

# The Most Common Grammar and Spelling Mistakes You'll Never Make Again (You're welcome)

## Apostrophes and Quotation Marks

**Apostrophes** are used to make contractions, which combine two words (like you're and I'm) and possessives, which demonstrate ownership.



Examples:

- 1 Greyson's hoodie is really cool. (possessive)
- 2 We're confident he's setting a cat hoodie trend. (contraction)

Apostrophes are almost never used to make plurals, so **DON'T DO IT!**

Example:

- 1 The red hoodie's unique color made it stand out from other hoodies.



**Double quotation marks** are the American English standard for designating quotes, but you should use single quotation marks (or inverted commas or apostrophes) to indicate a quote within a quote. Ending punctuation almost always belongs inside the quotation marks.



Example:

- 1 "I heard Franklin say, 'I want a hoodie just like Greyson's.'"

## Capitalization

**Proper nouns** are the names of very specific people (Greyson Catterson), places (Cat Prep), or things (*The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*). These include, but are not limited to book and movie titles, cities and countries, celebrities, and even you! All proper nouns begin with capital letters.

In multi-word proper nouns, capitalize the first letter of each word except for articles (like "the"), prepositions (like "in"), and conjunctions (like "and").

**Other kinds of words** should only be capitalized if they begin a sentence. Please don't forget to capitalize the first word of every sentence! We know the application form is online, but that doesn't mean it's like the rest of the lowercase-only Internet.



Your major should only be capitalized in three (3) specific cases: (1) it is a proper noun (like English or East Asian studies), (2) you are referring to the specific name of the department or school (like the School of Engineering or the Department of History), (3) it is the first word in a sentence. In all other cases, do not capitalize.

**B**  
**M**  
**J**

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## Homophones

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**Homophones** are words that sound the same but are spelled differently and mean different things. Don't let these common groups of similarly sounding words trip you up!

**You're**  
**Your**

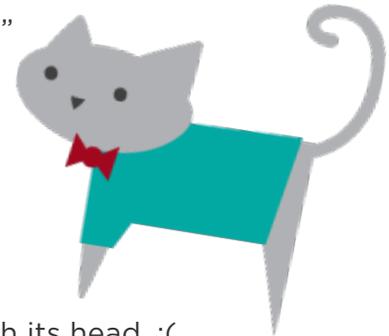
**You're** = the contraction form of "you are"  
→ *Example:* You're awesome!

**Your** = the possessive form of "you"  
→ *Example:* Your cat is awesome!

**its**  
**it's**

**It's** = the contraction form of "it is"  
→ *Example:* It's a T-Rex!

**Its** = the possessive form of "it"  
→ *Example:* The T-Rex could not scratch its head. :(



**There**  
**They're**  
**Their**

**There** = a place that isn't here  
→ *Example:* My burrito is over there.

**They're** = the contraction form of "they are"  
→ *Example:* They're going to steal my burrito!

**Their** = possessive form of "they"  
→ *Example:* I am going to steal their nachos.

**To**  
**Two**  
**To**

**Two** = the second loneliest number  
→ *Example:* Two ice cream cones are better than one.

**To** = a preposition expressing place or movement in the direction of something else

→ *Example:* Come to my house if you want an ice cream cone.

**Too** = another way of saying also, or increasing the intensity of a description

→ *Example:* You are too late, I already ate both ice cream cones.

**Affect**  
**Effect**

**Affect** = generally speaking, this is a verb  
→ *Example:* Your attitude will affect your essay.

**Effect** = generally speaking, this is a noun  
→ *Example:* A good attitude will have a positive effect on your essay.



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## Punctuation

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**Colons (:)** can be used to make smiley faces :), but they can also be placed at the end of sentences to introduce elements like lists, amplifying details, or quotations.

*Examples:*

- 1 Greyson loves all kinds of ice cream: vanilla, chocolate chip, and even rocky road.



**Commas (,)** are versatile but deceptively simple. In general, they are a tool for separating words in a sentence more distinctly than a space, but less firmly than a period. Use commas to separate items in a list, an aside from the rest of the main sentence, or numbers in dates.

*Example:*

- 1 On December 31, 2015, Greyson filed his last college application. (And then ate an ice cream cone.)

- **Commas can connect sentences ONLY** when the complete sentence following the comma starts with a conjunction (like “and,” “or,” or “but”).

*Example:*

- 1 Greyson wanted to take a nap, but he decided to do some freewriting for his college admission essays.

If the piece of the sentence following the conjunction does not have its own subject, don't use a comma.

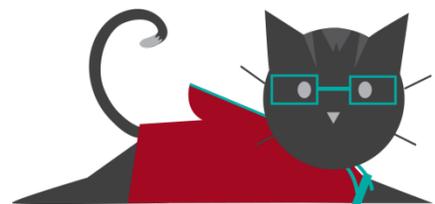
*Example:*

- 1 Greyson wanted to take a nap but decided to do some freewriting for his college admission essays.

- **The Oxford comma** is a special kind of comma that comes before the last item in a list, before the word “and” or “or.” Using the Oxford comma is a stylistic choice, but you have to make a decision and stick with it for your whole essay.

*Examples:*

- 1 Greyson loves all kinds of ice cream: vanilla, chocolate chip and even rocky road.
- 2 Greyson loves all kinds of ice cream: vanilla, chocolate chip, and even rocky road.





**Hyphens (-) and dashes (–)** are not the same. Hyphens connect words like “mother-in-law,” while em dashes are slightly longer than hyphens and act like strong commas to create breaks in sentences.

*Example:*

- ① Greyson’s opinion on ice cream – if you ever ask him – is highly positive.



**Periods (.)** come at the end of all your sentences. Period.



**Semicolons (;)** are a great way to connect two sentences that flow logically from one to the next.



*Example:*

- ① Greyson loves to write; accordingly, he wrote all five Common App essays for fun.

## Reference & Recommended Reading

*The Elements of Style*, by Strunk & White

NEVER MISUSE ANOTHER APOSTROPHE WITH



**COLLEGE ESSAY ADVISORS ON THE CASE!**

