Chapter 19

Mechanics

General Mechanics Overview

It’s likely that you have a fair sense of proper mechanics in written texts, but even the best writers can benefit from a quick brushup or a quick reference now and then. This chapter provides an overview of writing issues involving spelling, capitalizing, and abbreviating words; using symbols; writing numbers; and using italics.
# 19.1 Mastering Commonly Misspelled Words

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize ways to become a better speller.
2. Implement methods of monitoring your common spelling problems.

Regardless of how good a speller you are, knowing the type of spelling errors you are likely to make can help you correct the errors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Causes of Spelling Errors</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Ways to Deal with the Problems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some words do not follow common spelling rules.</td>
<td><em>i</em> before <em>e</em> except after <em>c</em>, so is it height or hieght?</td>
<td>Know the rules, know some of the exceptions, and use a dictionary or spell checker (see Section 19.1.1 &quot;Spell Check&quot;) if you have the slightest hesitation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You interchange homophones(^1) without realizing it.</td>
<td>I want to go to.</td>
<td>Be extra careful with each homophone you use; learn the commonly confused pairs of homophones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You often do not recognize that a word has a homophone or you do not know which homophone to use.</td>
<td>The cat chased its tale for an hour.</td>
<td>Read through your work once (preferably aloud) looking (and listening) only for homophone issues. Ask someone to proofread your work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You misspell some words almost every time you use them.</td>
<td>I can’t make a committment today.</td>
<td>Keep a list of your problem words where you can easily glance at them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You find words from other languages confusing since they do not follow standard English spellings.</td>
<td>I’m going to make an orderve for the party.</td>
<td>Add foreign words you often use to your list of problem words. Look the others up each time you use them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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1. Words that sound alike but have different spellings and different meanings.
Spell Check

The combination of extensive computer use and spell checkers have changed the way we look at spelling. Today’s software programs often provide both manual and automatic spell checking. Manual spell checking lets you go through the entire document or selected text from it and checks for spellings not present in the dictionary of reference. Automatic spell checking underlines spelling errors for you (usually in red). By right-clicking on the misspelled word, you’ll be given one or more correctly spelled alternatives. When you find the spelling you think is correct, clicking on that word will change the text automatically. Sometimes automatic spell checking underlines words that aren’t misspelled, but it rarely misses words that are. So if you check all the marked words, you can “spell check as you write.”

Just make sure you don’t rely on spell check to have a human eye. Consider the following sentence: “It was sunny win I drove of this mourning, so I lift my umbrela in the car port.” If you use a spell checker on this sentence, you will be alerted to fix the problem with “umbrela.” You won’t, however, be given any indication that “win,” “mourning,” “of,” “lift,” and “car port” are problems. Spell checkers have no way to tag misspelled words if the misspelling forms another word, incorrectly used homophones, or compound words that are presented as two words. So even though spell checkers are great tools, do not give them the sole responsibility of making sure your spelling is accurate.

Spell checkers can also suggest the wrong first choice to replace a misspelled word. Consider the following sentence: “My shert was wet cleer thrugh to my skin, and my shos sloshed with every step.” A spell checker might list “though” as a first-choice for “thrugh” and “through” as the second choice, thus forcing you to know that “though” is not right and to look on down the list and choose “through.”

As a rule, only very common proper nouns are part of the dictionaries on which a spell checker is based. Consequently, you are left to check your spelling of those words. Many software programs allow users to add words to the dictionary. This permission lets you incorporate proper nouns you use often into the dictionary so you will not have to address them during a spell check. You might, for example, add your name or your workplace to the dictionary. Besides adding proper nouns, you can also add your list of other words you’ve commonly misspelled in the past.

**Common Spelling Rules**

Although they all have exceptions, common spelling rules exist and have become known as common rules because they are true most of the time. It is in your best interest to know both the rules and the common exceptions to the rules.
Common Spelling Rules

- **Rule:** *i* before *e*
  
  **Examples:** belief, chief, friend, field, fiend, niece
  
  **Exceptions:** either, foreign, height, leisure

- **Rule:** ...except after *c*
  
  **Examples:** receive, ceiling
  
  **Exceptions:** conscience, financier, science, species

- **Rule:** ...and in long-*a* words like neighbor and weigh
  
  **Examples:** eight, feint, their, vein

- **Rule:** In short-vowel accented syllables that end in a single consonant, double the consonant before adding a suffix that begins with a vowel.
  
  **Examples:** beginning, mopped, runner, sitting, submitting
  
  **Exceptions:** boxing, buses (“busses” is also acceptable), circuses, taxes

- **Rule:** There is no doubling if the syllable ends in two consonants, the last syllable is not accented, or the syllable does not have a short vowel.
  
  **Examples:** asking, curling; focused, opening; seated, waited

- **Rule:** With words or syllables that end in a silent *e*, drop the *e* before adding a suffix that begins with a vowel.
  
  **Examples:** achieving, baking, exciting, riding, surprising

- **Rule:** If the suffix doesn’t start with a vowel, keep the silent *e*.
  
  **Examples:** achievement, lately
  
  **Exceptions:** hoeing, mileage, noticeable, judgment, ninth, truly

- **Rule:** With syllables that end in *y*, change the *y* to *i* before adding a suffix (including the plural -es).
Examples: carries, cities, dries, enviable, ladies, luckiest, beautiful, bountiful

Exceptions: annoyance, babyish

• Rule: Keep the final y when it is preceded by a vowel.

Examples: keys, monkeys, plays

• Rule: ...and when the suffix begins with i, since English words do not typically have two i’s in a row.

Examples: babyish, carrying, marrying

Exceptions: skiing

• Rule: When forming the plural of a proper noun, just add -s unless the proper noun ends in ch, s, sh, x, or z.

Examples: Bartons, Blairs, Hubbards, Murphys, Bushes, Collinses, Lynches, Martinezes, Wilcoxes

• Rule: When forming plurals of hyphenated nouns, use the plural form of the main word, regardless of where it falls within the word.

Examples: brothers-in-law, clearing-houses, ex-wives, not-for-profits, runners-up, T-shirts

• Rule: Add -es to words ending in s, ch, x, or z.

Examples: classes, dishes, couches, quizzes, taxes

Exceptions: epochs, monarchs (ch spelling makes k sound)

• Rule: For words ending in a consonant and an o, add -es.

Examples: heroes, potatoes, tomatoes, zeroes

Exceptions: memos, photos, zeros (also acceptable)

• Rule: For words ending in a vowel and an o, add -s.

Examples: patios, radios, zoos

• Rule: For words ending in f or fe, either change the f to v and add -s or -es or just add -s with no changes.
Homophones are words that sound alike but have different spellings and different meanings. The best way to handle these words is to view them as completely separate words by connecting the spellings and the meanings rather than relying totally on the sounds. You can make mnemonics (memory clues) to use with words that are a problem for you. Here's a small sampling of the thousand or more homophones in the English language:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ad/add</th>
<th>him/hymn</th>
<th>rose/rows</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ant/aunt</td>
<td>hole/whole</td>
<td>sail/sale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>band/banned</td>
<td>hour/our</td>
<td>scene/seen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be/bee</td>
<td>in/inn</td>
<td>sew/so/sow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beat/beet</td>
<td>knead/need</td>
<td>sight/site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>billed/build</td>
<td>knew/new</td>
<td>soar/sore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bold/bowed</td>
<td>knight/nacht</td>
<td>some/sum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bridal/bride</td>
<td>lead/led</td>
<td>son/sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ceiling/sealing</td>
<td>lessen/lesson</td>
<td>suite/sweet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cents/scents/sense</td>
<td>loan/lone</td>
<td>tail/tale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chews/choose</td>
<td>maid/made</td>
<td>tea/tee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clothes/close</td>
<td>might/mite</td>
<td>their/there/they're</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>creak/creek</td>
<td>miner/minor</td>
<td>throne/thrown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crews/cruise</td>
<td>none/nun</td>
<td>toe/tow</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. A memory assistance technique (e.g., a word or picture clue).
Commonly Misspelled Words

The following list includes some English words that are commonly used and often misspelled. You, personally, might or might not have problems with many of the words in the list. The important issue is for you to identify your problem words and negate the problems. You can handle your spelling problems by keeping a list of those words handy. Another way to deal with spellings that puzzle you is to use mnemonics such as those shown for the words in bold italics on this list:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>days/daze</th>
<th>pail/pale</th>
<th>time/thyme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dear/deer</td>
<td>pain/pane</td>
<td>to/too/two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>die/dye</td>
<td>pair/pare/pear</td>
<td>undo/undue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ewe/yew/you</td>
<td>passed/past</td>
<td>vain/vane/vein</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feat/feet</td>
<td>patience/patients</td>
<td>very/vary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fairy/ferry</td>
<td>peace/piece</td>
<td>wail/wale/whale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flour/flower</td>
<td>pedal/peddle/petal</td>
<td>ware/wale/where</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for/fore/four</td>
<td>plain/plane</td>
<td>weather/whether</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>genes/jeans</td>
<td>poor/pore/pour</td>
<td>weak/week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>groan/grown</td>
<td>principal/principle</td>
<td>which/witch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guessed/guest</td>
<td>rain/reign/rein</td>
<td>whine/wine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hair/hare</td>
<td>read/red</td>
<td>wood/would</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heal/heel/he’ll</td>
<td>ring/wring</td>
<td>yoke/yolk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hear/her</td>
<td>road/rode/rowed</td>
<td>your/you’re</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>abscess</th>
<th>deterrent</th>
<th>innocence</th>
<th>once</th>
<th>scissors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>accidentally</td>
<td>diaphragm</td>
<td>innovate</td>
<td>ounce</td>
<td>seize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accommodate</td>
<td>disastrous</td>
<td>inoculate</td>
<td>paraffin</td>
<td>separate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acquaintance</td>
<td>discipline</td>
<td>insistence</td>
<td>parliament</td>
<td>separately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acquiesce</td>
<td>disguise</td>
<td>iridescence</td>
<td>parallel</td>
<td>sergeant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acquire</td>
<td>dissipate</td>
<td>irrelevant</td>
<td>particularly</td>
<td>serviceable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acquit</td>
<td>ecstasy</td>
<td>irresistible</td>
<td>pastime</td>
<td>several</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>allotted</td>
<td>effervescence</td>
<td>judgment</td>
<td>pavilion</td>
<td>shriek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all right</td>
<td>efficiency</td>
<td>knowledgeable</td>
<td>permanent</td>
<td>siege</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amateur</td>
<td>embarrass</td>
<td>legible</td>
<td>permissible</td>
<td>sieve</td>
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<td>-------------</td>
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<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anoint</td>
<td>euphemism</td>
<td>leisure</td>
<td>perseverance</td>
<td>silhouette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apologize</td>
<td>exercise</td>
<td>liaison</td>
<td>personnel</td>
<td>similar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>argument</td>
<td>exhilarated</td>
<td>library</td>
<td>pharaoh</td>
<td>sincerely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beautiful</td>
<td>existence</td>
<td>license</td>
<td>phenomenon</td>
<td>sophomore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>benefited</td>
<td>exorcise</td>
<td>lieutenant</td>
<td>pigeon</td>
<td>souvenir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bicycle</td>
<td>extraordinary</td>
<td>lightning</td>
<td>playwright</td>
<td>spatial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bookkeeper</td>
<td>familiar</td>
<td>liquefy</td>
<td>precede</td>
<td>subtle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bureau</td>
<td>fascinate</td>
<td>llama</td>
<td>precedent</td>
<td>succeed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bourgeois</td>
<td>fatigue</td>
<td>loneliness</td>
<td>prejudice</td>
<td>suffrage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>business</td>
<td>February</td>
<td>maintenance</td>
<td>prevalent</td>
<td>supersede</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>calendar</td>
<td>foreign</td>
<td>manageable</td>
<td>privilege</td>
<td>surprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>camaraderie</td>
<td>forest</td>
<td>maneuver</td>
<td>proceed</td>
<td>symmetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>camouflage</td>
<td>forty</td>
<td>massacre</td>
<td>propaganda</td>
<td>therefore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>canoeing</td>
<td>fourth</td>
<td>mayonnaise</td>
<td>questionnaire</td>
<td>thorough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>changeable</td>
<td>friend</td>
<td>mediocre</td>
<td>queue</td>
<td>through</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chauffeur</td>
<td>frolicking</td>
<td>millennium</td>
<td>quiet</td>
<td>tomorrow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chauvinism</td>
<td>gauge</td>
<td>miniature</td>
<td>quite</td>
<td>tragedy</td>
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<tr>
<td>collectible</td>
<td>genealogy</td>
<td>minimum</td>
<td>quizzes</td>
<td>transferable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>colonel</td>
<td>government</td>
<td>miniscule</td>
<td>rarely</td>
<td>truly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>column</td>
<td>grateful</td>
<td>miscellaneous</td>
<td>raspberry</td>
<td>tyranny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commitment</td>
<td>guarantee</td>
<td>mischievous</td>
<td>receipt</td>
<td>ukulele</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>committee</td>
<td>guard</td>
<td>misspell</td>
<td>receive</td>
<td>unfortunately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>competitive</td>
<td>guinea</td>
<td>mnemonic</td>
<td>recommend</td>
<td>unmistakable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>completely</td>
<td>harass</td>
<td>moccasin</td>
<td>reconciliation</td>
<td>unnecessarily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conceivable</td>
<td>hemorrhage</td>
<td>month</td>
<td>reference</td>
<td>usually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conciliate</td>
<td>heresy</td>
<td>mortgage</td>
<td>referred</td>
<td>vacuum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conscience</td>
<td>heroes</td>
<td>nauseous</td>
<td>remember</td>
<td>variety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conscientious</td>
<td>hierarchy</td>
<td>necessary</td>
<td>reminisce</td>
<td>vehicle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conscious</td>
<td>humorous</td>
<td>ninth</td>
<td>reparable</td>
<td>vengeance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Selected Mnemonics

- **calendar**: Remember that a calendar is made up of many days.
- **conscience**: If you con people about your science work, your conscience should bother you.
- **forty**: Forty people are hiding in the fort.
- **icicle**: “Icy Icy Ellie” (“IC IC LE”) is a cold cold woman.
- **gauge**: You use a gas gauge.
- **judgment**: The general manager might pass judgment, but the lowly employee won’t even be there.
- **ninth**: Nineth...Take the e out so you can use it for the tenth.
- **quiet**: You need to be qui(end)(talking).
- **scissors**: She used some sharp s(cut)iss(off)rs.
- **tomorrow**: There’s only one morning, but every day there are two rred skies (sunrise and sunset).
- **weird**: Halloween last year was wild and eerie.

Of course, these mnemonics are not universal. Some of the suggestions on this list might seem corny or even incomprehensible to you. The point is to find some that work for you.

Words from Other Languages

English is an ever-evolving language. Part of this ongoing evolution is the incorporation of words from other languages. These words often do not follow typical English spelling rules, and thus require extra attention. This chart shows a very small portion of such words that are used in English.
Many common words in British and American English are spelled differently. For example, American English words ending in *-er* are often spelled with *-re* in British English. American English tends to use *-yze* or *-ize* while British English prefers *-yse* or *-ise*. Words that include the letter *o* in American English are often spelled with an *ou* in British English. American English uses *-ck* or *-tion* as word endings, whereas British English often uses *-que* or *-xion*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Borrowed Word</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Borrowed Word</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ad hoc</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>en route</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adios</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>et cetera (etc.)</td>
<td>Latin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>armadillo</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>faux pas</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>art deco</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>fiancé</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attaché</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>frankfurter</td>
<td>German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ballet</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>garbanzo</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bon appétit</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>gourmet</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bratwurst</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>homo sapiens</td>
<td>Latin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>burrito</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>hors d’oeuvre</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>café</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>incommunicado</td>
<td>Latin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chauffeur</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>jalapeño</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chihuahua</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>kaput</td>
<td>German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>concierge</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>kindergarten</td>
<td>German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cul-de-sac</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>margarita</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>curriculum vitae</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>megahertz</td>
<td>German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dachshund</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>née</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>déjà vu</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>per capita</td>
<td>Latin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diesel</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>résumé</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>American English</th>
<th>British English</th>
<th>American English</th>
<th>British English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>anemia</td>
<td>anaemia</td>
<td>fetus</td>
<td>foetus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>analyze</td>
<td>analyse</td>
<td>humor</td>
<td>humour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anesthetic</td>
<td>anaesthetic</td>
<td>judgment</td>
<td>judgement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apologize</td>
<td>apologise</td>
<td>inflection</td>
<td>inflexion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some words from other languages have plural formations that appear unusual within the English language. A good approach is to simply memorize these plural formations. If you don’t want to memorize them, remember that they are unusual and that you will need to look them up.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular Spelling</th>
<th>Plural Spelling</th>
<th>Singular Spelling</th>
<th>Plural Spelling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>alumnus</td>
<td>alumni</td>
<td>datum</td>
<td>data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>analysis</td>
<td>analyses</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>antenna</td>
<td>antennae</td>
<td>memorandum</td>
<td>memoranda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appendix</td>
<td>appendices</td>
<td>phenomenon</td>
<td>phenomena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>basis</td>
<td>bases</td>
<td>radius</td>
<td>radii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chateau</td>
<td>chateaux</td>
<td>stimulus</td>
<td>stimuli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>criterion</td>
<td>criteria</td>
<td>syllabus</td>
<td>syllabi (Americanized: syllabuses)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crisis</td>
<td>crises</td>
<td>thesis</td>
<td>theses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The English language includes some general spelling rules, but most of these rules have at least some exceptions.
- You need to take personal responsibility for dealing with the words that are spelling problems for you. Spell checkers can help handle spelling problems, but you cannot completely rely on them.
- Words from other languages have been incorporated into English and require special spelling attention.

EXERCISES

1. Using words from the lists in this section and other words you know you have trouble spelling, make a personal spelling checklist. Include only words that you find yourself having trouble spelling.

2. Write a two-page essay on a topic of your choosing. Then use spell check on the document. Finally, proofread the essay to find errors that the spell checker missed.

3. Choose ten words that you routinely use and struggle to spell correctly. Create clues to help you remember how to spell the words. Post your clues to a common site so that you can share them with your classmates.
19.2 Using Capital Letters

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

1. Recognize standard capitalization conventions.
2. Utilize capitalization in proper situations.

With the advent of new **social networking** structures, such as text messaging, IM (instant messaging), and Facebook, the reliance on traditional standard capital letters has been relaxed in informal settings. This laxity got its start as a means of expediency since the use of capital letters required additional efforts for people using only a couple of fingers or thumbs for typing words. Rather quickly, the use of abbreviations and lack of capital letters became fashionable—almost like a status symbol indicating a person’s social networking awareness. Despite this now common exclusion of capital letters in personal situations, capital letters are still the proper choice in professional and academic settings. If you are someone who writes far more often on a cell phone than on a computer, you are likely to benefit from a brush up on capitalization rules for those occasions when you are composing more official documents.

**Proper Nouns, Trade Names, I, and O**

Some words are capitalized whenever they are used. Proper nouns, trade names, the pronoun “I,” and “O” when used as an interjection make up this category of words.

**Proper nouns** include names of specific persons, places, or things. Words that are typically **common nouns** can become proper nouns when they are used as part of a name.

**People**

**Proper Nouns**

- Mike Smith
- Mrs. Fenora
- Judge Halloway
- Slick (used as a name)
- President Abraham Lincoln
- Mom (used as a name)
Methodist
Kelly

Common Nouns (Not Proper)

- girl
- teacher
- mom (my mom)
- friend
- judge
- president

Places
Proper Nouns

- Florida
- Disney World
- Tampa
- Africa
- Stockton High School
- Winnie’s Grocery Store
- 1432 W. Cherry Ave.
- Museum of Modern Art
- Atlantic Ocean

Common Nouns (Not Proper)

- state
- city
- street
- park
- town
- store
- kitchen
- museum

Things
Proper Nouns

- Washington Monument (a monument)
- Great Wall of China (a landmark)
- Chico (a dog)
• USS California (a ship)
• US History 101 (a course)
• University of Arizona (a university)
• Renaissance (an era)
• Bible (a book)
• Tuesday (a day)
• April (a month)

Common Nouns (Not Proper)

• boat
• newspaper
• dog
• house
• book
• history
• university
• century

Trade Names

Trade names include names of specific companies and products.

Proper Nouns

• Kellogg's
• Panasonic
• Starbucks
• BlackBerry
• Chevrolet
• Land's End

Common Nouns (Not Proper)

• cereal
• television
• doll
• phone
• car
• company
### I and O

The letters “I” and “O” each represent words that are always capitalized.

- **I** (as a proper noun): If you have time, I will go with you.
- **O** (as a vocative in direct address): O you who are about to enter here, beware!

### First Word in a Sentence

Capitalizing the first word in a sentence appears fairly straightforward at first glance. But there are actually some variations you should keep in mind.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capitalize the first word of a standard, simple sentence.</th>
<th>We usually start mowing our lawn in March.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capitalize the first word in a sentence of dialogue.</td>
<td>Beth said, “Please help me lift this box.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not capitalize the first word of dialogue that continues after the speaker’s name when the sentence has not yet ended.</td>
<td>“Please,” Beth said, “help me lift this box.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capitalize the first word in a quoted sentence when it is written in dialogue formation.</td>
<td>Ellery Jones noted, “Online education is here to stay.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not capitalize the first word in quoted text when it is imbedded in an existing sentence.</td>
<td>Ellery Jones agrees that online education is “here to stay.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not capitalize the first word of a sentence that follows a colon, unless the colon introduces two or more sentences.</td>
<td>Sports carry a lot of weight at our school: the football program is the only program that is funded at 100 percent each year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capitalize stand-alone sentences within parentheses.</td>
<td>Order your binders ahead of time. (You’ll need one for each course.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not capitalize sentences within parentheses if they are included as part of another sentence.</td>
<td>Order your binders ahead of time (one for each course).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capitalize the first word of continuation questions.</td>
<td>Are you attending on the eighth? The ninth? The tenth?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Do not capitalize the first letter of a noncapitalized proper noun even if it falls at the beginning of a sentence. (Generally try not to place such words at the beginning of sentences.)

| iPhones took the market by storm. |
| OR |
| The iPhone took the market by storm. |

Defer to the capitalization used in poetry or in other sources. (In some cases, the poem will not capitalize the first word of each line.)

| I think that I shall never see |
| A poem lovely as a tree |
| A tree whose hungry mouth is prest |
| Against the earth’s sweet flowing breast... |
| from “Trees” by Joyce Kilmer |

**Key Words in Titles and Subtitles**

In titles and subtitles, capitalize key words, including first words, last words, nouns, verbs, pronouns, adverbs, and adjectives. Do not capitalize articles, conjunctions, or prepositions unless they are in the initial position (either at the beginning of the entire title or at the beginning of the phrase after a colon if there is one). Look at the Figure 19.1 and consider why each word is capitalized or not.
Abbreviations

Capitalize abbreviations of proper nouns, such as the following:

- Schools: UNL, ISU, U of I
- Government agencies: USDA, CIA, FBI
- Countries and states: USA, NY, TX
- Organizations: BSA, AFS
- Corporations: IBM, AT&T
- Television and radio stations: NBC, CBS, WLS

Bulleted Items

If the items in a bulleted list are sentences, capitalize the first word of each item, as follows:

Semester exam schedule:

- Semester exams for M-W-F classes will be given on December 12.
- Semester exams for T-Th classes will be given on December 13.
- Semester exams for once-a-week classes will be given as arranged by the professor.

If the items are not sentences and are not continuations of a sentence stem, capitalize the first word of each item, as follows:
Semester exam schedule:

- Classes held on M-W-F: December 12
- Classes held on T-Th: December 13
- Classes held once-a-week: As arranged by instructor

If the items are continuations of a sentence stem, do not capitalize the first word unless it happens to be a proper noun.

Semester exams will be held on

- December 12 for M-W-F classes,
- December 13 for T-Th classes,
- a date arranged by the professors for once-a-week classes.

Common Misuse of Capital Letters

Avoid the unnecessary use of capital letters. As a rule, you can avoid capitalization errors by adhering to the rules for capitalization. But the following “don’t capitalize” suggestions can help you to avoid making some common mistakes.

- Capitalize names of holidays and months but not seasons:
  winter, spring, summer, fall
- Do not capitalize words such as “mom” and “dad” when they are used to talk about someone as opposed to when used as a name:
  Capitalize: “What did you say, Mom?”
  Don’t capitalize: “My mom and dad came with me.”
- Do not capitalize words that are often used as part of a name when they are used in other ways:
  “My family tree includes a general, a US president, and a princess.”
- Only capitalize direction words that designate a specific location:
  Capitalize: “I live out West.”
  Don’t capitalize: “I live west of Nebraska.”
- You can choose to capitalize a word for emphasis, but avoid overusing this technique since it will lessen the effect.
• Entire words and sentences written in capital letters are hard to read. Also, in online situations, this type of typing is referred to as shouting. So except in very rare situations, avoid typing in all capitals.

**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

• Capitalize proper nouns, trade names, the word “I,” and the interjection “O.”
• Capitalize the first word in a sentence and key words in titles and subtitles.
• Capitalize abbreviations of proper nouns and the first word of items in a bulleted list.

**EXERCISES**

1. Write a (short) short story that uses five capitalization rules in this section. Use a color-coded key and word highlighting to identify where the capitalization rules are satisfied.
2. Make a copy of a page from a textbook. Assign each capital letter on the page to one of the capitalization rules by placing a letter from a through f (representing Section 2.1 through Section 2.6) next to each capital letter. Make sure to use a color of ink that will stand out. Circle any missing or misused capitalization.
19.3 Abbreviating Words and Using Acronyms

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

1. Be familiar with common abbreviations.
2. Understand when to use and not to use abbreviations.
3. Recognize common symbols when you see them and learn to use them.

Abbreviations⁷ are shortened forms of words that are used for convenience or to manage space. In its purest form, an abbreviation includes initial letters of a word followed by a period, such as “in.” for “inches.” However, many abbreviations skip over letters, such as “yd.” for “yard,” and are still written with a period. Some multiword terms are abbreviated by using the first letter of each word and are called acronyms⁸ rather than abbreviations. An example of an acronym is “FBI” for “Federal Bureau of Investigation.”

Some abbreviations or acronyms require a period (etc.), but quite a few never take periods (IBM or FBI). You simply have to learn these differences through the experience of seeing specific examples in print.

You need to know two main things about abbreviations: when to use them and how to write them appropriately. The following sections will clarify these two points.

**Common Abbreviations for Titles with Names**

Titles that are used with names are often abbreviated—in fact, they are almost always abbreviated. You should spell out religious, academic, and government titles in academic writing, but otherwise, use the standard abbreviations.

---

⁷ A shortened form of a word that is used for convenience, to manage space, or both.

⁸ A multiword term that is abbreviated by using the first letter of each word.
Common Abbreviations


Use these standard abbreviations after names: Alex Jones, DDS; Arnold Wilson, PhD; George A. Ortiz, Jr.; George A. Ortiz, Sr.; Hannah Borry, MD; Phil Horace, BA; Millie Mance, MA; Gloria Wills, MBA; Fred Flores, CPA

Do not use an abbreviation both before and after a name: Write Dr. Joseph Pfeiffer or Joseph Pfeiffer, MD, but do not write Dr. Joseph Pfieffer, MD.

Spell out these titles in academic writing: Professor Robert Jones, Reverend Martin Luther King, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Senator John Smith

Do not use these title abbreviations if not attached to a name: Do not use any of these abbreviations on their own without a name. Instead spell the titles out, as in “I’m going to see the doctor after my meeting with my professor.”

Commonly Used Stand-Alone Abbreviations and Acronyms

Many abbreviations and acronyms are widely used as stand-alone words. A small sampling of these abbreviations and acronyms is listed in the following tables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avenue</td>
<td>Ave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boulevard</td>
<td>Blvd.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chapter</td>
<td>ch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>company</td>
<td>co.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporated</td>
<td>Inc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>Jan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katherine</td>
<td>Kathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maximum</td>
<td>max.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some abbreviations are used almost exclusively to describe or clarify numbers. These abbreviations should not be used as stand-alone abbreviations. In other words, you can use the dollar-sign abbreviation to write “$5.00” but not to write “I earned several $ last night.” Some of these abbreviations can be used within text, such as BC, p.m., and CST. Measurement abbreviations, however, should be used
only in tables, graphs, and figures and should be spelled out within continuous text. Some of these abbreviations will be addressed as symbols later in this section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Purpose/ Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>300 BC</td>
<td>Before Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300 BCE</td>
<td>Before the Christian Era or Before the Common Era</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900 AD</td>
<td>Anno Domini (in the year of the lord)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34 m</td>
<td>meters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 in.</td>
<td>inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5¢</td>
<td>cents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:00 p.m.</td>
<td>post meridiem (after noon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00 a.m.</td>
<td>ante meridiem (before noon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 cm</td>
<td>centimeters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 8</td>
<td>number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85 lbs.</td>
<td>pounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30 a.m. EST</td>
<td>Eastern Standard Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 hr. 10 min. 30 sec.</td>
<td>hours, minutes, and seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 + 3</td>
<td>plus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ = .5</td>
<td>equals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 ft.</td>
<td>feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7n &lt; 21</td>
<td>is less than</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>432 ≠ 430</td>
<td>does not equal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44 cu. in.</td>
<td>cubic inches</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Abbreviations in Academic Writing**

Academic citations include their own set of common abbreviations. They vary somewhat depending on the citation style you’re using, so always follow your specific style guidelines. Some typical academic citation abbreviations are provided here. (For much more on documentation, see Chapter 22 "Appendix B: A Guide to Research and Documentation").
Abbreviation | Purpose/Meaning
---|---
anon. | anonymous
b. | born
c. or ca. | circa; about (used with dates)
ch. or chap. | chapter
d. | died
ed., eds. | editor, editors
et al. | et alia (Latin: “and others”)
illus. | illustrated
n.d. | no date available
n.p. | no publisher information available
p., pp. | page, pages
vol., vols. | volume, volumes

**Topic- or Profession-Specific and Incident-Specific Abbreviations**

If you are writing for an audience that is familiar with a specific vocabulary that incorporates abbreviations—for example, readers with a strong military base—you can use those abbreviations freely. But be aware when you are writing for readers who do not share that common knowledge base that you will have to spell out abbreviations.

Incident-specific abbreviations are created for use in one specific situation and thus require obvious references so the audience can understand their meaning. For example, say you are writing a story about a teacher named Mr. Nieweldowskilty. If you refer to him by his full name once and then note that students call him Mr. Niews for short and then refer to him as Mr. Niews the rest of the time, your audience can easily understand that Mr. Niews is short for Mr. Nieweldowskilty. But if you write a second story about him, you cannot assume that readers will know the abbreviated name, Mr. Niews.

**Recognizing and Using Symbols**

Symbols are actually a form of abbreviating and are used widely in mathematics, on maps, and in some other situations. Here’s a small sample:

| 75% | Percent sign |
KEY TAKEAWAYS

- You should become familiar with common abbreviations so you can use them in casual situations and in tables and figures.
- As a rule, do not use abbreviations in formal writing except within citations.
- Keep your audience in mind when you decide whether to use abbreviations.
- Many symbols are used in mathematics, on maps, and in other situations.

EXERCISES

1. Write a short poem using as many abbreviations as possible.
2. Make a copy of a scholarly paper. Highlight all the abbreviations.
3. Make a list of twenty abbreviations or symbols that are not included in the lists in this section.
19.4 Inserting Numbers into Text

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand general rules for using numbers in text.
2. Recognize exceptions to the general rules for using numbers in text.

Proper writing of **numbers** in text is rather simple as long as you are familiar with the general guidelines and the exceptions to those guidelines.

### General Guidelines for Using Numbers in Text

**APA style** calls for writing out numbers from one to nine in words and using **numerals** for all other numbers. The Chicago Manual of Style calls for spelling out zero through one hundred as well as certain round multiples such as five thousand or six hundred. **MLA style**, however, requires that all numbers that are composed of one or two words be written out in words (e.g., one hundred, thirty-six, five million), and all numbers with more than two words be written in numerals (137; 6,482; 3,500,000). There are two general exceptions in MLA:

1. If a number falls at the beginning of a sentence, it should be written out in words.
2. If both large and small numbers are used within a single sentence or passage, all should be written as numerals in order to be consistent.

### Exceptions to the General Guidelines for Using Numbers in Text

Exceptions to the general guidelines are logical, and they help avoid awkward situations. These exceptions are in place in all citation formats and style sheets.

#### Numerals with Abbreviations

In a situation where abbreviations are used, use numerals, not number words, with the abbreviations.

- 6 in.
- 25 cm
- 125 lbs.
• 4 mos.

**Numerals for Time of Day**

Within text, you can use either words or numbers to write the time of day. Within a document, be consistent in your choice.

• 4:30 in the morning
• four thirty in the morning
• (but) 4:30 a.m.

**Numerals in Dates**

Use words to write months and numerals to write years. When the month, day, and year are all included, also use a numeral to write the day. If the year is not included, you can use either a numeral or a word to write the day. Express decades in numerals or words.

• July 23, 1985
• July 23 or July twenty-third
• the sixties or the 1960s

**Numerals in Sports’ Scores and Statistics**

Use numerals to write sports’ scores and sports’ statistics.

• The Bulls have a 34–6 record.
• The score was 4 to 3.

**Numerals Used Side by Side**

To avoid confusion when using two numbers side by side, spell out one of the numbers and use a numeral for the other one. Generally, you should write out the number with fewer letters and leave the longer one as a numeral.

• Two 20-page papers
• 24 three-pound bags
Numerals in Addresses and Phone Numbers

Generally, you should use numerals in addresses and phone numbers. One exception is that, when a street is a numeral, you can either use the numeral or spell out the word.

- 3545 N. Willow
- Denver, CO 80202
- Fifth Street or 5th Street
- 210-555-7485

Numerals as Part of Proper Nouns

Numbers that are part of proper nouns should always be written as they appear.

- Psychology 101
- Room 222
- 7-Up
- Fifth Third Bank
- Second City

Numerals as Divisions of Books and Documents

Use numerals to indicate page, volume, chapter, unit, and section numbers as well as other divisions that are used to organize written text.

- Section 2, Chapter 4
- page 8
- Act 2, Scene 7
- Volume 2, Unit 7, Item 12

Numerals in Decimals and Percentages

As a rule, numerals are used to express decimals and percentages.

- 34.72
- 75 percent
**Numerals Used for Identification**

Use numerals when writing identification numbers, such as the serial number for a computer, a driver’s license number, or a social security number.

- Serial: 25485359243642
- Driver’s license: 245Y823

**Numerals in Money Amounts**

When a money amount is briefly mentioned in a piece of writing that is not necessarily about money, spell the money amount out. However, if you are writing about money or are writing text that will reference money amounts on multiple occasions, use numerals and symbols.

- Offhand reference: ten dollars
- Repeated reference: $10 or $10.00

**Punctuating Numerals**

When writing numerals, use a decimal point to separate dollars and cents and use a comma to divide numbers of one thousand or more into units of three digits. Do not use these punctuation marks when writing numbers in words.

| 45,329 | forty-five thousand three hundred twenty-nine |
| $12.43 | twelve dollars and forty-three cents |

**Key Takeaways**

- Consult the style manual you are following to determine which numbers to write out in words and which to express as numerals.
- The Chicago Manual of Style calls for numbers to be written out from zero through one hundred.
- Be aware of special situations where numbers are written other than by the general rule.
1. Write five sentences using as many of the number rules and exceptions as possible. Write all the numbers in words. Trade papers with a partner and edit the numbers according to the guidelines in this section.

2. Make a copy of a newspaper or magazine article that includes numbers. In the margins, jot the rules that guide the use of each number.

3. Create a bookmark using all the number-writing guidelines from this section.
19.5 Marking Words with Italics

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Know when to use italics versus quotation marks in titles of works.
2. Review other circumstances when italics are appropriate.
3. Understand how to use italics in moderation for emphasis.

Traditionally, underlining was used as a means of emphasis in handwritten text. Since the advent of the personal computer, italics have replaced underlining. If you are creating text by hand or by some other means where italics are not available, use underlining instead of italics.

Italicize Titles of Published Texts, Lengthy Works, and Legal Cases

As a rule, you should italicize the titles of published works, but you should not italicize parts of published works, such as a poem within a book, or unpublished works. Some exceptions that should be italicized include lengthy works, such as a very long poem within a book, and legal cases. Some exceptions that should not be italicized include titles of published short stories and titles of television shows. Works that are not italicized are typically placed in quotation marks. Some other exceptions that should not be italicized include long religious works, such as the Bible and the Koran, and easily recognizable texts, such as the US Constitution.

Italicize Titles of Books, Magazines, and Newspapers

- The Runaway Jury
- People
- The New York Times

Italicize Titles of Long Poems, Plays, and Television Series (but Not Individual Television Shows)

- The Odyssey
- Billy Elliot the Musical
- The Mentalist
Italicize Names of Spacecraft, Aircraft, and Ships

- Apollo 13
- Boeing 777
- the Niña, Pinta, and Santa María

Italicize Foreign Words Used in English Sentences

- We would like to develop a very positive *esprit de corps* within the company.
- His actions over the past month have made him *persona non grata* within my group of friends.

Italicize Words, Letters, and Numbers That Are Called Out or Emphasized

- She is, by the very definition, *irascible*.
- Make a list of words that begin with *hu*.
- The numbers 36, 84, and 300 are all divisible by 6.

Italicize Scientific Names

- *Homo sapiens* are members of the *Animalia* kingdom.

Do Not Overitalicize

You might be tempted to use italics to emphasize a key phrase, word, or idea even though it doesn’t fall into any these categories. Fight off the temptation since an overuse of italics is distracting for readers.

**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- Italics have replaced underlining, thanks to word processing.
- Know the rules for what should and should not be italicized.
- Do not overitalicize by italicizing assorted words just to make them stand out.
1. Write sentences demonstrating your choice of five of the guidelines given in Section 19.5 "Marking Words with Italics" for using italics.

2. In a textbook, find as many examples of the different italicizing guidelines as possible. Copy the pages and identify each guideline you find.

3. Complete these sentences:

   a. If you use the word “magnum opus” in a sentence, you should italicize it because...
   b. Read this sentence: The word city has a soft c. The two italics rules used in this sentence are...
   c. Read this sentence: A Canis familiaris is a dog. The problems with this sentence are...