

Grammar Tips

Welcome to Grammar Tips! Here are some guidelines to follow when you're writing and/or editing.

For
And
Nor
But
Or
Yet
So

FANBOYS is a mnemonic device that helps you remember all seven of the coordinating conjunctions. These are used when joining two complete thoughts together--just don't forget your **comma!**

Ex: I love my bosses at Kingdom Winds, **and** I love my coworkers!

Ex: I want a cookie, **but** I should eat fruit.

It is helpful to structure your sentences in ways that lead to the next idea, too!

- "I want a cookie, **but** I should eat fruit" indicates that I might crave something sweet, but I will choose something healthy. The next sentence or thought might express that I felt better after choosing fruit.
- On the other hand, "I should eat fruit, **but** I want a cookie" indicates that I should eat something healthy, but I am opting for what I crave. The next sentence or thought might express that I got a tummy ache.

Sentence order and structure help us keep our minds focused on the movement and progression of the stories we are telling.

A round of applause for "AND!"

The **comma** can be used to separate different items in a list, too. "And" gets extra attention because it's the coordinating conjunction that we use to separate the items! Here at Kingdom Winds, we are firm believers in correct comma usage and the well-known **Oxford Comma!** The **Oxford Comma** is the last comma in a list of items.

Ex: Kingdom Winds is a publishing company for artists, authors, **and** musicians.

Ex: The zoo has monkeys, giraffes, tigers, lions, elephants, **and** alligators.

A common mistake is forgetting important **commas and **not having enough!** Sometimes commas are crucial because they can save lives!**

Ex: Let's eat Grandma!

Ex: Hop on Dad!

- Without a comma, "**Let's eat Grandma**" suggests that Grandma is about to become dinner. With the correct placement of a comma, however, "Let's eat, Grandma" suggests that Grandma is being called to dinner and that everyone should now eat.
- Without a comma, "**Hop on Dad**" suggests that the children in the family should dogpile on top of their father. With the correct placement of a comma, however, "Hop on, Dad" suggests that a child is telling his father to hop on a bicycle or a horse.

Another common mistake is placing **too many commas** in a sentence!

Ex: A panda eats, shoots, and leaves.

Ex: I drink, juice, milk, and coffee, and I eat, fruit, cookies, and doughnuts.

- "A panda eats, shoots, and leaves" gives the impression that the panda performs three separate tasks because of the extra commas that divide each idea. A panda does not eat food, shoot a BB gun, and leave the crime scene. It is crucial to remove the unnecessary commas to relay the correct message that the diet of a panda is bamboo shoots and leaves: "**A panda eats shoots and leaves.**"
- "I drink, juice, milk, and coffee, and I eat, fruit, cookies, and doughnuts" suggests multiple tasks being completed but relays incoherent messages. It's possible that I drink a beverage, juice a lemon, milk a cow, and eat food, but it's not possible that I "coffee, fruit, cookies, and doughnuts." Taking out extra commas makes the sentence clearer: "**I drink juice, milk, and coffee, and I eat fruit, cookies, and doughnuts.**"

Introductory Words and Phrases

All of the words you use to "introduce" a sentence get commas right after. You get a comma, and *you* get a comma! Everyone gets commaaas!

- Suddenly
- However
- Meanwhile
- Still
- Therefore
- Besides

Ex: **Suddenly,** I felt a cold chill drift through the room.

Ex: **Meanwhile,** I was having tea with my grandmother.

Be careful that you don't use the comma right after an introductory word when it's a part of an introductory phrase! Place the comma after the whole phrase instead.

Ex: **However you looked at it,** the situation was rather tough.

Ex: **Besides the stain on her shirt,** Jess was spotless from head to toe after the food fight.

Colon Vs. Semicolon

Many people mix up the **colon** and **semicolon**, but the difference in appearance is that a **colon** looks like two periods stacked on top of one another (:) while a **semicolon** look like a period resting on top of a comma (;). That isn't the only difference!

- A **semicolon** is similar to a comma because it **joins two complete thoughts together**, but it **doesn't need a coordinating conjunction**! If a semicolon is used, the second complete sentence usually starts with a lowercase letter. If you use "I," it remains capitalized.
Ex: My dogs are old; **my** cat is young.
Ex: I have three pets; **I** have two dogs and one cat.
- A **colon** has various roles, but two of the most distinct ways a colon is used are **introducing a list or concept and emphasis**.
Ex: This is what I'm packing: jeans, shirts, sunglasses, and a hat.
Ex: The jury came to a conclusion: the defendant was guilty.

Plurals Vs. Apostrophes

Often, people add apostrophes to words that are meant to be plural.

- Singular nouns turn into **plural nouns** when there is **more than one of something**.
Ex: My kitten grew up into an adult cat, and then she had **kittens** of her own.
Ex: I put my **quarters** into the drink machine and pressed the Coke button.
- **Apostrophes** show **possession of something**. A common issue is that people tend to place apostrophes before an S when trying to make something plural.
Ex of an incorrectly used apostrophe: I love Friday's because I get off early for the weekend.
Ex of a correctly used apostrophe (when referring to a day of the week): I wore my Sunday's best to the wedding. **OR** Did you see Sunday's bulletin?

Apostrophes can get trickier when a person possesses something, especially if his or her name ends in an S. Here are a few key notes to remember:

- If a singular person possesses something but his or her name does not end in an S, you add an **apostrophe** and an S.
Ex: If you see a coat lying around, it is Becca's.
Ex: Those paintbrushes are Dawn's.
- If a singular person possesses something but his or her name already has an S, you still add an **apostrophe** and an S. There is a reason for this—see bullet point #4.
Ex: Jesus's disciples were some of His most faithful followers.
Ex: It was not Chris's fault that he was late to work; he left early and got stuck in traffic.
- If more than one person shares joint possession, you only place an apostrophe and an S on the second person's name.
Ex: Timmy and Jimmy's little brother always tattletales on their shenanigans.
Ex: I ate at Mom and Dad's house last night.
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Hyphen and En Dash and Em Dash, OH MY!

Many times, especially when writing poetry, composers use a variety of punctuation. Three of these frequent punctuation marks are **hyphens**, **en dashes**, and **em dashes**.

- A **hyphen** is narrower than en and em dashes (-) and is used for word division and compound terms, which is what we will focus on here. Compound terms contain more than one word but represent one, solid item or idea.

Ex: Little children love to play on the merry-go-round.

Ex: My dog is happy-go-lucky no matter what.

- An **en dash** is slightly wider than the hyphen but narrower than the em dash (–) and is used to represent a span or range of numbers, dates, and times. There should be no space between the en dash and adjacent material because, depending on the use, an en dash reads “to” or “through.”

Ex: Chapters 8–12 are my favorite of the whole book.

Ex: The 2017–2018 football season was intense.

Ex: Our current office hours are 10:00a–4:00p.

[Note that when you use the words such as “from” and “between,” you do not use an en dash.]

- An **em dash** is the longest of the three dashes (—). It’s the most versatile as it can be used in the place of commas, parentheses, and colons. It’s limited to two uses per sentence. When replacing parentheses, they are less formal and more intrusive.

Ex in place of commas: When the package finally arrived—nearly three weeks after it was ordered—it was ripped and soaked from rain.

Ex in place of parentheses in the middle of a sentence: When feeding the cats—all 8 of them—Beth makes sure to give each one a scratch behind the ear.

Ex in place of parentheses at the end of a sentence: Jane decided to focus on the organization in her room—or, rather, lack of organization.