What an accomplishment it is to complete the first draft of a writing assignment. A lot of work goes into first drafts, and if you broke down that workload into steps, you might have found it a satisfying experience. It’s important, though, to note that a first draft is still a work in progress; nothing is set in stone.

Now is a good time to get some feedback on your paper. You might want to submit your draft to the Writing Center Paper Review service for comments on its overall organization and structure. You can also set up a study group with classmates and discuss your papers. At this stage in the writing process, focus on content, organization, and structure only. After you receive initial feedback, revise your draft, and then move on to editing and proofreading.

Prior to editing, reflect on your experience while drafting. What areas of writing did you struggle with? Did you know where to place periods, commas, and how to use semicolons? Does the wording flow smoothly and sound “right”? Before you start editing, do some preliminary review that focuses on your problem areas. For instance, if you are guessing where commas go, review the section on commas in Chapter 17, go to Live Tutoring to practice and reinforce your understanding of comma rules, and then apply those concepts as best you can to your own paper. This is really the only way you will learn how to use commas properly.

Take your time reading about best practices for peer review, study parts of grammar that you struggle with, and then read up on how most papers at Kaplan University are graded.
“We have found in our 22 years of experience in teaching composition that effective peer reviews can be very beneficial to students in the revision process.”

—Ellen Grady, Composition Instructor, and Dena King, General Education Department Chair, KU-Omaha

**WHY USE PEER REVIEWS?**

Imagine you’re getting ready for an important job interview or a first date. Do you put on the first outfit you pull out of your closet, or do you try on several outfits and ask others for their opinions? If you’re like most people, you probably try on at least two outfits. Why do you do this? Because you want to make a good impression.

Putting forth your best is essential in making a good impression, whether it is in how you dress or how you present yourself in writing. Peer reviews help you in the writing process by providing feedback from your classmates’ perspectives. You can choose what feedback you want to use and how you want to use it in revising your work.

Peer reviews can range from unsolicited, casual comments to specific, written comments given purposely to be used in revision. Effective peer reviews should take into consideration the following guidelines.

First, you need to understand what a peer review is. A peer review is the process of evaluating another writer’s work to enhance the qual-
ity of writing. This helps ensure assignment objectives are met and a professional finished product is the result. A peer review should not just tell the other writer what was done well, nor should it artificially overstate the quality to gain favor with the instructor.

The goal of any peer review is to help the author improve the writing, and peer reviews that fail to give meaningful feedback do not give the author what is needed.

Peer reviews have a variety of purposes. They are intended to help students achieve the following:

- Engage in an environment where students feel safe in expressing and receiving input
- Grow as a writer
- Refine skills
- Think critically
- Gain awareness of audience
- Engage in all aspects of the writing process
- Revise for quality

Effective peer reviews involve successful collaborations. As a writer and reviewer, you will be working with at least one peer to receive and give feedback. Working as a team, you will provide valuable insight that can assist with revisions.

**STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS**

**Benefits of Peer Review**

Most students dread peer reviews. Usually, two concerns come to light: (1) Students feel like they are not strong writers themselves, so they question how they could possibly give good feedback, and (2) they feel vulnerable and queasy about getting feedback from others in their class.

First, although you might struggle with writing yourself, no two writers are alike. You have writing strengths
other students might not have and vice versa. Peer review relies on this variability as we all have something to contribute. Second, you might feel like a weak writer, but you are still a thinking individual and you know when you are persuaded and when you’re not. If you cannot comment at the sentence- or word-level during a peer review, give feedback on the content or the flow of the argument or presentation of information in the paper.

As for feeling vulnerable, well, that gets better with time; just remember that all writers, no matter their level of expertise, have to rewrite, revise, and edit. They can’t possibly get their best work completed without constructive feedback from others.

As you participate in the peer review process, it might be helpful to keep in mind the Triple As of successful collaboration:

- **Accountability for writers and peers**
  - Maintain your credibility and respect your peer’s efforts.
  - Provide sincere, honest feedback.
  - Avoid being overly critical.

- **Assistance with revisions that lead to professional finished products**
  - Be thorough and specific.
  - Evaluate in terms of content, mechanics, structure, organization, style, tone, coherence.
  - Be constructive.

- **Audience awareness**
  - Determine whether the content takes the audience into consideration.
  - Evaluate from the audience’s perspective—whether employers, professors, or peers.
  - Audience’s response can provide valuable insight.
After reading my peer’s review, I saw my paper through her eyes. This helped me to make improvements in my final draft.”

—Kaplan University Student

PEER REVIEW PROCESS

Once you become familiar with the purpose of peer reviews and the keys to collaboration, you will be ready to begin the actual peer review process. This process involves three basic steps:

1. Read the entire paper once (without passing judgment).
2. Evaluate for the following (which will vary by class and rubric used):
   - **Content** refers to the meaning behind the words and paragraphs. Good content is on topic and has meaning.
   - **Organization** refers to the overall structure of a paper. Does the paper have an introduction, body, and conclusion? Do individual paragraphs have topic sentences, supporting sentences, and concluding sentences? Does the argument or logic in the paper flow smoothly or does the writer jump from point to point with little or no organization?
   - **Coherency** means that the writing makes sense. The paper should be written to a particular audience, and it should make sense for that audience. For instance, you would not use highly technical medical terms to explain what measles is to a first grader. They wouldn’t understand; it would not be coherent to them.
   - **Mechanics** deals with correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
   - **Format** is the physical layout or design of the paper. Are there one-inch margins all the way around or do the pages have
different margins that make the paper difficult to read? Is it all single spaced or double spaced or mixed? Is the font easy to read and consistent throughout? Does the formatting adhere to the assignment directions?

3. Offer specific suggestions for improvement (consider constructive comments versus comments that are not constructive).

The type of feedback you provide to your peers is important. There are two types of comments: constructive comments and those that are not constructive. Constructive comments give concrete, specific suggestions that are helpful in making revisions. Some examples include the following:

“Your thesis clearly identifies your main point.”

“Add two or three more sentences to your conclusion to highlight the main ideas you want readers to remember from your paper.”

“Try to paraphrase more instead of using so many direct quotes.”

Comments that are not constructive provide vague or overly positive or negative suggestions that are difficult to use in making revisions:

“I really liked it.”

“The conclusion is too short.”

“You need to add more examples.”

“It’s really good.”

“You did a good job.”

“It doesn’t make sense.”

“It’s boring.”

Consider the following peer review examples.

**Writing sample:** All parents experience the joys and sorrows of raising children, but single parents face the task of raising children on their own. Today, there are more and more single parents in America. According to Carter (2005), “Being a single parent is one of the most challenging and rewarding jobs” (p. 135). Single parents can be just as effective as families with two parents.
Peer review that is not constructive: I really liked your topic. I think your paper is interesting. I am a single parent too, so I know what you’re talking about. It’s a good paper.

Constructive peer review: This is an interesting topic choice because a lot of people are single parents. You might consider using an example or a statistic to show how many people are affected by this topic. Your thesis statement clearly describes your position.

REVISING AFTER A PEER REVIEW

Once you have received your peer review, you are ready to begin the revision process. When revising, consider not only peer review comments but also the assignment objectives and the instructor’s feedback.

Here is a revision of the sample paragraph after taking the constructive peer review comments into account:

All parents experience the joys and sorrows of raising children, but single parents face the task of raising children on their own. In America, there were approximately 12.9 million one-parent families in 2006 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). According to Carter (2005), “being a single parent is one of the most challenging and rewarding jobs” (p. 135). Single parents can be just as effective as families with two parents.

The writer has incorporated a statistic into the paragraph, per the reviewer’s suggestion. The addition gives a concrete representation of how many people are affected by this topic. Using the advice of a peer has helped the writer present the information in a more effective way by backing up an assertion with a statistic from a reliable source.

This is just one example of how a peer review can be used to make revisions that strengthen the overall product. With the input of a peer, the writer was able to clarify and bolster the point, as well as make the best impression possible on the reader. Whether working to enhance
a paper, or choosing the best outfit for the occasion, using the comments of a peer can be extremely helpful. Understanding the advantages of peer reviews and the keys to successful collaboration will allow you and your peers to help each other become stronger writers.

**WORDS FROM WRITERS**

**Appreciating Other Voices**

“At first I wasn’t sure why I had to do peer reviews, but now I know that they can be helpful to both the writer and reviewer. This process helped me to appreciate other people’s writing styles.”

—Kaplan University Student
STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS
Grammar and Editing

The time to study grammar is when it is most relevant to your writing, and usually this is in the editing stage of the writing process. The grammar section of a handbook or guide like this one is not meant to be read from beginning to end; it is a reference chapter, and should be used as a reference. This means you will read and study only those parts of the chapter that you have a particular interest in or want to learn more about. Then, you can take those concepts and apply them to your paper.

The word grammar can be daunting and downright scary to some. Images of fierce red lines, complicated terminology, or confusing exceptions to rules can haunt any writer. What students might not realize is that those grammar rules do not apply to all language usage. Rather, these rules are in place to help standardize language for the academic and business worlds so that individuals understand a common form of written and spoken English. In the United States, we refer to that common form as Standard American English (SAE). In fact, nearly every country has a standardized form of its language, and Standard American English is one of many English language standards. Others include British English (also called the Queen’s English) and Canadian English. As the majority of Kaplan University students live in the United States, we use Standard American English in this text.
Because you are a part of the academic community, learning to use SAE can help you communicate clearly with your classmates, professors, and a more global college community. These skills can also help you communicate clearly in the business world with supervisors, colleagues, and clients.

**WORDS FROM WRITERS**

**Style and Content**

“With the Internet Age growing and affecting so many people, I think many students are forgetting the importance of proper writing skills when communicating online. Instant messaging and texting have become so popular that the language associated with these tools is becoming common written language for many students. Although this type of language is okay for casual communication with friends, it is important to keep this in its proper place. Complete and proper sentences are still important to use to portray a mature communication style in the business world.”

—Heather Booth, Senior Systems Developer

This chapter explains the basic elements of SAE. Whenever possible, the reason behind the rule is explained as well. Knowing why a comma, a particular verb form, or a capital letter is needed helps you better understand and learn the rules. Relating the material to your own writing also helps you learn the rules. Whenever possible, look for similar situations in your own papers and projects.

**STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS**

**Focus for Better Learning**

To become a stronger writer, first reflect on your writing experience. In one column on a piece of paper, write down all of the things you do well when it comes to writing. In a second column, write down those things that you struggle with. Although there might be 15 items in the second column, you don’t tackle all 15 at one time. Choose two things from the second column and look them up in this chapter. To solidify your understanding of the concepts you just read about, visit a live tutoring session at the Writing Center and ask a tutor to work through a few examples with you. Next, go back to the
second draft of your paper and apply the concepts of those two grammar issues that you studied this week.

By focusing on only two things at a time, you can devote more time to truly understanding those two issues and then apply them to your writing without becoming confused or rushed. On your next writing assignment, review the previous two issues for more clarity and then pick one or two more items from your second column to work on this time around.

PARTS OF SPEECH

The eight parts of speech (noun, pronoun, adjective, preposition, conjunction, verb, adverb, and interjection) are the foundations of grammar. Understanding how each part of speech communicates ideas helps you use them correctly.

Nouns

Nouns name people, places, things, and ideas; they are the stuff of life, the things we cannot do without. In the following sentence, all of the nouns are italicized:

Charlie knew that his obsession with collecting miniature bottles of condiments had to stop when he no longer had room for anything other than mustard in his pantry.

Without nouns, writers would have nothing to talk about:

Knew that his with collecting miniature of had to stop when he no longer had for anything other than in his.

Table 17.1 provides examples of different categories of nouns. Students of grammar typically find it easier to identify people, places, and things as nouns than ideas as nouns. It is sometimes more challenging to recognize an abstract idea such as happiness or success as a noun.
Nouns can be further categorized as either common or proper. *Common nouns* are general nouns. They refer to types or categories of people, places, things, and ideas. Because common nouns are not specific names, they do not need to be capitalized. Here are some examples of common nouns:

- tree
- portfolio
- master’s degree
- teacher
- state

*Proper nouns* are specific nouns. They name individual people, places, things, or ideas. Here are some examples of proper nouns:

- Elvis Costello
- Bachelor of Arts in English
- Tallahassee, Florida
- Professor Dunkin

It is important to know the difference between common and proper nouns so that you can decide whether the word needs to be
capitalized. If you cannot decide if a word is common or proper, try using a college-level dictionary to find out.

*Collective nouns* are nouns that refer to a group of things or people. Some examples of collective nouns are as follows:

- team
- class
- group
- congregation

Sometimes collective nouns are considered singular and sometimes they are considered plural. To make sure your collective noun agrees with the verb of the sentence, ask yourself if the group is working together as a whole or if you are highlighting the actions of individuals within the group. If the group is working as a whole, the collective noun is singular:

The team is winning by one goal!

If you are emphasizing actions of individuals in the group, the collective noun is plural:

The team are going to their homes after an exhausting day.

Because using a collective noun as a plural noun can sometimes sound awkward to your audience, consider changing the wording a bit to avoid this construction. Instead of saying, “The team are going to their homes after an exhausting day” consider “The team members are going to their homes after an exhausting day.” Just because a construction is grammatically correct does not mean that it is the clearest way to communicate an idea.
WORDS FROM WRITERS
Effective Communication in Law
“The best attorneys in my field are those who not only speak and write well, but who also use their communication tools to reach out and engage their clients to avoid problems caused by assumptions. Quite often, practicing effective communication not only helps you present your thoughts more effectively, it also helps others communicate their ideas better too. Students, or future attorneys, who have the right tools to write and communicate well, will be better at representing their clients because they will be able to focus on the logic of the legal issues, by knowing when an assumption is no longer reasonable, instead of handicapping themselves by having to deal with problems caused by ineffective communication.”
—Matthew R. Day, Attorney

Pronouns
Pronouns are noun placeholders. They are like the people who fill in seats during an awards show when the celebrities get up to walk around. They keep the crowd full. Without pronouns, the wording of a sentence would sound repetitive and distracting. Imagine a world without pronouns:

Jane placed Jane’s keys on the table in front of Jane. Jane then decided that Jane better put Jane’s keys on the hook by the door so Jane wouldn’t forget where Jane placed Jane’s keys.

Does that sound a bit clunky?

Pronouns allow sentences to vary in word choice and style, encouraging writers to create a smoother flow of ideas at the sentence level.

Jane placed her keys on the table in front of her. She then decided that she better put them on the hook by the door so she wouldn’t forget where she placed them.
Table 17.2 shows some examples of different types of pronouns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERSONAL PRONOUNS</th>
<th>RELATIVE PRONOUNS</th>
<th>REFLEXIVE PRONOUNS</th>
<th>DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUNS</th>
<th>INTERROGATIVE PRONOUNS</th>
<th>INDEFINITE PRONOUNS</th>
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<td>that</td>
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Pronoun Reference

A reader should be able to easily identify who or what a pronoun is referring to. In the following example, the pronoun *we* is used without a specific reference.

Childhood obesity is a problem that plagues America. *We* need to take responsibility for modeling healthy lifestyles to help influence the way children in America eat and live.

The reader might wonder if *we* refers to all Americans, parents, just the author and the reader, or some other group of people. In general,
first person plural pronouns (*we, us, our, ourselves*) are avoided in formal writing to prevent any confusion about the reference of the pronoun. Second person pronouns (*you, your, yours, yourself*) are also typically avoided in formal writing situations unless you are explaining a process or set of procedures, as in a technical training document. In certain situations, using second person pronouns can be off-putting to a reader, especially in a negative context:

Pediatricians will tell you that modeling the couch potato lifestyle to your child will only perpetuate the obesity to the next generation.

**Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement**

Pronouns and the words they refer to must agree in number so the reader does not confuse the reference of the pronoun. If the noun or pronoun that comes before the pronoun, the antecedent, is singular, the pronoun should also be singular. The following is an example:

The *student* took *her* responsibility as hall monitor very seriously.

If the antecedent is plural, the pronoun should also be plural. The following is an example:

The *students* took *their* responsibilities as hall monitors very seriously.

Issues that writers typically have with pronoun-antecedent agreement occur when the antecedent is an indefinite pronoun or a noun without a specific gender. Examples of each situation are as follows:

*Everyone* should turn in *their* homework by midnight on Tuesday to receive full credit.
The indefinite pronoun *everyone*, like most indefinite pronouns, is considered singular. However, the pronoun *their* is plural. To correct the problem in agreement, you could make the antecedent plural:

All students should turn in their homework by midnight on Tuesday to receive full credit.

Or, you could make the pronoun singular:

Everyone should turn in his or her homework by midnight on Tuesday to receive full credit.

Because the gender of the group is not identified in the sentence, the singular pronoun *his or her* is used as a gender-neutral option. If you find this construction too clunky, you can always use the previous option and make both the pronoun and antecedent plural.

**WORDS FROM WRITERS**

**Lasting Legacies**

“At times it appears that good writing has become a lost art. In this age of instant text messages, voice text messaging, and cryptic voice mails, let alone wing dings and smiley faces in e-mails, someone with any kind of writing skills is a welcome sight. Written communications are a fundamental element of good engineering and especially project execution. Clear, concise writing in e-mails, memos, notes, and whatever other document format is used is key in conveying an idea or concept. The writing has to be able to stand alone; it has to speak for you when you are not there. An aspect that few people in engineering realize is that writing skills leave a lasting legacy in the company where you work. For example, our company still has guidelines that were written in the 1940s that have stood the test of time and are still used in fundamental system design theories and applications today. It is probably safe to assume that when these documents were written, the writer never for a moment thought that over 60 years later, people would still be referring to the document as a reference or guide for solving a current-day problem.”

—Timothy K. Hannigan, Manager
Adjectives are words that describe or modify nouns and pronouns. These words provide details to better identify, limit, and define what a noun is. There are two types of adjectives: predicate adjectives and modifying adjectives.

A *predicate adjective* is an adjective that describes or limits the subject of the sentence (a noun or noun phrase) and is placed after a linking verb (*is, am, are, was, were*). Here are examples of predicate adjectives:

I am happy.

I am confused.

My yoga teacher is too perky today.

The children were wild in the library.

This assignment is quite difficult.

Most other adjectives fit into the category of *modifying adjectives* and are used in situations where the noun or pronoun and adjective are not connected by the linking verb. These types of adjectives are typically placed before the noun. The following are examples of modifying adjectives:

The confused child raised her trembling hand in class.

My perky yoga teacher showed us a new pose in class today.

The wild children were asked to keep quiet or leave the library.
I’m trying to tackle that difficult assignment this afternoon.

*Coordinate adjectives* are adjectives that modify the same word equally and are separated by a comma. Two scenarios can help you determine if adjectives are coordinate:

If you can use the word *and* between the adjectives and the phrase makes sense, use the comma.

- I got dizzy at the top of the long, winding staircase. (*Long and winding* works too.)

If you can switch the order of the adjectives and the phrase still makes sense, use the comma.

- That sweet-looking, unsuspecting kitten in the corner will attack your leg if you look at her in the wrong way. (*Unsuspecting, sweet-looking* kitten works too.)

**Comparative and Superlative**

Adjectives can also help you assess relationships between nouns. They can do so by either comparing two nouns (comparative adjective) or comparing more than two nouns (superlative adjective).

A *comparative adjective* is formed by either adding –*er* to the end of the word or by using the adverb *more* before the adjective. Here are some examples:

Shelly is taller than Mikey.

The first novel of the series was more engaging than the rest of the novels in the series.
A superlative adjective is formed by either adding –est to the end of the word or by using the adverb most in front of the word. Here are some examples:

Jonathan is the pickiest eater in our family.

*Top Chef* is the most addictive reality show on television today.

How do you determine which method to choose? Check your college-level dictionary for correct usage.

**Articles**

*Articles*, a type of adjective, are the words *a*, *an*, and *the*. They are placed before nouns that you can count. *A* and *an* are used before countable nouns that aren’t specific. *The* is used before a countable noun that is specific.

I am going to take *a* bus to *the* city this weekend. (No particular bus is emphasized here, but a particular city is emphasized.)

I am going to take *the #4* bus to the city this weekend. (A particular bus—the #4—is emphasized here.)

How do you know when to use *a* or *an*? Your decision depends on the beginning sound of the noun that follows the article. If the noun begins with a consonant sound, use *a*:

- a car
- a doughnut
- a podcast
a union (Don’t be fooled by the spelling. Listen to the sound. “Union” starts with a consonant “y” sound.)

If the noun begins with a vowel or vowel sound, use an:

- an apple
- an ego
- an asthma attack
- an iPod
- an hour (As above, don’t be fooled by the spelling. Listen to the sound.)

Prepositions

Prepositions are words that are part of a phrase, aptly named the prepositional phrase. These phrases show the relationships between nouns and pronouns in a sentence. They are bridges between ideas and are usually discussed in grammar books along with conjunctions (see the following “Conjunctions” section, pp. 235–237). Some common prepositions are in, around, on, between, over, under, from, within, before, after, beyond, through, with, by, since, near, throughout, until, for, above, and below. A good way to remember prepositions is that most will fit in the blank in this sentence: The squirrel ran _____ the tree.

Prepositional phrases include the preposition, an object, and any modifiers. The following are examples of prepositional phrases:

- over the ant hill
- behind the refrigerator
- in the classroom
- throughout the afternoon
- with my cousin Jenny and my brother James
The following is an example of a sentence using prepositional phrases to show the relationship between elements of the sentence:

The three mischievous children in the back of the classroom are throwing paper airplanes around the room and filming their aeronautic adventures with their iPhones.

Recognizing prepositions in a sentence does more than help you appreciate the nuances of the English language. This skill can help you edit your paper for clarity, agreement, and sentence structure. If a sentence contains several prepositional phrases in a row, it might lack focus and strong, active verbs:

The committee is in need of major restructuring before the New Year.

You could cut the wordiness and get to the point by eliminating a prepositional phrase and making the verb active:

The committee should restructure before January.

If a preposition is placed between the subject and verb of a sentence, do not mistake the object of the preposition for the subject:

Do you know which reality TV show on one of the major networks are going to be canceled this season?

In the preceding sentence, the writer has confused the object of the preposition, networks, with the subject of the sentence, creating an error in subject-verb agreement. To correct the sentence, the writer would need to recognize the true subject of the sentence, show:
Do you know which reality TV *show* on one of the major networks *is* going to be canceled this season?

If a sentence begins with a preposition, make sure you are not confusing the object of the preposition with the subject:

*For most students* who procrastinate on their weekly assignments are getting lower grades because they do not have time to revise and edit their work.

In the preceding example, the word *students* is the object of the prepositional phrase *for most students*, so it cannot be the subject of the sentence. That leaves the verb *are* without a subject. To correct the sentence, you could eliminate the prepositional phrase:

*Most students* who procrastinate on their weekly assignments are getting lower grades because they do not have time to revise and edit their work.

In the preceding example, the preposition *for* was removed, leaving the word *students* to function as the subject of the sentence.

**Conjunctions**

Conjunctions are connecting words. They can connect elements that are similar or different in a sentence. Using conjunctions helps the writer avoid short, choppy sentences.

Conjunctions that join similar grammatical elements are coordinating conjunctions. You can remember these conjunctions by the acronym FANBOYS:

- *for*
- *and*
- *nor*
● but  
● or  
● yet  
● so

Coordinating conjunctions join two words, two phrases, or two clauses:

● **Words:** The dog *and* the cat caused havoc in the RV during our trip across country.

● **Phrases:** They were either tearing up the upholstery on the seats *or* eating all of our snacks.

● **Clauses:** We wanted to take them with us to Aunt Betty’s house for Thanksgiving, *but* after this fiasco, they will be eating their turkey and gravy in the kennel.

Notice how a conjunction can be used to join two independent clauses (sentences), as indicated in the final example; a comma must be used with the conjunction in these situations to ensure that the reader pauses appropriately.

Correlative conjunctions also join similar grammatical elements. However, these conjunctions always come in pairs: *Either...or, neither...nor, not only...but also, both...and.* The following are some examples of correlative conjunctions used in complete sentences:

To fit back into my pants, I will *not only* have to diet after the holidays, *but I will also* have to exercise strenuously.

The monkey in the zoo *either* has a generally jovial disposition *or* is laughing specifically at me for slipping on the sidewalk.
Subordinating conjunctions join a dependent and an independent clause. These conjunctions begin the subordinate (dependent) clause:

*Before* I decide to buy a new puppy, I should probably house-train my 2-year-old Collie.

*When* I finally left the heat of Savannah, I vowed to return to Minnesota and never again complain of the snow drifts in winter.

**Verbs**

Verbs either express the action of the sentence or provide a link from the subject to the rest of a sentence. Let us examine action first.

*Action* verbs show the reader what the subject is doing. Here are some examples:

My granny *won* the shuffleboard competition at the Senior Games this year.

Her victory dance *embarrassed* our family somewhat, but we *hid* our embarrassment well.

*Linking* verbs link the subject with a noun or adjective that renames or describes the subject.

Grandpa Bob *was* a grumpy old man.

My hound dog, Charles, *is* sleepy.

Writers must be aware of appropriate verb forms to make sentences clear to readers. There are three standard forms of English verbs: base, past, and past participle. Regular verbs have a regular pattern of adding an *–ed* ending to the form to create the past and past participle forms.
Irregular verbs change spelling to create the past and past participle forms. The helping verbs *has*, *have*, and *had* are used before the past participle form. Table 17.3 lists the various types of verbs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BASE</th>
<th>PAST</th>
<th>PAST PARTICIPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>laugh</td>
<td>laughed</td>
<td>(have) laughed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>give</td>
<td>gave</td>
<td>(have) given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sit</td>
<td>sat</td>
<td>(have) sat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fly</td>
<td>flew</td>
<td>(have) flown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>write</td>
<td>wrote</td>
<td>(have) written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>show</td>
<td>showed</td>
<td>(have) shown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tense**

In Standard American English, various verb tenses are used to reflect the specific time an event occurs. Simple tenses include the present, past, and future tense:

- **Past Tense**: For the simple past tense, use the past tense form of the verb.
  
  Yesterday I *gave* my sister a dollar.

- **Present Tense**: For the simple present tense, use the base form of the verb.
  
  Today I *give* my sister a dollar.

- **Future Tense**: For the future tense, add the helping verb *will* to the base form of the verb.
  
  Tomorrow I *will give* my sister a dollar.

To allow for more specific increments of time, the English verb phrases get more complex. In addition to the simple tenses, there are
also perfect tenses. *Perfect tenses* specify that an action either has been, is being, or will be completed. There is an essence of finality (perfection, completeness) to this tense. The helping verbs *had, have,* and *has,* and *will have* are used to indicate past, present, and future perfect tenses. The following are examples of each tense used appropriately in sentences:

- **Past perfect:** I *had given* Jenny another chance to turn in the report before our boss returned from vacation. (had + past participle)
- **Present perfect:** We *have gone* to the store for the last time today. (have or has + past participle)
- **Future perfect:** The city council *will have decided* on the traffic circle proposal before the next meeting. (will have + past participle)

Though grammar books tend to disagree about the classification of this next set of verbs, because it distinguishes time, we also refer to it as a tense—the progressive tense. Progressive verbs show a continuation of time, indicated by the *–ing* ending added to the base form. As with the perfect tenses, progressive forms require helping verbs.

The following examples use the base form *writing* to demonstrate the use of progressive tense:

- **Past progressive:** She *was writing* a dissertation last year.
- **Present progressive:** She *is writing* a conference proposal this week.
- **Future progressive:** She *will be writing* a book of essays next year.
- **Past perfect progressive:** She *had been writing* drafts of the essays in graduate school before delving into the dissertation.
- **Present perfect progressive:** She *has been writing* professionally since she was 15 years old.
- **Future perfect progressive**: She *will have been writing* for 20 years at her next birthday.

Keeping all of these tenses in order can be challenging. Writers must avoid switching tenses unnecessarily so that the reader does not get confused about when an event is occurring. This issue typically happens when writers are using narration to develop an idea.

The following is an example of a tense shift that might cause confusion for the reader:

> Last night when I first *saw* Larry, I *thought* he was wearing a shirt with orange sleeves. However, I *looked* closer, *asked* him to step in the light, and *saw* that he is actually the victim of cheap self-tan lotion that changed his skin an odd pumpkin shade.

In this passage, the entire event with Larry took place in the past, but the tense shifts in the second sentence, and the reader might think that the writer didn’t discover the self-tan fiasco until now. Shifts in tense like this can cause issues with clarity.

**Adverbs**

Adverbs, like adjectives, are modifiers. Instead of modifying nouns and pronouns, adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs. Adverbs typically answer the question how or when.

The following examples show adverbs modifying verbs:

> Scotty ran *quickly* down the hall. (*Quickly* tells the reader *how* Scotty ran.)

> *Yesterday*, I threw my television out the window in an angry fit. (*Yesterday* tells the reader *when* I threw the television.)
The following examples show adverbs modifying adjectives:

My roommate was very angry at me for destroying our television. (Very tells the reader how angry the roommate was.)

My actions were completely inappropriate, and I apologized to my roommate for destroying the television set. (Completely tells the reader how inappropriate my actions were.)

The following examples show adverbs modifying other adverbs:

Although my roommate was obviously upset, she remained quite calmly situated at the end of the hallway staring down at the mess of glass, plastic, and metal on the pavement below. (Quite tells the reader how calmly situated the roommate was.)

I can almost always predict what my roommate will say to me, but I was blown away by her response that it was okay. (Almost tells the reader how often the correct predictions occur.)

Conjunctive adverbs are adverbs that helps introduce an independent clause. They usually provide a type of transition within the context of the passage. The following are frequently used conjunctive adverbs:

- however
- therefore
- nevertheless
- furthermore
- similarly
- thus
- nonetheless
- likewise
- consequently

If these adverbs are used in the beginning or middle of a sentence, they are usually followed by a comma. Because they typically begin an independent clause, they are usually preceded by a period or semicolon. The following are some examples of conjunctive adverbs used in sentences:

The father took away the children’s Internet privileges for the night; furthermore, he threatened to give away their computer if they refused to take turns in the future.

I wanted to believe my little sister’s bargain to clean my room for a week if I let her borrow my new scarf. However, I had been burned too many times with her empty promises.

**Interjections**

Interjections are words that exclaim an emotion. These words are rarely used in formal, academic writing. In the following examples, interjections are used in sentences:

*Wow*! I wonder who ordered the one-pound, triple cheeseburger with a large basket of fries?

*Well*, who would have imagined little Jeannie Smith could eat all of that food?

*Oh*! I forgot to turn off the coffeemaker before leaving the house this morning!
SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION

The parts of speech, explained in the previous section, shape how individual words or phrases are used in writing. The parts of a sentence shape the meaning and form of independent ideas. To understand how to avoid common problems with coordinating elements or combining sentences—run-on sentences, comma splices, fragments—the writer must learn what makes a sentence a sentence. A sentence needs a subject and a verb. It should also express a complete thought.

Subject

A subject is the main player of the sentence. Typically, the subject is a noun (Harry, discussion, effects), but it can also be in the form of a verbal (a word that looks like a verb but acts like another part of speech) or phrase (learning to ski, figuring it all out, painting). Subjects can also be compound, joined by the conjunctions and or or. Despite its form, the subject is the center of the discussion in the sentence.

In the following examples, the subject is italicized:

*Harry* decided it was time for a change.

The heated *discussion* at our last staff meeting prompted many employees to leave the company.

During much of his life, the *effects* of the war haunted my grandfather.

*Learning to ski* was a lesson in humility for me.

Though Sarah wanted to consider all of her employees’ vacation requests this holiday season, *figuring it all out* was not going to be easy.

*Painting* produces a calming effect on my hyperactive three-year-old.
Either my brother or my cousin ate the last ice cream bar, and I was furious.

Through their latest exploration of the flea market, my mother and my great aunt discovered a treasure trove of mismatched dinnerware and tacky floral prints.

**Verb (Predicate)**

The verb or predicate of the sentence is where all the action happens or where the writer makes an assertion about the subject.

In the following examples, the verb is italicized.

Harry decided it was time for a change. (*Decided* is an action verb.)

The heated discussion at our last staff meeting prompted many employees to leave the company. (*Prompted* is an action verb.)

During much of his life, the effects of the war haunted my grandfather. (*Haunted* is an action verb.)

Learning to ski was a lesson in humility for me. (*Was* is a linking verb.)

Though Sarah wanted to consider all of her employees’ vacation requests this holiday season, figuring it all out was not going to be easy. (*Was going* is an action verb.)

Painting produces a calming effect on my hyperactive three-year-old. (* Produces* is an action verb.)
Either my brother or my cousin Tommy *ate* the last ice cream bar, and I *was* furious. (*Ate* is an action verb; *was* is a linking verb.)

Through their latest exploration of the flea market, my mother and my great aunt *discovered* a treasure trove of mismatched dinnerware and tacky floral prints. (*Discovered* is an action verb.)

Typically, there is more wording after the verb in a sentence. This information could include an object or a complement. Some action verbs need objects. Linking verbs need complements.

Action verbs that require a direct object (something or someone to receive the action of the verb) are called transitive verbs.

Buster, my hound dog, *ate* *spaghetti and meatballs* for supper tonight.

In the preceding example, the subject is *Buster* and the verb is *ate*. The reader will need to know what Buster ate for the sentence to be complete, so the direct object is *spaghetti and meatballs*.

Sarah *loaned* me her *copy* of the *Great Gatsby*.

In the preceding example, the subject is *Sarah*. The verb is *loaned*. The reader will need to know what was being loaned, and *copy* is the answer to that question—the direct object. The word *me* is the indirect object, the person to whom the copy is being loaned.

Intransitive verbs do not need a direct object to complete the thought expressed by the verb.

The children *played* until midnight.
My sister talks incessantly.

John Jr. swam gracefully across the pool.

Your college-level dictionary will indicate if a verb is transitive or intransitive.

Linking verbs require a subject complement—a noun or adjective that completes the subject. Linking verbs include the forms of to be: is, am, are, was, and were. Other verbs that can be linking verbs when followed by a subject complement include words like look, taste, appear, become, seem, sound, prove, and remain.

Surprisingly, Judy remained calm after almost running into the median on a busy interstate highway.

In the preceding example, calm (an adjective) describes the subject Judy.

I am a rock star.

In the preceding example, rock star (a noun) renames the subject I.

**Phrases**

Phrases are groups of words that may contain a subject or a verb, but will not contain both of these elements. By describing, renaming, and relating to other words, phrases can enrich sentences and make the information more precise.

**Prepositional Phrases**

A prepositional phrase modifies a word or other phrase in a sentence and can be used as either an adjective (modifying nouns or pronouns) or an adverb (modifying verbs, adjectives, or adverbs). Prepositional phrases begin with prepositions (words or phrases like in, around, from, by, on, and with) and end with an object (a noun or pronoun). In the following sentences, prepositional phrases are italicized:
When you go to the beach for your next vacation, don’t forget to take me!

Instead of taking me to the beach, Henry brought his dog with him.

**Verbal Phrases**

Verbal phrases are a bit deceptive at first glance. These word groups begin with a form of a verb but are used as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs. These sneaky phrases are divided into three categories—gerund phrases, participial phrases, and infinitive phrases.

A **gerund phrase** begins with a verb ending in –ing and is used as a noun. Gerund phrases can either be the subject of a sentence, direct object, subject complement, or object of a preposition. The following sentences contain gerund phrases:

*Paying attention in class* was one of my strategies for improving my grade point average. (The gerund phrase is used as the subject of the sentence.)

Facebook has a way of **distracting me** from *doing my homework*. (The gerund phrases are used as objects of prepositions.)

**Participial phrases** begin with a verb ending in –ing or a verb in the past participle form. Participial phrases function as adjectives (describing nouns or pronouns). The following sentences contain participial phrases:

The dog, **leaning out the window with his tongue flapping in the breeze**, looked as though he was enjoying the car ride. (The participial phrase modifies the noun *dog.*)
The child stared at the enormous wrapped package *given to her by her grandmother.* (The participial phrase modifies the noun *package.*)

*Infinitive phrases* are formed by combining the word *to* with the base form of a verb. These phrases can be used as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs. The following sentences contain infinitive phrases:

*To forgive and forget* is truly therapeutic. (The infinitive phrase is used as a subject.)

It took Benjamin several years *to master* his bread-making techniques. (The infinitive phrase is used as an adverb modifying the verb *took.*)

**Other Types of Phrases**

*Appositive phrases* are placed after and rename a noun or pronoun:

*My older brother, the family prankster,* keeps us busy on April Fool’s day.

*Absolute phrases* modify clauses. They typically modify an entire sentence:

*My eyesight not being what it used to be,* I am afraid to drive at night when it is raining.

**Clauses**

A clause is a group of words that contains both a subject and a verb. Clauses can either be dependent or independent based on their ability to stand alone as a complete sentence.

*Dependent clauses* (also known as subordinate clauses) cannot stand alone as a sentence. They “depend” on another clause to be complete. Some common words that begin dependent clauses are
that, which, who, whom, when, if, since, before, after, because, what, where, and how.

If you want to avoid the crowds, you should probably consider staying at home on Black Friday.

I don’t remember when my brother’s birthday is.

My mother is the twin who always wears her hair in an up do.

Notice the punctuation in the preceding examples. If the dependent clause comes before the independent clause, a comma is placed after it. If the dependent clause comes after the independent clause, no comma is needed.

A common issue writers have is placing end punctuation after a dependent clause, creating a sentence fragment.

Mary will pay back the money she owes you. If you remind her.

In the preceding example, if you remind her is a dependent clause and can’t stand alone as a sentence. It is a fragment. To correct the problem, simply link the two clauses together:

Mary will pay back the money she owes you if you remind her.

Recognizing the words that typically begin dependent clauses helps you learn to avoid creating fragments.

Independent clauses contain a subject and a verb and can stand alone as a complete sentence. The following are examples of independent clauses:
The fish tank overflowed onto our new white carpet.

We managed to pry the children away from the television set in order to take a family walk around the neighborhood.

Fragments

The fragment is an incomplete sentence. At first glance, these groups of words might appear to be a sentence because they might include a subject or a verb. They might even include both, but still not create a complete thought. The following are examples of sentence fragments:

- Tillie, the woman who always interrupts our meetings with long, boring personal anecdotes.
- By learning to fix motors in electronic toys and simple gadgets around the house at an early age.
- When I first became a palm reader.

To correct a fragment, writers can add the missing sentence elements (a subject or a verb), complete the thought of the sentence, change the wording of the sentence (usually removing the dependent element), or add the fragment to another sentence in the paragraph to create a complete thought.

When a sentence is missing a subject or a verb, the writer can simply add the missing element to create the complete thought:

- Tillie, the woman who always interrupts our meetings with long, boring personal anecdotes, extended the meeting for 20 extra minutes and exhausted our staff.

Many times, writers mistake a dependent clause for an independent clause or sentence. Both types of clauses contain a subject
and a verb. However, a dependent clause does not create a complete thought. Instead, it depends on another clause (independent clause) to complete the thought:

*When I first became a palm reader,* I had to get a second job to pay the bills.

If an adjacent sentence completes the thought of a fragment, you can combine those elements to create a sentence:

*Tommy was an engineer from the start. By learning to fix motors in electronic toys at an early age, he showed potential and talent that was fully realized in adulthood.*

**Run-on Sentences**

The infamous run-on sentence occurs when two or more complete thoughts “run” together without an appropriate break (punctuation). Run-on sentences can be further categorized as either fused sentences or comma splices. In either case, run-on sentences can be distracting to readers or cause them to either misinterpret the author’s intentions or wear down trying to understand the main point of the sentence.

**Fused Sentence**

A fused sentence occurs when two or more sentences run together without any punctuation break. The reader needs to be able to stop at the end of a complete thought so several thoughts do not run together in the mind. The following are examples of fused sentences:

*My little sister has been pulling the same stunt for years* she promises to attend my grandma’s Thanksgiving luncheon so that I don’t have to face our eccentric relatives alone *then she pulls out at the*
The first sentence ends and the next sentence begins without a break. There are actually three complete thoughts (sentences) in this example and no break is provided. You will find it difficult to read the sentence out loud without a break and will probably end up providing your own pausing to get the entire sentence out.

**Comma Splice**
A comma splice occurs when two or more sentences are spliced together with a comma when more of a break is needed. The following example includes a fused sentence and a comma splice:

My little sister has been pulling the same stunt for years she promises to attend my grandma’s Thanksgiving luncheon so that I don’t have to face our eccentric relatives alone, then she pulls out at the last minute claiming her children are sick or her car needs repair.

**Correcting Run-Ons**
Run-ons need punctuation to allow the reader to pause or stop and to provide a break between independent ideas. Here are some ways to correct a run-on sentence (comma splice or fused sentence):

- **Period**: Add a period between independent clauses to create the break:
  
  My little sister has been pulling the same stunt for years. She promises to attend my grandma’s Thanksgiving luncheon so that I don’t have to face our eccentric relatives alone.
- **Semicolon:** Use a semicolon between independent clauses that have a close relationship. This relationship could cause an effect or a further explanation or extension of an idea:
  
  My sister promises to attend my grandma’s Thanksgiving luncheon so that I don’t have to face our eccentric relatives alone; then she pulls out at the last minute claiming her children are sick or her car needs repair.

- **Comma with a coordinating conjunction:** You can use a comma between independent clauses but only when that comma is accompanied by a coordinating conjunction. These conjunctions include *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so* and can be remembered by the acronym FANBOYS.
  
  My sister promises to attend my grandma’s Thanksgiving luncheon so that I don’t have to face our eccentric relatives alone, *but* she pulls out at the last minute claiming her children are sick or her car needs repair.

- **Subordinating conjunction:** You can convert one sentence into a subordinate (dependent) clause so you are not joining two independent clauses (sentences) together:
  
  *Although my sister promises to attend my grandma’s Thanksgiving luncheon so that I don’t have to face our eccentric relatives alone,* she always pulls out at the last minute claiming her children are sick or her car needs repair.

Reading your work out loud can help you avoid fragments and run-ons. When you read out loud, be sure to pause slightly for commas; pause a bit longer, almost stopping, for semicolons; and stop briefly for periods. If your sentences do not seem to be complete at the period, check for fragments. If you run out of breath before the period, check for run-ons.
AGREEMENT (PRONOUN-ANTECEDENT; SUBJECT-VERB)
In Standard American English, certain elements of a sentence must agree in number (either plural or singular). This agreement provides harmony between the writer and the audience as well, for the reader will not be searching aimlessly for a reference or meaning in the sentence.

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement
Pronouns are those words that replace nouns and offer variety in sentences (see the earlier “Parts of Speech” section, pp. 223–242). The pronouns must agree in number with those nouns or other pronouns (also referred to as antecedents) that they refer to. This agreement helps the reader easily understand the meaning of the pronoun. Without the agreement, there will be clarity issues.

Consider this sentence:

If a student registers for class late, they will have fewer options to choose from.

In this example, the pronoun they is plural, but the antecedent student is singular. The pronoun and antecedent do not agree in number. The reader might be left wondering who the word they refers to. Could there be another group of people in this sentence?

To correct the preceding sentence, the pronoun needs to be singular:

If a student registers for class late, he or she will have fewer options to choose from.

Or, the antecedent needs to be plural:

If students register for class late, they will have fewer options to choose from.
Typically, writers have trouble with pronoun-antecedent structure when using singular, indefinite pronouns. The following is a list of singular indefinite pronouns.

- anybody
- anyone
- somebody
- someone
- each
- everybody
- everyone
- something
- neither
- either
- nothing

*Anyone* can try out for the team if *they* have the skills and motivation to stick with practice.

*Anyone* is singular, but *they* is plural. Here are three options to correct the sentences:

- **Make the pronoun singular:**
  Anyone can try out for the team if *he or she* has the skills and motivation to stick with practice.

- **Make the antecedent plural:**
  *Students* can try out for the team if *they* have the skills and motivation to stick with practice.

- **Change the sentence to avoid the issue:**
  Anyone with the skills and motivation to stick with practice can try out for the team.

A generic noun can cause the same problem that an indefinite pronoun causes:
Every student must practice writing daily if they want to build stronger writing skills.

*Student* is singular, but the pronoun *they* is plural.

Here are three options to correct the sentence:

- Every student must practice writing daily if *he or she* wants to build stronger writing skills.
- *Students* must practice daily if they want to build stronger writing skills.
- To build stronger writing skills, students must practice daily.

**Subject-Verb Agreement**

To avoid clarity issues, subjects and verbs must agree in number (singular or plural). A subject is the main player of the sentence. The verb is either the action or the expression of the state of that subject. For more on subjects and verbs, see the previous “Sentence Construction” section, pp. 243–254.

In the following sentences, subjects and verbs agree in number:

*Sammy* is happy to see his aunts over the holidays.

There is only one *Sammy*, so *Sammy* is singular. The verb *is* is singular as well.

*His aunts are* happy to see him too.

There are multiple *aunts*, so *aunts* is plural. The verb *are* is plural as well.
Here is the trick. Typically, a singular subject does not end in –s or –es, but a singular present tense verb does end in –s. Many times, a plural subject ends in –s or –es, but a plural present tense verb does not end in –s. There are exceptions, but this general guideline will help you edit for subject-verb agreement.

Issues can arise in the following situations:

- The subject and verb are separated by a phrase.
- The subject of the sentence is an indefinite pronoun.
- The sentence order is inverted (verb comes before subject).
- The subject is compound.

Strong writers tend to vary their sentence structure to create flow and rhythm in their writing and to emphasize particular points. These are positive qualities. However, when writers use these intricate techniques, sometimes the subject and verb of the sentence are not easy to distinguish, leading to agreement problems.

Here is an example of a sentence where the subject and verb are interrupted by a phrase, causing a problem with subject-verb agreement:

Traditional media outlets like the print newspaper is of little interest to youth today.

The subject of this sentence is outlets. Some writers might think that newspaper is the subject because it is next to the verb. However, newspaper is the object in the phrase like the print newspaper. The verb is (singular) does not agree with the subject outlets (plural). Here is the corrected version:

Traditional media outlets like the print newspaper are of little interest to youth today.
Most indefinite pronouns are considered singular. So they agree with singular verbs. Many of these types of pronouns end in –one or –body as in anybody, anyone, somebody, someone, everybody, and everyone. Other examples include each, something, neither, and either.

In the following example, a student has used a singular indefinite pronoun as a subject with a plural verb, creating a problem with subject-verb agreement:

*Everybody in the room have tickets for the play.*

The subject everybody is singular, but the verb have is plural. They do not agree. The verb needs to be singular to agree with the singular subject:

*Everybody in the room has tickets for the play.*

*Each of the four children are cooking this week.*

The subject each is singular, but the verb are is plural. They do not agree. The verb has to be singular to agree with the subject:

*Each of the four children is cooking this week.*

You might consider memorizing a list of indefinite pronouns if you find a pattern of subject-verb agreement errors in your writing.

Some writers invert the traditional sentence order to add variety to a passage of text. Although this practice can make writing more dynamic and interesting, the writer must also be aware of subject-verb agreement. These topsy-turvy sentences might make it difficult to isolate the subject.
There are several excuses that I could make for not going to the party, but I will just try my best to avoid the inquiries for a while.

The subject excuses (plural) follows the verb are (plural).

The following sentence contains a problem with subject-verb agreement:

In the shadows lurk a strange figure.

The subject is figure (singular), but the verb is lurk (plural). The verb needs to be singular to agree with the subject:

In the shadows lurks a strange figure.

**Compounding the Issue**

A compound subject can be considered either singular or plural, depending on the conjunction that joins the subject. Subjects joined by “and” are considered plural.

*Pat and Lisa are* visiting their great-great aunt in Tallahassee next weekend.

When two subjects are joined by *or*, the verb agrees with the closest subject:

Option 1: Either Tammy or her three *children are* going to join them on the trip.

Option 2: Either the three children or *Tammy is going* to join them on the trip.
If one of the subjects is plural, consider placing it closest to the verb to avoid any awkward phrasing. In the preceding examples, option #1 is probably the best choice because *children* is plural and closest to the verb.

**PARALLELISM**
To avoid awkward, unclear phrasing, writers must keep items in a series parallel. Parallelism means that the structures of those items will be similar. For instance, a series could include all noun forms, all –*ing* forms, or all infinitives but not a combination of the forms. The following is an example of a series that is not parallel:

> The child is more likely to finish her language arts homework this evening than working through her assigned math problems.

In the preceding example, one item is structured as an infinitive—*to finish*—but the other item is structured as a participle—*working*.

> Many adults are taking advantage of the opportunities to advance their careers and enroll in an online university.

In the preceding example, one verb is in the present progressive tense—*are taking*—and the other is in the plain present tense—*enroll*.

To correct the previous sentences above, the writer needs to create parallel structures:

> The child is more likely *to finish* her language arts homework this evening than *to work* through her assigned math problems.
Many adults are *taking* advantage of the opportunities to advance their careers and *enrolling* in an online university.

When comparing objects using the words *like* or *as*, a writer must also create parallel structures to keep the comparison clear and avoid awkward phrasing. The following is an example of a comparison that is not parallel:

My granny would rather *peddle* across town on her bicycle than *to take* a bus.

The preceding series includes *peddle* and *to take*.

My granny would rather *peddle* across town on her bicycle than *take* a bus.

The preceding series is parallel.

**POINT OF VIEW**

The point of view in which a piece is written depends on the purpose of that piece and the level of formality the author wants to create.

*First person point of view* allows writers to speak from their personal perspective. Pronouns such as *I, me, my, myself, we, us, our, ourselves* create the first person perspective. Typically, first person pronouns are avoided in academic projects and essays to create a more formal tone. Academic authors tend to distance themselves from their texts and avoid revealing personal opinions.

*Second person point of view* allows the writer to speak directly to the audience, as if in a conversation with another individual. Second person pronouns include *you, your, yours*, and *yourself*. Typically, second person pronouns are avoided in academic projects unless the writer is explaining or describing a process.


Third person point of view is used most often in academic writing. This perspective allows the authors to distance themselves personally from the text and creates a more formal, objective discussion. Third person pronouns include words such as he, his, him, she, her, hers, they, them, and their. Nouns also create the third person perspective (individuals, theorists, studies, practitioners, students).

Writers should keep a consistent point of view throughout a work to ensure clarity in their writing. In the following example, the point of view is not consistent, causing awkward phrasing:

Students should be aware of the pitfalls of a busy academic life. Without proper planning and time management, you get worn down, and students burn out quickly. I must create an action plan at the beginning of each semester and stick to it to make it through the courses.

In this example, first (I), second (you), and third person (students) points of view are used, causing an unclear passage. The reader might wonder who the word you refers to and if the author is suggesting that all students or just I should create the action plan.

Here is a revision of the preceding text using a consistent point of view:

Students should be aware of the pitfalls of a busy academic life. Without proper planning and time management, they can get worn down and burn out quickly. Students should create an action plan at the beginning of each semester and stick to it to make it through their courses.
PUNCTUATION

Using punctuation effectively allows a writer to create rhythm, emphasis, and space for the reader. Punctuation also helps to separate independent thoughts from each other. The following section explains punctuation usage for both end punctuation, such as the period, exclamation mark, and question mark, and internal punctuation, such as the comma, semicolon, colon, dash, hyphen, and apostrophe.

The Period

A period is also referred to as a full stop, meaning the reader should stop, not merely pause, when approaching a period in text. Therefore, a period is used to end a complete thought—an independent clause, also known as a sentence. Periods end sentences of declaration or command:

Jeffrey and Shelly’s movie marathon lasted 48 hours.  
(declarative sentence)

Avoid movie marathons over six hours long unless plenty of stretching and snack breaks are built in.  
(command)

The Exclamation Mark

The exclamation mark is used to show elevated emotion or exclamation in a sentence.

“Quick, throw me the baking soda!” yelled Mom as she tried to control the grease fire on the stove.

Oh no! We’re out of baking soda!
Exclamation marks are used sparingly to emphasize the emotion of the expression and are typically avoided in academic and business writing where a more even, formal tone is used.

**The Question Mark**
The question mark is used after a direct question.

Did grandpa find his false teeth?

When did the city council make the decision to create a traffic circle downtown?

Question marks are not used with indirect questions:

Jamie asked grandpa where his false teeth were.

I wanted to know when the city council made the decision to create a traffic circle downtown.

**The Comma**
A comma provides the reader with a pause and is typically used to separate items within the sentence. There are many uses for the comma, but writers should avoid unnecessary commas that can interrupt the flow of a text. This section explains common uses of commas.

Commas can be used between independent clauses along with coordinating conjunctions (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet,* and *so*). The comma and the conjunction provide enough of a break between complete thoughts, but both elements should be used to avoid running sentences together or creating comma splices.

The community orchestra practiced twice a week for the upcoming holiday event, *and* Sam ensured that he attended each session.
Sam wanted more than anything to play the trumpet solo, but the more experienced trumpeter, Steven, got that honor.

Commas are used to separate introductory words, phrases, or clauses from the rest of the sentence. Many times, these introductory elements also provide transitions for the reader.

Yesterday, I finally admitted to eating the last slice of cake.

In the middle of the night, I had gotten hungry and couldn’t resist the temptation.

Before I confessed, I planned to bake another cake so my husband could have a slice tonight.

However, I was out of flour and sugar and could not continue with my plan.

When two adjectives modify a noun equally rather than cumulatively, a comma is needed to separate the adjectives. A writer can use two unofficial tests to determine if adjectives are coordinate:

- The writer can switch the order of cumulative adjectives without affecting clarity.
- The word and can be used between coordinate adjectives.

My daughter is a playful, imaginative child.

The preceding example passes both coordinate adjective tests. You could easily switch the order of adjectives (My daughter is an imagi-
native, playful child) or use the word and in place of the comma (My daughter is a playful and imaginative child).

She wore a light blue tutu around the house for several days. (cumulative)

The preceding example does not pass the coordinate adjective test; therefore, a comma is not needed between adjectives. You could not switch the order of adjectives (She wore a blue light tutu around the house for several days) or separate the items with and (She wore a light and blue tutu around the house for several days).

Commas are used between three or more items in a series to help separate and distinguish those items from each other. Many academic style manuals encourage writers to place a comma before the last item, but others, including journalistic manuals, do not encourage the use of that last comma.

We went over the river, through the woods, and past a hermit’s cottage before arriving at the camp site for the evening.

Mom, Granny, and Aunt Ida wanted to snoop around the cottage, but I insisted that we keep hiking to reach our destination before midnight.

A nonrestrictive element does not restrict or refine the meaning of a word in the sentence in order to affect the meaning of that word. Therefore, a nonrestrictive element is not absolutely essential for the meaning of the sentence. Instead, these elements provide extra description or detail that the reader will find interesting.

Nonrestrictive elements are set off from the rest of the sentence by commas:
My mother’s frequent warnings, *which I rarely heeded in the past*, flashed through my mind as I jumped back on the curb barely avoiding a speeding city bus.

Sue’s clunker car, *with its rusted and duct-taped exterior*, chugged and smoked up the mountain on her way back to school.

In both of the preceding cases, the information within the commas is interesting and descriptive, but it is not necessary to understand the main point of each sentence. Contrast these to a sentence like this:

*The man with the tribal tattoo cut my hair.*

In this case, *with the tribal tattoo* identifies exactly which man cut the hair. Without it, it could have been any man, so this is a restrictive element (because it restricts who the man could be) and is not set off with commas.

Commas are used to set apart transitional words or phrases used within a sentence:

*I watched the weather forecast on the local news station last night; therefore, I was prepared for the downpour that occurred this afternoon.*

*As a matter of fact, I brought extra umbrellas to pass out to drenched pedestrians that I passed on my way into the office.*

Commas are used to set apart parenthetical elements within a sentence as well:
The coffeepot, *luckily*, had an automatic shut down feature.

Richard, *my dear*, you must return to the grocery store because you forgot the milk and bread.

Commas are needed after appositive phrases. Appositive phrases rename a noun or pronoun in the sentence.

Tommy, being the stereotypical class clown, frequently got in trouble for placing tacks in chairs and flying paper airplanes around the classroom.

Commas are used to separate the year of a date from other items in the sentence. A comma is also needed between a city and its state.

On January 14, 1975, my mother moved to Nashville, Tennessee, to begin her career as a country singer/songwriter.

**Frequently Misused Commas**

Unnecessary commas can interrupt the flow of writing or cause clarity issues. Writers should avoid including commas if no particular reason to use one exists. The following examples reveal commonly misused commas, which are highlighted:

A comma should not be placed between two items joined by a coordinating conjunction (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*) unless the items are independent clauses:

Sarah *thought* of how responsible and trustworthy her son had always *been, and decided* to allow him to stay out an hour past curfew.
In the preceding example, the conjunction *and* is joining two verbs—thought and decided—so the comma is not necessary.

A single comma should never separate a subject and verb:

> The *child* who finishes her *homework first*, *will be* *able* to choose the recess activity this afternoon.

Commas are not needed within a prepositional phrase:

> Virginia found several rules of her new job difficult to follow, *such as*, *arriving on time, completing her daily tasks, and not falling asleep at her desk after lunch*.

In the preceding example, the comma after *such as* is not necessary as it interrupts the phrase *such as arriving on time, completing her daily tasks, and not falling asleep at her desk after lunch*.

Commas are not needed to set off essential information in the sentence:

> I promise never to call after 10:00 p.m. *again, unless it is an emergency*.

In the preceding example, the clause *unless it is an emergency* is necessary for the meaning of the sentence, so the comma should not be placed before that clause.

**The Semicolon**

A semicolon provides a substantial break in or between sentences. A semicolon is typically used in two ways.

Semicolons can be used to separate sentences that have a close connection with each other. The semicolon provides enough of a break to indicate to the reader that there are two distinct, complete thoughts. At the same time, the semicolon shows the reader that the complete
thoughts are related enough not to warrant separation by a period. Many times, conjunctive adverbs are used in these constructions:

Harry wanted to ask Janelle to marry him; however, he couldn't get up the nerve to do so in a crowded restaurant.

Janelle knew something was going on; she could sense Harry's tension from across the table.

Semicolons can also be used between three or more items in a series when the items are complex and contain commas. The semicolons help distinguish the larger elements from the smaller elements in the series:

To show support for her son's little league team, Tonya drove the neighborhood kids to practices; served drinks, snacks, and ice cream at the concession stand; and sold magazines, candy bars, and wrapping paper to raise funds for new uniforms.

The Colon
A colon is used after an independent clause (sentence) that introduces a list, definition, quote, explanation, or example:

Millard’s Pizza Palace has several delicious items on the menu that I would recommend: cheese calzones, Chicago-style pies, and Greek salad.

My father had only one rule for his household of teenage kids: Get home before midnight or be prepared for an early alarm and yard work chores the next morning.
Grammar Geeks Online (2008) offers the following suggestion: “Keep your grammar handbooks with you at all times and be prepared for questions about participial phrases” (para. 4).

Book collectors can be quite obsessive: My Uncle Frank can no longer walk down his hallway without tripping over tomes lining the path.

A common mistake that writers make is not creating an independent clause before the colon. In these instances, the colon many times interrupts a phrase, as in the following example:

Our picnic consisted of: cold fried chicken, potato salad, fruit salad, and plenty of ants.

**The Dash**

Dashes are used to set aside parenthetical information and emphasize or highlight the information. To create a dash, type two hyphens (--). Please note, however, that some word-processing programs, depending on how they are configured, automatically convert two hyphens(--) to a solid dash—and this is acceptable.

The following are examples of situations where a dash would be used:

The city council’s final decision—evolving from many hours of citizen complaints and heated debates among council members—seemed to satisfy most parties involved.

Last night’s dinner—broccoli salad, chicken casserole, cloverleaf rolls, sweet tea, and pound cake—was a southern potluck-lover’s dream meal.
Try to avoid using dashes too often in college-level and business writing as they can interrupt the flow of writing and distract readers.

The Hyphen
Hyphens are used to combine terms and create compound words that come before and modify nouns (these are also called “compound adjectives”):

- My ninety-year-old granny practices yoga at the YMCA daily to keep fit.
- The ever-popular class clown, Jimmy Simms, had us all in stitches from his latest prank.

Hyphens are also used after certain prefixes.

- Jenny McGhee was a self-made millionaire.
- Despite the horrible sunburn and a weight gain of 10 pounds, I enjoyed the all-inclusive trip to the Bahamas I won for contributing to a local public radio station last year.
- I downloaded an e-book last night to take to the beach for some light reading.

The Apostrophe
An apostrophe is used to show possession.

- My dog’s tail
- Sarah’s new car
- The home’s appeal
- The decision’s finality
To make a singular noun possessive, add an apostrophe and an –s ending:

The car’s fender
My sister’s room
The store’s sale

To make a plural noun that doesn’t already end in –s possessive, add an apostrophe and an –s:

Children’s mischief
Oxen’s load

To make a plural noun that ends in –s possessive, simply add the apostrophe:

Employees’ complaints
Boys’ toys
Bears’ cave

To make a singular noun that ends in –s possessive, simply add an apostrophe as well, especially if adding another –s ending makes the word difficult to pronounce:

Tom Jones’ songs

Possessive pronouns do not require an apostrophe:

The dog chased its tail.
The children lost their shoes.
We will always keep our holiday traditions.
CAPITALIZATION

The basic capitalization principle to remember is to capitalize proper nouns, nouns that name specific people, places, things, or ideas. Recognizing categories of proper nouns will help you remember specific words to capitalize. In addition, a college-level dictionary is a wonderful resource to have on hand when trying to determine whether a word should be capitalized.

The following lists rules for proper capitalization of various categories of nouns.

Capitalize Key Words in a Title

Nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, and pronouns are all capitalized in a title. Also, any word that contains more than four letters is capitalized, according to APA guidelines:

- The Naked and the Dead
- A Community of Writers
- “Writing and Knowing: Toward Redefining the Writing Process”

Exception: Capitalization of titles on an APA-formatted reference page differs from the preceding rule. Only the first word of the title, first word of the subtitle, and any proper nouns are capitalized in a full reference citation.


Titles of People

Capitalize a title used with a person’s name. Titles used alone typically do not need capitalization.

Doctor Phillip J. Jones
Phillip J. Jones, my daughter's doctor
Professor Jeannie Jones
The professor currently teaching the class

**Places**
Capitalize the proper names of places, but do not capitalize common nouns naming a general type of place:

- New York City the city
- Atlantic Ocean the ocean
- Germany a country

**Agencies/Companies**
Capitalize the proper names of specific agencies, companies, organizations, and departments:

- Kaplan University
- Washington Post Company
- American Medical Association
- Communications Department

**Sentences**
Capitalize the first word of a sentence and a sentence in a quoted passage:

Three years have gone by, and I haven’t had a cigarette.

My daughter often asks, “May I borrow the car?”

**ABBREVIATIONS**
An abbreviation is a shortened form of a word or phrase. In formal, college-level writing, most abbreviations are avoided to ensure that
the reader will not misinterpret the meaning of the abbreviated form. The following are some common abbreviations that are typically used in any type of writing.

A title is abbreviated when a person’s proper name is used:

Ms. Stephanie Cartier
Dr. Janice Rollins
Prof. Patrick Smith
Rev. Leah Sanders
Tyrone Parker, MD
Sam Clark Jr.
Erin Cloninger, PhD
Benjamin Bartley, DDS

The abbreviations BCE (before the Common Era), BC (before Christ), CE (the Common Era), AD (Anno Domini—“in the year of the Lord”), a.m., and p.m. are acceptable when using specific information.

500 BCE (or 500 BC)
1280 CE (or AD 1280)
9:00 a.m.
3:30 p.m.

Avoid using these abbreviated forms when a specific date or time is not mentioned:

My history class focuses on Palestine before the Common Era, specifically during the time of Herod.

We arrived home from Aunt Ida’s in the afternoon.
NUMBERS

Generally, spell out numbers one through nine unless used as measurement, ages, percentages, or with a dollar sign:

There were three children running around the living room.

I downloaded five songs to my MP3 player last night.

The student had reached nearly 6 feet tall by her senior year in high school.

Sylvia is looking forward to turning 9 this year.

Will you loan me $20?

Use figures for numbers less than one and include the zero:

How would I round .067 to the nearest tenth?

Use figures for specific dates:

Jenny will begin graduate school on August 14, 2010.

Note: An apostrophe is not needed when indicating a specific decade: Harry grew up in the 1980s and still referred to his friends as the other Brat Pack.

Spell out fractions less than one and convert larger fractions to decimals:

In the study, one-half of all students within the university regularly used writing center services.
The tank held 20 gallons of gasoline.

Use a comma for numbers greater than 100:

My final project turned out to be 12,239 words long.

**COMMONLY MISSPELLED (AND SOMETIMES MISUSED) WORDS**

**accept/except**

Accept is a verb meaning receive, believe, or recognize.

I accepted Jim’s apology right away to avoid further conflict.

Except is a preposition meaning other than.

Tom has completed all of his exams except for his geometry final that is due tonight by midnight.

**adapt/adopt**

Adapt is a verb meaning to become accustomed to.

I had to adapt to the new living situation when my Granny Sarah came to stay with us.

Adopt is a verb meaning to take ownership of.

I adopted the habit of texting after realizing how quickly and easily I can communicate with my daughter that way.

**affect/effect**

Affect is typically used as a verb meaning make an impact on.

A sedentary lifestyle can affect a child’s weight and physical condition.

Effect is typically used as a noun meaning a result.

The effects of good study habits could include better grades, a more organized life, and peace of mind.
advice/advise

Advice is a noun meaning a piece of wisdom.
   My advice to students recently graduating from high school is to learn the basics of personal finance before leaving home.

Advise is a verb meaning to give out those pieces of wisdom.
   The college counselor advised Jenny to take at least 24 credit hours this year in order to graduate on time.

all ready/already

All ready means prepared.
   We are all ready to leave for the mountains.

Already is an adverb meaning that an act has occurred in the past.
   We were already on the road when we heard the weather report indicating that a blizzard awaited us at the ski lodge.

choose/chose

Choose is a present-tense verb meaning to make a selection.
   The children were allowed to choose one toy to bring home on their outing to the mall.

Chose is a past tense verb meaning made a selection.
   After much consideration, we chose to take the puppy with the calmer disposition over the energetic, playful one.

cite/sight/site

Cite is a verb meaning to give credit to an outside source.
   I need to cite the online article that I used in my paper.

Sight is a noun meaning vision.
I caught sight of a woodpecker trying to drill a hole in the side of the house.

*Site* is a noun meaning location.

The site for our new log cabin is deep in the woods.

**conscience/conscious**

*Conscience* is a noun meaning your inner moral voice.

I listened to my conscience and decided to tell the truth to my boss no matter how difficult it was to do so.

*Conscious* is a verb meaning to be aware of or to be alert and awake.

I was conscious of the small child staring at my extra large feet.

**everyday/every day**

*Everyday* is an adjective meaning daily or common. It is typically used before a noun.

My chocolate bar break is becoming an everyday occurrence, unfortunately.

*Every day* is a two-word phrase meaning each day. It typically is not placed before a noun.

I go to the grocery store every day to pick up fresh produce.

**imply/infer**

*Imply* is a verb meaning to suggest without actually stating.

My Aunt Minnie implied that our house was a mess when she kept recommending cleaning products and tools that would be useful for us.

*Infer* is a verb meaning to come to a conclusion based on a situation or facts.
From her cleaning recommendations and her refusal to sit down on our furniture, we inferred that Aunt Minnie was not comfortable being in our cluttered home.

**its/it’s**

*Its* is a possessive pronoun.
- The dog chased its tail.

*It’s* is a contraction of it is.
- It’s cloudy today.

**lay/lie**

*Lay* is a verb meaning to place.
- I will lay the keys by the door so I’ll remember where I put them next time.

*Lie* is a verb meaning to recline.
- I’m feeling quite faint, so I must lie down.

The conjugations of the verbs lay and lie are typically what confuse writers.

*Lay (present tense)* Today they lay the foundation of the house.

*Laid (past tense)* Yesterday, they laid the foundation of my neighbor’s house.

*Laid (past participle)* In the past three weeks, they have laid foundations for more than 10 houses in our new neighborhood.

*Lie (present tense)* Right now I must lie down and rest.

*Lay (past tense)* Yesterday, I lay down for a two-hour nap in the middle of the day!

*Lain (past participle)* I would have lain down for longer, but my spastic dog woke me up with his incessant barking.
**loose/lose**

*Loose* is an adjective meaning, free and roomy.

Hadley chose to wear loose-fitting pants during our Thanksgiving turkey feast.

*Lose* is a verb meaning to misplace, to be defeated, or to evade.

Unfortunately, after realizing that she had forgotten to put coffee in the buggy, Sarah had to lose her place in the long grocery line and run back through the aisles one last time.

Determined not to lose to that arrogant team with the professional looking uniforms, Coach Terry spend half-time in the locker room with her rag-tag team trying to inspire them to win.

Henry tried to lose the hall monitor by slipping down the third hall on his way to the gym, but the eagle eyes of Jerry Smithers caught him running between the lockers.

**passed/past**

*Passed* is a past-tense verb meaning went by, delivered, happened, approved, succeeded, or threw.

Johnny passed Rita the note in class.

Time passed quickly as we tried to wrap up the last major project for the year.

The Senate passed a resolution last night.

I passed my math class with a B average!

*Past* is a noun meaning a previous time period.

Although in the past Jenny would have never thought to borrow money from her older brother, his recent success in the stock market and newfound generous spirit encouraged her to ask for a small loan.
principal/principle

Principal is an adjective meaning main or a noun meaning head of a school.

The principal at the middle school showed his encouragement and support for students and teachers with a generous spirit and a positive, successful outlook for the school.

The principal point Gina’s father tried to make in his lecture to her was that she needed more experience on the road before he would trust her to drive his new car to school.

Principle is a noun meaning a belief or rule.

There are several principles that apply to good management practices.

than/then

Than is an adjective used to show a comparison.

The building to my right is much taller than the building to my left.

Then is an adverb meaning next or at that moment.

First Granny made the punch. Then we all sat down around the fireplace to enjoy the holiday.

It was then that I realized how important time with my family was to me.

their/there

Their is a possessive pronoun.

The children left their books at school and were not able to complete their homework.

There is an adjective indicating a location.

My keys are over there on the coffee table.
**to/too/two**

*To* is used before a verb in an infinitive phrase or as a preposition in a prepositional phrase.
- If you burn yourself in the kitchen, use mustard to prevent blistering.
- Let’s pack up and head to the beach for the weekend!

*Too* is an adverb meaning very or also.
- Benjamin was too tired to cook super, so he stopped by a fast-food restaurant on the way home.
- I want a fast-food hamburger too.

*Two* is a noun meaning the number between one and three.
- I was hungry, so I ate two servings of mashed potatoes.
- It is rare to have two full moons in the same month.

**weather/whether**

*Weather* is a noun meaning climate or a verb meaning to endure.
- The weather is beautiful today!
- The customer service representative weathered the flood of angry customers coming in to exchange broken merchandise after the holiday.

*Whether* is used to show a comparison.
- I’m not sure whether I should choose the German restaurant or the French restaurant for my birthday dinner.

**were/where**

*Were* is the past tense form of the verb to be.
- The three children were chattering away in the tent on their scout retreat.

*Where* is an adverb that refers to a location.
- Where will you go on your honeymoon?
your/you’re

*Your* is the possessive form of the pronoun you.

Let’s go to your house to watch the game.

*You’re* is the abbreviated form of *you are*.

That’s so exciting that you’re going on a cruise next month.

**COMMON GRAMMAR MISTAKES**

Though writers are individuals with their own writing identity—voice and, unfortunately, patterns of error—writers’ errors tend to fall into several major categories. The following sections explain some of these common grammar mistakes. Practice exercises also accompany each section so you can work on identifying and correcting these types of errors as you edit your work.

*Answers to the practice exercises are included at the end of this chapter.*

**Agreement**

In Standard American English, there are situations when words must agree in number (plural or singular). Subjects and verbs must agree in number as well as pronouns and their antecedents. Each of these agreement situations are explained in more detail in the earlier section, “Agreement (Pronoun-Antecedent; Subject-Verb),” pp. 254–260. Here are the basics.

Pronouns must agree in number with the words they refer to (nouns or pronouns).

The *mechanics* in the shop next door baked *their* famous oatmeal chocolate chip cookies for my birthday party.
Exercise A: Find and correct any errors in pronoun-antecedent agreement.

Joe’s attempt to learn to cook Mexican food (thinking they would impress his girlfriend) began in an interesting way. As he was flipping through the television stations one night, bored out of his mind, he stopped at the local PBS station to watch what seemed to be a documentary about Mexico City. Each of the locations that the camera panned by revealed their unique identity within the city, and in these locations was a chef whose food reflected these unique identities.

Present tense subjects and verbs must agree in number.

The mechanics bake cookies for us to celebrate any special occasion.

Harry, in particular, bakes sugar cookies that are out of this world!

Exercise B: Find and correct any errors in subject-verb agreement.

As the snow continues to fall outside, the sixth graders fidget in their seats. Each of the students are sure that the principal will interrupt the teacher over the intercom at any minute announcing an early dismissal. The teacher, trying to regain the attention of her students, begin a new lesson on Shakespeare. Neither her efforts to calm the class nor her attempt to close the blinds are helping the situation as stu-
students remain distracted. Just as she finishes handing out a reading list, the intercom buzzes and the voice of Ms. Smith, the principal, rings out. There is shouts of joy everywhere!

Run-on Sentences and Comma Splices
As your writing skill and confidence develops, you might begin combining sentences in interesting ways. Though this practice certainly helps you build skills, it also can cause punctuation issues. Each complete thought needs appropriate punctuation. You can end a sentence with a period, or you can combine two sentences with a semicolon or a comma with a conjunction (FANBOYS). The following are several examples of correct punctuation of combined sentences:

I wanted to leap in the car and drive home as fast as possible; however, I realized that I would hit rush hour traffic. I decided to stay in the office for a couple of hours instead of fighting the other commuters for a lane, and my plan was successful. I completed a project that I had been working on for days in that quiet office after hours.

Exercise C: Find and correct any run-on sentences or comma splices.

Sarah’s first day on the job began as a disaster. Walking into the front office, she slipped and fell on the mat at the doorway, she tumbled across the floor landing at the feet of her new boss. The entire lobby froze in disbelief at what just happened the receptionist then rushed over to ensure that she was okay. Her boss knelt down and offered her a hand. Instead of going straight back up to her office, Sarah’s boss
invited her to the break room for some tea and Sarah gladly accepted because she knew she would need some time to shake off the embarrassing event.

Unnecessary Commas and Missing Commas
Many writers have issues with commas. Some writers put in unnecessary commas; other writers leave out essential commas. The “Punctuation” section, pp. 263–273, indicates the guidelines for using commas correctly. This section describes situations when writers typically misuse commas.

Commas are not needed between two items joined by the word and.

Sally opened the refrigerator door, and nearly fell on the floor from amazement. Her roommate had stocked the shelves with food for the entire week!

Corrected version: Sally opened the refrigerator door and nearly fell on the floor from amazement. Her roommate had stocked the shelves with food for the entire week!

In the preceding sentence, the comma is not needed to join the verbs opened and fell. They are already joined by the conjunction and.

Commas are needed between two sentences joined by the word and:

Sally opened the refrigerator door and she nearly fell on the floor from amazement. Her roommate had stocked the shelves with food for the entire week!

Corrected version: Sally opened the refrigerator door, and she nearly fell on the floor from amaz-
ment. Her roommate had stocked the shelves with food for the entire week!

Because the subject *she* was added to the second clause, now there are two sentences. They need both a comma and a conjunction (*and*) to be combined.

Commases are needed to set off introductory elements and transitional elements in a sentence:

The grass in my yard is getting quite tall; however, the first cold spell of the season is approaching, so I think I’ll keep the lawn mower in the garage until next spring.

Corrected version: The grass in my yard is getting quite tall; however, the first cold spell of the season is approaching, so I think I’ll keep the lawn mower in the garage until next spring.

After the four-course *dinner* I was stuffed and quite lethargic.

Corrected version: After the four-course *dinner, I was* stuffed and quite lethargic.

Commases are not needed in the middle of a prepositional phrase. Many times, writers try to insert commas within a phrase that begins with *such as*. These commas are not necessary:

I bought many unnecessary items at the grocery store, such as, *cookies, ice cream, and nacho chips.*
Corrected version: I bought many unnecessary items at the grocery store, such as cookies, ice cream, and nacho chips.

Commas are not needed between the subject and verb of a sentence:

Since I was a little girl my dream has always been to coach little league baseball.

Corrected version: Since I was a little girl, my dream has always been to coach little league baseball.

Exercise D: Find and correct any misused commas or missing commas.

As Jerry walked into the front of the restaurant that comforting smell of greasy burgers and crispy French fries hit him. He knew this would be the perfect place for his first job. He loved eating fast-food meals, and often begged his mother to buy the family a round of value meals instead of preparing home-cooked items such as, meatloaf with mashed potatoes or chicken and rice. As he reveled in the sights and smells of the restaurant, the assistant manager rushed over to greet him. The manager was quite busy trying to attend to a string of full ordering lines, however he made time to talk with Jerry and make him feel welcomed.

Fragments (Subordinate Clauses)
Fragments are another issue that many students have. A fragment is an incomplete thought. Typically, students create fragmented sen-
sentences when they place a period after a subordinate clause (a clause that doesn’t create a complete thought) or when they place a period after a gerund phrase (a phrase beginning with an –ing verb).

The following are examples of fragments and corrections to those fragments:

Running down the slippery sidewalk in the middle of a snowstorm. Kara frantically waved down the bus.

Corrected version: Running down the slippery sidewalk in the middle of a snowstorm, Kara frantically waved down the bus.

Since my last doctor’s appointment. I have taken excellent care of myself by eating right and exercising.

Corrected version: Since my last doctor’s appointment, I have taken excellent care of myself by eating right and exercising.

Exercise E: Find and correct any sentence fragment errors.

Several years ago. My mother began taking pottery classes. She heard about the opportunity to learn basic wheel thrown pottery in our local Parks and Recreation Department summer catalog. She has always had an interest in pottery. Especially since her great grandfather made his living as a potter in the early twentieth century. With only a few shards of old pots saved from her grandfather’s legacy. My mother decided to take the stories and memories that her mother passed down to her for inspiration.
Exercise F: Find and correct any common grammatical errors.

After a week of frantic searching, Amanda realized that she must have left her coat at the local YMCA. She immediately got in the car and sped over there. As she approached the YMCA lost-and-found counter eager to retrieve the coat, a present that her Grandpa Steven had given her last Christmas. Each of the attendants were intently listening to their iPods and paying Amanda no attention. She waited for one of them to notice her then approached the young man at the closest counter. She waved her hand in front of his face To ensure he was paying attention.

“I can see you, ma’am,” the 16-year-old said in an apathetic tone.

“I'm sorry. I just need to pick up my coat I must have left it here last Tuesday after swim class.”

The young man sighed and slumped off his stool. He returned and plopped a box full of coats, hats, and gloves on the counter. Then plugged his earbuds back in and stared back off into space.

Taken aback, Amanda wondered if she had ever experienced such horrible customer service, then she spotted her jacket smashed in the corner of the box. Elated at finding the coat she pulled it out, and thanked the young man for his trouble. Each time that she returns to the YMCA, there are another group of bored looking teenagers leaning against the counter. Waiting for their shift to end.
Grammar Exercise Keys

Exercise A Answers: Pronoun-antecedent agreement

Joe’s attempt to learn to cook Mexican food (thinking it would impress his girlfriend) began in an interesting way. As he was flipping through the television stations one night, bored out of his mind, he stopped at the local PBS station to watch what seemed to be a documentary about Mexico City. Each of the locations that the camera panned by revealed its unique identity within the city. And in these locations was a chef whose food reflected these unique identities.

Exercise B Answers: Subject-verb agreement

As the snow continues to fall outside, the sixth graders fidget in their seats. Each of the students is sure that the principal will interrupt the teacher over the intercom at any minute announcing an early dismissal. The teacher, trying to regain the attention of her students, begins a new lesson on Shakespeare. Neither her efforts to calm the class nor her attempt to close the blinds is helping the situation as students remain distracted. Just as she finishes handing out a reading list, the intercom buzzes and the voice of Ms. Smith, the principal, rings out. There are shouts of joy everywhere!

Exercise C Answers: Run-on sentences and comma splices

Sarah’s first day on the job began as a disaster. Walking into the front office, she slipped and fell on
the mat at the doorway, and she tumbled across the
floor landing at the feet of her new boss. The entire
lobby froze in disbelief at what just happened. The
receptionist then rushed over to ensure that she
was okay. Her boss knelt down and offered her a
hand. Instead of going straight back up to her office,
Sarah’s boss invited her to the break room for some
tea. Sarah gladly accepted because she knew she
would need some time to shake off the embarrassing
event.

Exercise D Answers: Misused commas and missing commas

As Jerry walked into the front of the restaurant, that
comforting smell of greasy burgers and crispy French
fries hit him. He knew this would be the perfect place
for his first job. He loved eating fast-food meals and
often begged his mother to buy the family a round of
value meals instead of preparing home-cooked items
such as meatloaf with mashed potatoes or chicken
and rice. As he reveled in the sights and smells of
the restaurant, the assistant manager rushed over
to greet him. The manager was quite busy trying
to attend to a string of full ordering lines; however,
he made time to talk with Jerry and make him feel
welcomed.

Exercise E Answers: Sentence fragment errors

Several years ago, my mother began taking pottery
classes. She heard about the opportunity to learn
basic wheel thrown pottery in our local Parks and
Recreation Department summer catalog. She has
always had an interest in pottery especially since her great grandfather made his living as a potter in the early twentieth century. With only a few shards of old pots saved from her grandfather’s legacy, my mother decided to take the stories and memories that her mother passed down to her for inspiration.

**Exercise F Answers: Common grammatical errors**

After a week of frantic searching, Amanda realized that she must have left her coat at the local YMCA. She immediately got in the car and sped over there. As she approached the YMCA lost-and-found counter, she was eager to retrieve the coat, a present that her Grandpa Steven had given her last Christmas. All of the attendants were intently listening to their iPods and paying Amanda no attention. She waited for one of them to notice her and then approached the young man at the closest counter. She waved her hand in front of his face to ensure he was paying attention.

“I can see you, ma’am,” the 16-year-old said in an apathetic tone.

“I’m sorry. I just need to pick up my coat. I must have left it here last Tuesday after swim class.”

The young man sighed and slumped off his stool. He returned and plopped a box full of coats, hats, and gloves on the counter and then plugged his earbuds back in and stared off into space.
Taken aback, Amanda wondered if she had ever experienced such horrible customer service. Then she spotted her jacket smashed in the corner of the box. Elated at finding the coat, she pulled it out and thanked the young man for his trouble. Each time that she returns to the YMCA, there is another group of bored-looking teenagers leaning against the counter and waiting for their shift to end.
We are all familiar with grading. Almost every class we have attended has some form of grading attached to it. Every assignment is, for the most part, graded by our instructor. This can include all tests or quizzes, term papers, projects, discussion posts, seminar participation, and even homework. These assignments show our instructor what we have learned about a subject or topic. Therefore, we are assessed on our performance or ability to understand and apply the information we have been taught.

However, grading implies much more. Grades certainly evaluate how well a student progresses in a class or on a particular assignment. They also assess learning and indicate how well a student meets an assignment’s criteria. Grades can also be looked at as motivators that encourage students to strive for a better understanding and practice of a course’s learning objectives.

Most assignments and projects require a grade, and it is, therefore, necessary to provide students with a clear set of guidelines so they will know how that grade is derived. All graded assignments in a class, when added together, provide the student with an overall grade for the course, so it is important to understand how each assignment is weighted and what criteria are being measured.
RUBRICS

Rubrics are the written guidelines that measure degrees of quality in a particular assignment. They are a clearly outlined set of expectations, and they can be as varied as the assignments they assess. Usually, instructors post rubrics for each graded class assignment in the syllabus at the start of the term. Students can easily see what is expected for each assignment, which outcomes the instructor will assess, and how much each criterion is worth.

There are generally three types of rubrics: holistic, analytic, and hybrid.

Holistic rubrics evaluate the assignment as a whole. They do not assign specific point values to particular criteria. Many instructors will use this type of rubric to make sure the student understands the larger elements of an assignment. These rubrics allow the instructor to give a general overview reaction to the assignment. They tend to focus on more general concepts so the student will not feel penalized by small errors.

Analytic rubrics assign specific points for each main criteria of the assignment. The number of points the assignment earned for each criterion determines the grade. It could be any number of points depending on the particular assignment. For example, a project worth 200 points might have 50 points allocated for each of four main criteria—organization, content, writing skills, and formatting. When the points are added together, the final grade would reflect how well the student met each criterion. Analytic rubrics help identify specific strengths and weaknesses of each student’s performance. The students can clearly see which areas they need to work on and which they might have mastered. Therefore, analytic rubrics give the students specific information on how to improve. They also give benchmarks so student improvement can be demonstrated over time.
Hybrid rubrics look like holistic rubrics, but with broader-based criteria. They also have point assignments, so they are used analytically. Many of the rubrics used by Kaplan University professors are hybrids.

Tables 18.1, 18.2, and 18.3 show some samples of the kinds of rubrics your class syllabus may contain.

**Table 18.1 HOLISTIC RUBRIC**

**UNIT 1 EXERCISE RUBRIC: 40 TOTAL POINTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Credit (40 Points)</th>
<th>Exercise includes screen shots for each of the four assigned areas.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exercise includes paragraphs discussing goals and/or concerns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Goals and concerns are written in complete sentences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minimal spelling, grammar, and mechanical errors exist.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partial Credit (Point Values Vary)</th>
<th>Exercise is missing some screen shots.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exercise is missing some goals or concerns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grammar, spelling, and mechanical errors are more than minimal.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No Credit (0 Points)</th>
<th>Exercise is not turned in.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exercise does not include screen shots or goals/concerns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grammatical errors make it impossible to understand the points of the author.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Project is turned in late, but before the end of Unit 2: –20%
- Project is turned in late, but before the end of Unit 3: –30%
- Project is turned in after Unit 3: 0.
### Table 18.2 ANALYTIC RUBRIC

#### DISCUSSION BOARD RUBRIC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeliness</th>
<th>6 points</th>
<th>Original response and peer responses made on time.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 points</td>
<td>Original response and one peer response posted on time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 points</td>
<td>Original response posted on time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 point</td>
<td>Original response not posted on time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td>No responses were made.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality of Original Response</th>
<th>6 points</th>
<th>Information clearly relates to the main topic. Original response addresses all parts of the original question and provides several supporting details or examples.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 points</td>
<td>Information clearly relates to the main topic. Original response addresses all parts of the original question and provides one to two supporting details or examples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 points</td>
<td>Information clearly relates to the main topic. Original response addresses most parts of the original question. No details and/or examples are given.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 point</td>
<td>Information has little or nothing to do with the main topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td>Original response was not made.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality of Peer Response</th>
<th>6 points</th>
<th>Minimum of two peer responses meets length requirements and contributes to the quality and advancement of the discussion.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 points</td>
<td>Minimum of two peer responses does not meet length requirements, but contributes to the quality and advancement of the discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 points</td>
<td>Only one peer post is made that meets length requirements and contributes to the quality and advancement of the discussion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Table 18.2 ANALYTIC RUBRIC [continued]**

**DISCUSSION BOARD RUBRIC**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality of Peer Response (cont.)</th>
<th>1 point</th>
<th>Peer posts, regardless of number, do not contribute to the quality or advance the discussion.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td>Peer posts were not made.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount of Information</th>
<th>6 points</th>
<th>Original response meets length requirement.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 points</td>
<td>Original response falls slightly short of length requirement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 points</td>
<td>Original response does not meet length requirement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 point</td>
<td>Amount of information seriously short of length requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td>Original response was not made.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mechanics</th>
<th>6 points</th>
<th>Responses are clearly written. No grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors exist. If applicable, references or resources used are cited using APA format.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 points</td>
<td>Responses are clearly written. Almost no grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors exist. If applicable, attempt is made at using APA format for any references or resources used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 points</td>
<td>Responses are clearly written. There are a few grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors. If applicable, attempt is made at using APA format for any references or resources used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 point</td>
<td>Response is not clearly written. Many grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors exist. If applicable, references were not included.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td>Responses were not made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td>Content</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Includes a strong thesis statement, introduction, and conclusion. Shows original thought. Supports arguments well (no logical flaws; outside sources used to support arguments). Develops main points clearly. Skillfully refutes counterarguments and does not ignore data contradicting its claim. Refers to at least five outside sources in the text and references page, three of which are academic sources. Meets page requirements. Includes abstract, title page, and references page.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Should be very well ordered. Internally, each section must have a strong internal organization. Transitions found between and within sections must be clear and effective.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing Style</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appropriate to the assignment, fresh (interesting to read), accurate (no far-fetched, unsupported comments), precise (say what you mean), and concise (not wordy).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mechanics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Project is free of serious errors; grammar, punctuation, and spelling help to clarify the meaning by following accepted conventions. Citations follow APA guidelines.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Includes a good thesis statement, introduction, and conclusion that need some revision. Shows original thought. Supports most arguments concretely (no logical flaws; outside sources supporting most claims). Develops the main points clearly. Refutes counterarguments and does not ignore data contradicting its claim, though the refutation might need tightening and additional support. Refers to a minimum of five outside sources both in text and in the references page, two of which are academic sources. Less than a page short of the requirement.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 18.3 HYBRID RUBRIC [continued]

**FINAL PROJECT RUBRIC: 250 TOTAL POINTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **B** 200–224 pts (cont.) | **Organization** Should be well ordered. Internally, each section must have a good internal organization. Transitions found between and within sections are mostly clear and effective.  
**Writing Style** Should generally be appropriate to the assignment, accurate (no far-fetched, unsupported comments), precise (say what you mean), and concise (not wordy).  
**Mechanics** Contains some generally minor grammatical and punctuation errors. Few misspellings. Citations generally follow APA guidelines (perhaps one or two minor errors). |
| **C** 175–199 pts | **Content** Includes a thesis statement that needs revision. The introduction and conclusion do not set up or close the paper very effectively. Shows too little original thought. Main points are adequately defined in only some areas of the paper; points might be over emphasized or repeated. Some arguments are supported with outside research, but others might not be. Relies too heavily on personal experience or one or two sources. Some obvious counterarguments are ignored or not well refuted. The paper is largely informative with little persuasive claim. Contains references to three to four outside sources, only one of which is academic. One to two pages short of the requirement. Does not include one of the following: title page, abstract, reference page.  
**Organization** The organization has a few problems. Sections lack transitions, and several sentences may be monotonous or confusing. The overall structure of the assignment is not effective.  
**Writing Style** Appropriate in places, but elsewhere language is vague and/or inappropriate.  
**Mechanics** Numerous grammatical and punctuation errors exist. Misspellings are more frequent, but they are the sort spell-checkers do not catch, such as “effect/affect.” An attempt at APA citation was made, but there are multiple errors larger than a misplaced period. |
### Table 18.3 Hybrid Rubric [continued]

#### FINAL PROJECT RUBRIC: 250 TOTAL POINTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Writing Style</th>
<th>Mechanics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>150–174 pts</td>
<td>The thesis statement identifies a topic but no claim and needs major revision. The introduction or conclusion is poorly developed. The essay’s main points are developed inconsistently, or repetitiously. Many obvious counterarguments are ignored and go unrefuted. Relies too heavily on personal experience. The paper does not meet many of the source requirements. There are too few in-text citations or one or two sources are relied on exclusively; the references page might be missing. The paper is largely informative with little persuasive claim. Three or more pages short of the requirement. Is missing two of the following: abstract, reference page, title page.</td>
<td>The organization has multiple problems. Most sections lack transitions, and sentences are often monotonous or incomprehensible. The overall structure of the assignment is not effective.</td>
<td>Inappropriate and vague writing interferes with the development and clarity of the main points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0–149 pts</td>
<td>It meets no or few of the assignment’s guidelines. The components outlined for a D paper are not met. It might be plagiarized.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Many serious and minor grammar or punctuation errors; frequent misspellings, including those that should have been caught by the spell-checker. Citation meets few APA guidelines.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Project may not be turned in late.*
How Instructors Use These Rubrics
Instructors use rubrics to assign grades for seminar, discussion posts, some exercises, and all projects. The types of rubrics vary with each class, but for the most part, they should look something like the previous samples. Instructors read an assignment and then compare it with the rubric for evaluation.

For holistic rubrics, the instructor gets an overall sense of the student’s performance on the assignment and then assigns the appropriate grade, usually A, B, C, and so forth. They may also use pluses and minuses with those grades.

For analytic rubrics, the instructor assigns specific points for each criterion of the rubric and then totals them to arrive at a final grade, usually in points. The points correspond to a letter grade. For example, a seminar valued at 10 points might have earned 8.5 points in total, which would correspond to a B.

For hybrid rubrics, the instructor might indicate performance by highlighting the criteria that the student met in each analytic category. Table 18.4 shows a sample of this.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Writing Style</th>
<th>Mechanics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>225–250 pts</td>
<td>Includes a strong thesis statement, introduction, and conclusion. Shows original thought. Supports arguments well (no logical flaws; outside sources used to support arguments). Develops main points clearly. Skillfully refutes counterarguments and does not ignore data contradicting its claim. Refers to at least five outside sources in the text and references page, three of which are academic sources. Meets page requirements. Includes abstract, title page, and references page.</td>
<td>Should be very well ordered. Internally, each section must have a strong internal organization. Transitions found between and within sections must be clear and effective.</td>
<td>Appropriate to the assignment, fresh (interesting to read), accurate (no far-fetched, unsupported comments), precise (say what you mean), and concise (not wordy).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>200–224 pts</td>
<td>Includes a good thesis statement, introduction, and conclusion that need some revision. Shows original thought. Supports most arguments concretely (no logical flaws; outside sources supporting most claims). Develops the main points clearly. Refutes counterarguments and does not ignore data contradicting its claim, though the refutation might need tightening and additional support. Refers to a minimum of five outside sources both in text and in the references page, two of which are academic sources. Less than a page short of the requirement.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 18.4 FINAL PROJECT RUBRIC [continued]

**FINAL PROJECT RUBRIC: 100 TOTAL POINTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **B** | 200–224 pts (cont.) | **Organization**

Should be well ordered. Internally, each section must have a good internal organization. Transitions found between and within sections are mostly clear and effective.

**Writing Style**

Should generally be appropriate to the assignment, accurate (no far-fetched, unsupported comments), precise (say what you mean), and concise (not wordy).

**Mechanics**

Contains some generally minor grammatical and punctuation errors. Few misspellings. Citations generally follow APA guidelines (perhaps one or two minor errors).

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **C** | 175–199 pts | **Content**

Includes a thesis statement that needs revision. The introduction and conclusion do not set up or close the paper very effectively. Shows too little original thought. Main points are adequately defined in only some areas of the paper; points might be over emphasized or repeated. Some arguments are supported with outside research, but others might not be. Relies too heavily on personal experience or one or two sources. Some obvious counterarguments are ignored or not well refuted. The paper is largely informative with little persuasive claim. Contains references to three to four outside sources, only one of which is academic. One to two pages short of the requirement. Does not include one of the following: title page, abstract, reference page.

**Organization**

The organization has a few problems. Sections lack transitions, and several sentences may be monotonous or confusing. The overall structure of the assignment is not effective.

**Writing Style**

Appropriate in places, but elsewhere language is vague and/or inappropriate.

**Mechanics**

Numerous grammatical and punctuation errors exist. Misspellings are more frequent, but they are the sort spell-checkers do not catch, such as “effect/affect.” An attempt at APA citation was made, but there are multiple errors larger than a misplaced period.

[continued]
### Table 18.4 FINAL PROJECT RUBRIC [continued]

#### FINAL PROJECT RUBRIC: 100 TOTAL POINTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Writing Style</th>
<th>Mechanics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>D</strong></td>
<td>150–174 pts</td>
<td>The thesis statement identifies a topic but no claim and needs major revision. The introduction or conclusion is poorly developed. The essay’s main points are developed inconsistently, or repetitiously. Many obvious counterarguments are ignored and go unrefuted. Relies too heavily on personal experience. The paper does not meet many of the source requirements. There are too few in-text citations or one or two sources are relied on exclusively; the references page might be missing. The paper is largely informative with little persuasive claim. Three or more pages short of the requirement. Is missing two of the following: abstract, reference page, title page.</td>
<td>The organization has multiple problems. Most sections lack transitions, and sentences are often monotonous or incomprehensible. The overall structure of the assignment is not effective.</td>
<td>Inappropriate and vague writing interferes with the development and clarity of the main points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>F</strong></td>
<td>0–149 pts</td>
<td>It meets no or few of the assignment’s guidelines. The components outlined for a D paper are not met. It might be plagiarized.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Project may not be turned in late.*
This paper is clearly a $B$ paper. The exact points applied would equal the sum of the four main criteria: $A$ for Content; $B$ for each of the remaining three criteria: Organization, Writing Style, and Mechanics. Assigning points for each criterion would then enable the instructor to add the points together and come up with a final grade. In this case, the student might have earned 24 points for Content, 21 for Organization, 21 for Writing Style, and 21 for Mechanics for a total of 87. That is one way to calculate a hybrid rubric grade.

**Which Rubrics Are Better to Use?**

Many students feel that holistic rubrics are too vague and do not provide enough specific detail as to why a paper received a certain grade. On the other hand, other students like holistic rubrics because they feel they will not be penalized for small errors in writing, for example. The type of assignment generally dictates what kind of rubric would be best. A peer review that needs to fulfill three or four main objectives, with the main emphasis on answering specific questions about the peer paper, might be better evaluated holistically. Did the student do the peer review and answer all the questions? If so, that student might earn full points for that particular assignment.

Analytic rubrics might be best used in complex research paper assignments where the student needs to demonstrate several learning objectives like content, organization, APA formatting, writing style, and mechanical and grammatical correctness. Then, each criterion would earn a certain number of points. When added together, the paper receives a specific number of total points, which equals a particular letter or number grade. Scoring tends to be more consistent. Assignments using these types of rubrics usually take more time to grade.

Hybrid rubrics offer the advantages of both forms of rubrics. They show clearly how the assignment addresses each of the criteria, but also allow for an overall rating of the assignment’s success.
How Students Can Use Rubrics

Students can easily understand how their grades were determined by following the rubrics. They can also see the criteria upon which the paper is graded and use those as a guide. To successfully meet all criteria would mean that the assignment earns a significantly high grade. Hence, students should always review the rubrics before completing and submitting an assignment.

Student Grading Expectations

Many students are under the assumption that if they complete all the work for a course, they should be guaranteed an A. This is actually a false assumption and needs to be explained. An A implies perfect or excellent, where there is little room for improvement. A B corresponds to good work, which meets the assignment criteria, but has potential for improvement in a few areas. A C grade is earned when several criteria were met, but there was need for improvement in several areas. See the following list for a more detailed description of each grade.

Great learning comes with great effort, and so students should strive to perform above and beyond the average to earn a grade of B or A. Students who fall short of the course objectives might earn lower than a C. Students who miss assignments, intentionally or unintentionally, might also be at risk for lower grades.

Grades are generally assigned as follows:

- **A: Excellent**—Meets and exceeds all course objectives and assignment criteria. There is little room for improvement.
- **B: Good**—Meets all course assignment criteria, and has demonstrated good understanding of most course objectives. There is room for further improvement in some areas.
- **C: Satisfactory**—Meets most assignment criteria, but might need more work on several course objectives.
- **D: Unsatisfactory**—Does not meet several assignment requirements and needs to demonstrate better understanding of course objectives.
● **F: Failure**—Lacks several course assignments and/or might have not met most assignment criteria. An F can also be the result of detected plagiarism.

It is also important to understand that universities require that students take certain courses because the skill sets they can provide allow the students to become more successful in their field of study. Without those skills, students might not be as effective in their chosen professions. Basic writing and math courses generally fall into the “required” course area. Everyone needs to learn to write more effectively and think more critically, skills that these required basics provide. Some students might find these courses more difficult because they are not specific to their chosen field specifically, yet are still necessary for greater achievement and success in general.

Another consideration is turnaround time for grading. Most instructors are teaching other courses and will return projects and assignments in a reasonable time frame. It is not feasible to expect an immediate response, although university policies usually require between five and seven days for most graded work. Assignments submitted after the due date may incur point deductions and lower grades. Late policies are always explained in the syllabus.

Overall, students really need to develop their own learning goals and expectations for a course. Working for an A is a lofty goal, but remember to consider all that is required to achieve that. Your instructor will follow the rubrics for grading your work, so you can clearly see how you can demonstrate improvement in the course objectives and skills for the course.

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**STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS**

**Learning Does Not Always Equal an A**

Learning is an intrinsic process. It cannot always be computed into a number or letter grade. It’s perfectly possible to meet certain expectations on the surface, but not actually internalize information. Internalization is what every student should aim for. When you start a course, read the course
concepts and ask your instructor if you have questions about your understanding of what you should be able to do when you complete the course. As you write assignments, use the rubrics to help you identify what skills are being emphasized. Learning is not about earning an A. It's perfectly possible to earn a C in a course and yet walk away having learned a world of information you did not know previously.

**An Instructor’s View of Grading**

I truly hope all my students will at least meet the learning objectives of the course. If they successfully complete all assignments on time and post the required number of responses to peers as required, there is no reason they cannot pass the course.

It is unreasonable, however, for a student to expect a perfect grade just for submitting an assignment. The rubrics will clearly map out the kind of responses that are necessary to earn an appropriate grade. To strive for an A is wonderful, but sometimes it takes more time and practice for students to fully understand and apply certain concepts. Trying is good (and necessary), but perfection takes time and dedication.

This is not to say that students cannot earn an A if they have mastered the skills of the course objectives. Quite the contrary; I have had students who demonstrated with great proficiency the ability to meet the A standards by working hard, applying what they learned, and submitting all assignments within the allotted time frame.

I provide a good deal of feedback along the way, so students can fully understand what they need to do to earn a higher grade. Communication is key. If a student does not understand something, it is the student’s responsibility to ask for clarification. Lastly, it is very important that the student is able to synthesize the feedback I provide and apply it to all future work. After all, it is the purpose of education to empower students to apply what they learned and use it in their everyday lives.