Lesson 19: Punctuation, Capitalization, and Spelling

You probably do not notice capitalization or punctuation unless they are incorrect. That is because capitalization and punctuation are road signs for the reader. They are there to direct your way through reading. The same is true of spelling. Rarely do you say to yourself, “Well, that was a very nicely spelled book.” But when words are misspelled, you notice—and you can become confused about meaning.

This lesson will help you correctly capitalize, punctuate, and spell in your writing.

Punctuation

Little things mean a lot in your writing little things like punctuation marks which help your reader understand your writing without little marks such as periods commas quotation marks and other punctuation we wouldn’t know when to start or stop reading or know when someone is speaking or well you get the picture.

The purpose of punctuation is to make the meaning of your sentences as clear as possible to the reader. Punctuation also tells your reader how the sentence should sound. By using exclamation marks, quotation marks, periods, commas, and other punctuation, you communicate signals such as excitement, dialogue, and pauses.

Commas

**TIP 1: Use commas after items in a series, except for the last item.**

If you list items one after another (called a series), you need a comma after each item in the series except for very last item.

- Wendy has black belts in karate, judo, and jiu-jitsu.
- We went bowling, walked home, had dinner, and watched a movie.

**TIP 2: Use commas to separate items in dates and addresses.**

Use commas in dates and addresses, as in the following examples:

- George was born on October 1, 1999, in Cleveland, Ohio.
- Our old address was 1717 Hamilton Road, St. Louis, Missouri.
TIP 3: Use a comma after the salutation or closing of a friendly letter.

Dear Madison,       Yours truly,

TIP 4: Use commas to set off names used in direct address.

Lizzie, you’re my best friend.  
If I were you, Henry, I’d enter that contest.

TIP 5: Use a comma after an introductory phrase.

A short phrase that introduces the main idea of the sentence is called an introductory phrase. An introductory phrase is followed by a comma.

Before leaving, finish your breakfast.
To get the highest possible score on the test, I study each question before answering.

TIP 6: Use a comma before the conjunction in a compound sentence and in certain complex sentences.

Sometimes two simple sentences are connected by a conjunction. Use a comma before the conjunction.

Jo’s cat can do a somersault in the air, and her dog can do a back flip into the pool.

Clauses are also sometimes connected by a conjunction, such as in a complex sentence.

When the complete thought comes first in a complex sentence, no comma is needed.

Cheryl had to come inside when the streetlights came on.  
(complete thought)  (incomplete thought)

Phrases and Clauses

You’ve probably heard the words phrase and clause, but do you know the difference between them?

A phrase is a group of words that contains neither a subject nor a verb. However, it may contain a verbal form, such as an infinitive, a participle, or a gerund.

After practicing, they went out for ice cream.

A clause contains a subject and a verb. Some clauses can stand alone as a sentence (independent) and some cannot (dependent).

After the team practiced, they went out for ice cream.
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CCS: L.6.2a

However, use a comma when the incomplete thought comes first in a complex sentence.

When the streetlights came on, Cheryl had to come inside.

(incomplete thought) (complete thought)

TIP 7: Use commas to set off descriptive phrases and to set off parenthetical expressions.

Descriptive phrases are groups of words that describe nouns or pronouns. These phrases are set off by commas.

The owner of Sam’s Scooters, the guy with red hair, drives a monster truck.

The Arts and Science Center for Southeast Arkansas, which was founded in 1968, displays paintings by many local artists.

Parenthetical expressions are words or phrases that interrupt a sentence. They are usually not needed to understand the sentence. Some common expressions are believe me, it seems to me, to tell the truth, and as a matter of fact.

Believe me, Gus is the biggest goldfish in the pond.

That movie, if you ask me, should be shown to every sixth-grade student.

Dashes and Parentheses

TIP 8: Use a dash to show a break in a sentence or a change of speech or thought.

You can use dashes to set off information that is not critical to the understanding of the sentence.

Alexis—she is a poet—came down with a bad case of the flu.

My bike—if you haven’t noticed—has a very flat tire.

TIP 9: Use parentheses to provide extra information that is not essential for the meaning of the sentence.

Parentheses can be used around words to provide more information.

Some bakers prefer to use lard (pork fat) when they make biscuits because of the texture and flavor.

Please refer to the chart (figure 4) to see the differences between attendance in the sixth and seventh grades.
Practice Activity 1

Directions: Choose the correct answer.

1. Which sentence below is written correctly?
   A. Mail that letter to 1012 Happy, Avenue Farmington Arkansas.
   B. Mail that letter to 1012 Happy Avenue Farmington, Arkansas.
   C. Mail that letter to 1012, Happy Avenue Farmington Arkansas.
   D. Mail that letter to 1012 Happy Avenue, Farmington, Arkansas.

2. Which sentence below is written correctly?
   A. Carmen are you, ready to go to the mall?
   B. Carmen, are you ready to go to the mall?
   C. Carmen are you ready, to go to the mall?
   D. Carmen, are you ready, to go to the mall?

3. Which sentence below is written correctly?
   A. Lola’s four rabbits are named Winkin Blinkin, Nod and Bruiser.
   B. Lola’s four rabbits are named Winkin, Blinkin Nod and Bruiser.
   C. Lola’s four rabbits are named Winkin, Blinkin, Nod and Bruiser.
   D. Lola’s four rabbits are named Winkin, Blinkin, Nod, and Bruiser.

Directions: Read the following paragraph. Commas, dashes, and parentheses have been omitted. Insert the proper punctuation where needed.

By taking care of the environment in your community you can have a positive influence on the rest of the natural world. First you might want to sit down and list ways in which you and your family waste certain resources. That way you’ll know which problems to address first. If you and your family throw away a lot of newspapers and cans consider taking part in a recycling program most communities have them. If you and your friends are driven to school separately talk to your parents about carpooling. If you live near your school try walking during nice weather. You’ll be surprised and pleased how easy it is to prevent pollution.
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**Capitalization**

WHAT difference do CAPS really make in WriTing? IT SEEMS to me that it’s Just one More Thing TO ThinK about. Who Cares IF I lower case words such as lima, ohio, english, or zanzibar?

You get the picture. Writing that ignores the rules for capitalization is not pretty, nor is it easy to read. Here’s a review of the most important capitalization rules.

**TIP 10: Capitalize the first word of every sentence.**

Capitalize the first letter of the first word of every new sentence.

You probably already knew this rule.

Also, be sure to capitalize the first word of quotations used in sentences, except for a quoted phrase.

Corey said, “Use a capital letter when you quote me on this.”

BUT

Amber claimed that the movie was “out of this world.”

**TIP 11: Capitalize proper nouns.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proper Nouns</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cities, counties, states, countries, and geographical features</td>
<td>Seattle, Bergen County, Kansas, France,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yellowstone River, Mediterranean Sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>days, months, holidays (not seasons)</td>
<td>Monday, November, Veterans Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nationalities, references to continents and their people and</td>
<td>Spanish, Dutch, North American, Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>names, family relationships with names, titles used as names</td>
<td>J.K. Rowling, Uncle Edwin, Grandma Anderson, Dr. Collins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>titles of magazines, newspapers, books, movies, TV shows,</td>
<td>Highlights, The Daily News, Curious George,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>songs</td>
<td>Lizzy McGuire, “Happy Birthday”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Unit 3 – Language

Practice Activity 2

Directions: Rewrite the following sentences with the correct capitalization.

1. aunt juanita and uncle ron’s anniversary is june 16, which falls on father’s day this spring.

2. shelly thinks that saved by the bell was the best television show ever. she watches the reruns over and over on nickelodeon.

3. my french teacher, mr. rodriguez, has taught school in sweden, venezuela, and japan.

4. My grandmother and brother jason are going to visit sergeant wallace at the military academy in the fall.

5. I read in national geographic that the geyser old faithful was named that because it erupts once every ninety minutes or so.
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CCS: L.6.2b

Spelling

Certain words just seem to cause writers all sorts of problems. Some words sound the same as other words, but they don’t look the same and they don’t have the same meaning. Word processing spell-checkers won’t catch them, but sharp-eyed readers will. They’re some of the most frustrating words in English.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Some Commonly Confused Words</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ate, eight</td>
<td>through, threw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beat, beet</td>
<td>there, they’re, their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rain, reign, rein</td>
<td>right, write, rite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cent, scent, sent</td>
<td>or, oar, ore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to, two, too</td>
<td>where, wear, ware</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The words in the chart are called homonyms. They sound the same as other words, but have different meanings and are spelled differently. It is sometimes difficult to decide which word you should use in a sentence. It is easy when you are speaking—these words sound the same! However, when you sit down to write, you may become confused.

Look at this short poem. It has been run through a computer spell-check program, and still, most of the words are misspelled because the poem uses words like those listed in the chart.

from

Candidate for a Pullet Surprise

by Jerrold Zar

I have a spelling checker,
It came with my PC.
It plane lee marks four my revue
Miss steaks aye can knot sea.

TIP 12: Use your dictionary.

If you don’t know which spelling of a word to choose, look it up in a dictionary. If the definition fits your meaning, use the word. If not, try a different spelling.

There’s no magic trick for remembering the difference between great and grate, heal and heel, berry and bury, or any of the other groups of words. The more you come across them in your reading, the easier it will be to remember them.
Practice Activity 3

Directions: The following sentences have at least two commonly confused words in parentheses. Consult a dictionary if you are unsure which word is correct. Circle the word or words that best complete(s) each sentence.

1. I saw Kathy grocery shopping (inn / in) the frozen foods (aisle / isle).
2. A huge (bare / bear) chased the hunters up into a tree.
3. Bonnie's favorite (desert / dessert) is chocolate ice cream with caramel sauce.
4. The roller coaster ride was five minutes of (sheer / shear) terror.
5. Sara put her dog, Roscoe, on a healthy diet (to / too) help him (loose / lose) (weight / wait).
6. The farmer stored his corn in a grain (bin / been) made out of (metal / medal).
7. When I slipped on a banana (peel / peal), I tore a (seem / seam) in my jeans.
8. (Whose / Who's) bike is blocking the sidewalk? (Its / It's) in everyone's way.
9. Because Dad's pickup would not start, he called a (toe / tow) truck.
10. It is not polite to (stair / stare) at people.
11. I hope we don't (lose / loose) the game to Springfield this afternoon.
12. Your results on this exam will (affect / effect) your overall grade.
13. I can (where / wear / were / we're) this outfit to the restaurant (where / wear / were / we're) we will celebrate my mom's birthday.
14. I (cent / scent / sent) twenty different (cents / scents / sents) to the lab to be tested as a new perfume.
15. I look forward to hearing your (insight / incite) on our problem.
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Practice Activity 4

Directions: Choose the sentence that contains an incorrect usage of a commonly confused word.

1. A. It’s not polite to stare at people.
   B. The restaurant charges extra if people waste food.
   C. The doctors worked through the night to save the patient.
   D. The old man walked so far that he wore out the souls of his shoes.

2. A. You must be getting the flu; you look very pale.
   B. Mice are the natural prey for many kinds of snakes.
   C. My brother’s favorite thing to eat is a big, juicy stake.
   D. The shortest distance between two points is a straight line.

3. A. The Mikado family has two sons and two daughters.
   B. We're all out of apples, but there are some pears left.
   C. Scottie tried to steal the ball and score the winning basket.
   D. Mrs. Moreno uses tax to put artwork and papers on her bulletin board.

4. A. The some of the two numbers equals seventy-six.
   B. Uncle Nick waved goodbye from the window of the airplane.
   C. The gentle breezes pushed the little boat back and forth near the dock.
   D. My sister is always telling me how hard it is to run when she is wearing high heels.

Directions: Choose the sentence that contains the correct spelling of a commonly confused word.

5. A. I didn't have enough money for bus fare.
   B. The racers will be running on a two-mile coarse.
   C. That rose is the most beautiful flour I have ever seen.
   D. Everyone is talking about Mia’s hair because she died it green.

6. A. It was just a minor traffic accident.
   B. Their are 22 students in my art class.
   C. Roland got many nice birthday presence.
   D. The magazines in the doctor’s weighting room are very old.

Lesson Practice begins on the following page.