs a citation.


Writing example: Wordsworth extensively explored the role of emotion in the creative process (263).

Writing example 2: Experts have extensively explored the role of emotion in the creative process (Wordworth 263).

2) Quoting a person who is not the author of your source


Writing example: Jon Anderson, the noted scientist, believed the evidence, while compelling, was inconclusive (Smith 5).

*Here, Anderson had the idea, but Smith wrote the article where the idea is from.*
In-text Citations

3) Citing a source without an author or page: Use the first important word from the title in quotes.


Writing example: One online film critic stated that *Fitzcarraldo* is a beautiful and terrifying critique of obsession and colonialism (“Herzog”).

*Use the first important word of the bibliographic entry. Put it in quotes since it is a title.*

4) Direct quotation: Using someone else’s exact words to enhance your essay.


Writing example: Wordsworth stated that Romantic poetry was marked by a “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (263).

Writing example 2: Romantic poetry is characterized by the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (Wordsworth 263).

5) If you continue the sentence after the direct quote, you can put the citation in two places:

As Steven Belweather, the author of *Ways to the Means*, has observed, “Many of these proposals for investigation are quite inconclusive” (213), an analysis that does not seem to arrive at any specific conclusion allowing for further debate on the topic.

*(note where the comma is)*
In-text Citations

As Steven Belweather, the author of *Ways to the Means*, has observed, “Many of these proposals for investigation are quite inconclusive,” an analysis that does not seem to arrive at any specific conclusion allowing for further debate on the topic (213).

6) Article with no author:


Writing example: A number of scholars have noted that “these proposals for investigation are quite inconclusive” (“Language” 13).

Note: There is no comma after *that*, so don’t capitalize the word *these*.

7) Using a source with more than one author:


Writing example: The *Purdue OWL* is accessed by millions of users every year. Its “MLA Formatting and Style Guide” is “one of the most popular resources” (Stolley and Miller).

8) Using two sources by the same author:

Writing example: Murray states that writing is “a process” that “varies with our thinking style” (*Write to Learn* 37). Additionally, Murray argues that the purpose of writing is to “carry ideas and information from the mind of one person into the mind of another” (*A Writer* 101).
In-text Citations

9) Using two sources by the same author without mentioning the name in the text:

Writing example: Visual studies, because it is such a new discipline, may be “too easy” (Elkins “Visual Studies” 63) or “too far from the norm to be considered a new discipline” (Elkins “Looking” 7).

10) Citing authors with the same last name:

Writing example: Although some medical ethicists claim that cloning will lead to designer children (R. Miller 12), others note that the advantages for medical research outweigh this consideration (A. Miller 46).

11) Direct quotation of 30 words or more: The Block Quote

Writing example:

Before discussing the topic further, we need to define the word “culture.” A number of scholars, including William Belweather, have observed, A culture is a commonly shared, learned, and remembered history that unites a particular group of people. Cultures have their own language, mores and reprisals that make them distinct from other cultures... (j)ust as cultural diffusion occurs among neighboring tribes, so too does this diffusion occur between much smaller sub-cultures as well. (21)

Belweather goes on to suggest that modern offices are cultures in and of themselves that follow the same guidelines as certain tribes in the South Pacific.

1) Left margin is indented
2) Right margin is NOT indented
2) Spacing remains the same
3) No quotation marks around the block quote
4) Don’t indent the line after the block quote
5) The period comes BEFORE the citation
Notes
Notes
We would like to acknowledge Chappaqua administrators, English teachers, and library/media specialists, and Pinellas County Schools (Florida), for their contributions.