

This is a brief summary of Writing Essentials Paige Wilson, Teresa Ferster Glazier - Thomson Heinle (2003) - ISBN 1413000002 to help students with their compositions.

Writing Essentials for Intermediate and Upper-intermediate

Most common errors and some advice

Contractions

Do not use contractions for formal texts.

Use contractions for informal or colloquial texts.

Doubling of a final consonant in compounds

Follow this rule:

- 1- The word ends in a single consonant
- 2- Which is preceded by a single vowel
- 3- And the accent is on the last syllable

Begin -----} beginner

Stop -----} stopped

Filter -----} filtered (the stress is on the first syllable)

Agreement or concordance

S+V

Some of the pie is gone

Some of the cookies are gone

Pronoun agreement

Each classroom has its own chalkboard

Both classrooms have their own chalkboards

Pronoun reference

Calvin told his father that he needed a haircut

Who needed a haircut?

Rewrite and explain more if necessary.

Calvin noticed his father needed a haircut, and he told his father to get it (a haircut)

Sentence patterns

S+V+Obj+Complements. (Time, place, etc.) is the most common pattern in English. Try to make sentences following it.

Avoiding shifts in time

If you begin writing an essay, letter, or story in the present, do not change to the past without a reason. Be consistent.

Changes of present/past/future must be marked by punctuation. The example below is a good example of shifts in time:

To Kill a Mockingbird is Harper Lee's most famous work and it received the Pullitzer prize. It turned 40 years old in 2000. It will always remain one of the most moving novels in American Literature.

Misplaced modifiers

Look at this example:

Swinging from tree to tree, we watched the monkey, at the zoo ----- **WRONG**

Who was swinging? "we?", "the monkeys?", "The zoo?"

Two possibilities here:

We watched the monkeys, swinging from tree to tree, at the zoo.

Or even,

At the zoo, we watched the monkeys, swinging from tree to tree

Awkward phrasing

Look at this example:

There should be great efforts in terms of the communication between teachers and their students.

The sentence above is too long to say something really short...

Teachers and their students must communicate.

When writing in English do not try to make complicated sentences. Communicate clear ideas. This leads to the concept of **Wordiness**. This is to say, write concise sentences and words. Some examples:

Instead of (WRONG)

Better

In the month of August -----

In August

At this point of time -----

Presently or Nowadays

At a later date -----

Later

Follow parallel structure

Phrases and sentences should follow a parallel structure.

Instead of

*My favourite films are comic,
romantic or the one about outer space*

Or

Better

*My favourite film categories are comedies,
love stories, and sci-fi films.*

*I like films that make me laugh, that make
me cry and that make me think.*

I like to hike, to ski and going sailing

I like hiking, sailing, and skiing

RUN ON sentences

These are sentences without the proper punctuation. To avoid doing run-on sentences we need to study how *clauses work in the sentence*. A *clause* is a group of words having at least a Subject + Verb pattern

There are two types of clauses: Dependent and Independent clauses.

Dependent clauses

We can say:

We ate dinner together.

But if we use a conjunction at the beginning:

After }
As } *we ate dinner together, ... (we went to the evening seminar)*
Before }

We will need something else afterwards like the other sentence between (). The latter is an independent clause.

When a dependent clause comes first is followed by a comma, like in the example above.

If the main clause is first, the dependent clause will not need a comma.

Eg.

We went to the evening seminar after we ate dinner together.

Independent clauses

They normally carry out different ideas.

I love the sound of piano.

Chopin is one of my favourite composers.

You can make two sentences using a stop, a semicolon and/or a connector.

I love the sound of piano.(;) Therefore, Chopin is one of my favourite composers.

If the connector is short, such as *then* or *thus*, the comma is not needed.

Use a comma before one of the words called *fanboys* (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*)

*I love the sound of piano, **so** Chopin is one of my favourites.*

Make one sentence dependent with a conjunction:

Chopin is one of my favourites because I love the sound of piano.

Punctuation and capital letters

Period
Stop
Full stop

.

The students elected Mr. Daniels to represent the class.

Question mark

?

After a direct question, not
an indirect one such as:
I wonder if we will be able to use our notes

Exclamation

!

Strong emotion in dialogues or informal correspondence
I can't believe I did so well in my first exam!

Semicolon

;

Between independent clauses in a sentence unless joined by *fanboys* words.
My mother co-signed for a loan; now I have my own car.

Colon

:

Complete statement that introduces a name, list, quotation, or explanation.
These are the last Employees of the Month: Lee Jones, Miriam Diaz, Pat Ting, and Laura Howard.

Dashes

—

To isolate inserted information, abrupt change or thought.
Lee Jones —March's Employee of the Month— received his own special parking space.

Comma rules

1. Put a comma before the words *fanboys* when they connect two independent clauses (page 3).

Eg. *The cake looked delicious, and it tasted good too.*

2. Use a comma to separate 2 or 3 items in a series.

Eg. *Today I did my laundry, washed my car and cleaned my room.*

3. Put a comma after an introductory expression (a word, a connector, a phrase, a dependent clause).

Eg. *Once I have finished my homework, I will call you.*

Eg. *He said he needed to ruminate, whatever that means.*

4. Around a person spoken to...

Eg. *Did you know, Danielle, that you left your backpack at the library.*

5. With expressions to interrupt the flow of the sentence.

Eg. *I know, of course, that I have misled the deadline.*

6. With *scoopable* (not needed) information.

Eg. *Hamlet, Shakespeare's most famous play, has been made into a film.*

Quotation marks and underlining /italics

1. Direct quotation.

Eg. *The officer said, "Please, show me your driving license"*

2. Around the title of short stories.

Eg. I couldn't sleep after I read "The lottery" by Shirley Jackson.

3. Underline or use italics for titles of longer works, books, newspapers, magazines, plays, radio and TV series, albums or Cds, and films.

Eg. The colour purple is a novel by Alice Walker.

Capital letters

1. First word of every sentence.
2. First word of every direct quotation.
3. Capitalise the first, last and every important word in a title. Not prepositions or connecting words.

Eg. I saw a copy of Darwin's *The Origin of Species* at a yard sale.

4. Names of people, places, languages, races, and nationalities.
5. Capitalise names of months, days of the week, special days, but not seasons.

spring *Easter* *winter*
 Tuesday

6. Relationships. If it takes the place of the person's name.

Eg. *We visited Aunt Sophie*
 We visited our aunt.

7. Capitalise the names of particular things or people, not general ones.

Eg. *I admire Professor Washborne*
 I admire my professor.

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