

Writing
Analyzing an Audience
Punctuation, Grammar, Style, & Usage: Twelve Guidelines
Basic Mechanics and Errors

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Analyzing an Audience

Why consider audience? All writing is geared to a specific time, place, and reader (also called **context**). Writers who fail to successfully analyze their audience **may also fail to reach their goals**. Their writing may seem unfocused or inappropriate.

Who will ultimately read your work? While in the university classroom your audience is often your instructor, some assignments are designed so that you are also writing to a secondary audience, for example, to an expert in your field, to the general public or to another reader. **Your instructor may designate an audience, or you may have to imagine one you feel is most appropriate for your topic or thesis.**

How does an analysis of audience affect my writing? When you tailor your writing to a specific audience, you also tailor **features of the text**. Audience affects your **message** (What do readers care about? What are they likely to act upon?); your **argument** (What would be convincing? What kinds of evidence are normally used for this type of reader?); your **word choice** (Can you use jargon or slang?); your **sentences types or lengths** (Can you use fragments? Long, complex patterns or short simple ones, or a combination?); your **tone** (Is it personal, friendly, distanced, humorous, serious?); and so on. Together, these elements constitute your **style**. **Style should be adjusted appropriately to your audience.**

Do I have to analyze audience before I begin writing? You should **consider audience early in the writing process, but not necessarily as a first step**. The more you know about your audience, the better you can tailor your message. However, thinking too much about accommodating an audience can inhibit you. Try doing some prewriting and research first. Once you are confident you are knowledgeable about your topic and have something to say about it, consider how to make it interesting and significant for specific readers.

Below are some questions you might consider in an audience analysis:

- **How much does the audience know about your subject?** Gulf Coast fishermen might know a great deal about saltwater fishing regulations, but might not be receptive to a preachy, academic tone. Chemistry professors would probably know little about saltwater fishing, but would expect a more restrained, academic approach. Level and type of knowledge determines how much background or history you will have to provide and what terms might need definition or explanation.

- **How does the audience feel about your subject? Are they indifferent?** Your paper may have to engage indifferent readers and convince them that your topic has some merit. If the audience is hostile towards your view, you'll have to find ways to argue effectively for your position. For example, citing some common ground between your beliefs and theirs might be one place to start.
- **What new information can you provide for readers?** Why is what you are saying valuable to your readers? What can they take away from your paper?
- **What is your relationship to the audience?** Are you an equal, an authority, or a subordinate? Are you giving order, suggestions, or friendly advice? You might be more colloquial or personal with a peer, and more distanced and careful with a subordinate. As an authority, you'll want to sound sure of yourself; a peer or subordinate might be more tentative or suggestive.

Punctuation, Grammar, Style, & Usage: Twelve Guidelines

Punctuation

1. To join two or more independent clauses, use a comma followed by a coordinating conjunction, a semicolon alone, or a semicolon followed by a conjunctive adverb.

- o An independent clause is a group of words that contains a subject and a predicate and can stand alone as a sentence.
- o To remember the coordinating conjunctions, think A. B. Fonsy or FANBOYS (And, Bt, For, Or, Nor, So, Yet).
- o Conjunctive adverbs are words like *however*, *nevertheless*, *otherwise*, *thus*, *moreover*, *additionally*, etc.

Examples:

A sentence is the same as an independent clause; a dependent clause also has a subject and predicate but can't stand alone.

A sentence is the same as an independent clause, and a dependent clause also has a subject and predicate, but it can't stand alone.

2. When beginning a sentence with an introductory phrase or an introductory dependent clause, follow the introductory element with a comma.

- o Words that might be found opening an introductory clause include *after*, *although*, *as*, *as if*, *as long as*, *because*, *before*, *if*, *in order that*, *since*, *so that*, *though*, *unless*, *until*, *when*, *whenever*, *where*, *wherever*, and *while*.
- o If the phrase is very short, the comma is sometimes omitted. Use your judgment.

Examples:

Whenever you open with an introductory clause, you should consider using a comma.

With a short introductory phrase the comma is often omitted.

3. Use commas to bracket nonrestrictive words or phrases that are not essential to the sentence's meaning.

Examples:

The boys, who are friends of the defendant, entered the courtroom. [Nonessential]

4. Do not use commas to bracket words or phrases that are restrictive, or essential to the sentence's meaning.

Examples:

The boys who were friends of the defendant stood behind him in support; those who were not friends shouted angry words. [Essential]

5. The rule for the final comma within a series varies. In Associated Press (AP) style, the comma is omitted, In Chicago Manual Style (CMS) and Modern Language Association style (MLA), use of the final comma is recommended to clarify possible ambiguity.

- o If the series elements are long and contain commas, separate them with semicolons.

Examples:

red, black, and white OR red, black and white

The first element, being so important, was to be emphasized; the second, being less crucial, could be less prominent; and the third hardly mattered.

6. Use proper punctuation to **integrate a quotation into a sentence**. If the introductory material is an **independent clause, add the quotation after a colon**. If the introductory material ends in **"thinks," "says," or some other verb indicating expression, use a comma**.

Examples:

In *The Awakening*, Mme. Ratignolle exhorts Robert Lebrun to stop flirting with Edna: "She is not one of us; she is not like us."

In a song featured in *South Pacific*, Oscar Hammerstein writes, "You have to be carefully taught."

Grammar

7. Make the **subject and verb agree with each other, not with words that come between them**.

- *Anyone, anybody, anything, each, everyone, everybody, everything, nobody, no one, nothing, somebody, someone, and something* are singular.
- *All, any either, more, most, neither, none, and some* can be singular or plural, so use your judgment.
- *Few, many, and several* are plural.
- Collective nouns such as *gang, crowd, class, team, or committee* can be either singular or plural. If you want to focus on the whole, use plural, and on the members (as in *the members of the class*), use singular.

Examples:

None of the approximately eight-five thousand people attending the football game knows how the game will end.

The class is inattentive. OR The class are inattentive.

Few have the ability to concentrate for more than 55 minutes.

8. Be sure that a pronoun, a participial phrase, or an appositive refers **clearly to the proper subject**.

- The personal pronouns are *I, you, he, she, it, we, they, me, him, her, them, my, your, his, her, hers, its, our, their, mine, yours, ours, theirs*.
- Some writers follow colloquial speech and use *they* with **gender inclusive terms** such as ***anyone or a person***. Some use a version of ***his/her***; others **alternate between *his* and *her***. The most conservative use **only the male pronoun (*his*, etc.)**. Often writers use the plural (*students . . . they*) to avoid the issue.
- Appositives are nouns that follow other nouns and rename them.
- Participial phrases are made up of the present participle (-ing) form or the past participle (usually -ed) form of a verb, the object of the participle, and any modifier, as in *dressed to kill* or *moving slowly down the field*.
- The **error** often referred to as a **dangling modifier** occurs when the participial phrase which opens a sentence is not **followed by the subject to which it refers**, as in Having hit the fast ball, the game was won. (The game didn't hit the ball.)

Examples:

When the woman saw that the man was following her, she walked faster.

Followed by three suspicious men, the woman hurried down the street.

A student must always bring his or her textbook to class.

Students must always bring their textbooks to class.

Having hit the fast ball, the batter declared victory.

Style and Usage

9. Use **parallel construction** to make a **strong point** and create a smooth flow.

- It doesn't matter what grammatical construction you use; just be consistent.
- You may truncate functional words such as "if you are" in the last example below.

Examples:

To be late, to dress poorly, or to fail to complete your work are cause for dismissal.

Being late, dressing poorly, or failing to complete your work might cause you to lose your job.

You might lose your job if you are constantly late, if you dress poorly, or if you fail to complete your work.

You might lose your job if you are constantly late, dress poorly, or fail to complete your work.

10. Use the **active voice** to **stress the actor** and the **passive voice** to **stress the action** or **underplay the action** or when the actor is unknown.

- In active voice the subject performs the action, as in "Samantha dunked the ball."
- In passive voice the subject receives the action, as in "The ball was dunked by Samantha" or "The ball was dunked."

11. You may **split an infinitive** if it would sound awkward to leave the verb and the infinitive (to + verb) together, or for stylistic effect.

Examples:

to go boldly OR to boldly go

12. You may **end a sentence with a preposition** if it would sound more graceful or natural to do so, or for stylistic effect.

Examples:

I don't know with whom to go.

I don't know who to go with.

Additional Resources

Jack Lynch, [Guide to Grammar and Style](#).

[The Daily Grammar](#) (Word Place, Inc.) provides daily grammar tips and lessons.

[Purdue University's Writing Lab](#) also has good information on grammar.

[Guide to Grammar & Writing](#) (Capital Community College of Hartford, CT) provides detailed information pertaining to grammar, punctuation, sentence structuring, paragraph developing, and organizing essays and research papers.

Basic Mechanics and Major Errors

While readers sometimes pay too much attention to mechanics issues in papers and fail to look at the substance, too many errors can seriously jeopardize the readability and impact of your writing. To avoid the pitfall of mechanical errors, you can learn to proofread your paper for such errors so that your paper makes a better impression.

Run-on Sentences (Fused Sentences)

A run-on sentence occurs when **two independent clauses are joined together with no punctuation.**

Example: The motto of the Corps of Cadets is "Where Leaders are Forged" the Fightin' Texas Aggie Band is called the "Spirit of Aggieland."

Comma Splices

A comma splice occurs when **two independent clauses are joined with a comma.**

Example: The motto of the Corps of Cadets is "Where Leaders are Forged", the Fightin' Texas Aggie Band is called the "Spirit of Aggieland."

To write this sentence correctly, you have several options:

1. Add a semicolon in the run-on or replace the comma with a semicolon in the comma splice.

Example: The motto of the Corps of Cadets is "Where Leaders are Forged"; the Fightin' Texas Aggie Band is called the "Spirit of Aggieland."

Sometimes the semicolon is followed by a conjunctive adverb which is followed by a comma. Some conjunctive adverbs are however, therefore, nevertheless, thus, moreover, consequently, etc.

2. Add a comma and a coordinating conjunction to the run-on or a coordinating conjunction after the comma in the comma splice.

Example: The motto of the Corps of Cadets is "Where Leaders are Forged", and the Fightin' Texas Aggie Band is called the "Spirit of Aggieland."

To remember the coordinating conjunctions think of A. B. Fonsy (and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet).

3. Make the two clauses two separate sentences.

Example: The motto of the Corps of Cadets is "Where Leaders are Forged."

The Fightin' Texas Aggie Band is called the "Spirit of Aggieland."

Fragments

The sentence fragment occurs when a sentence is not a **complete thought or is missing a subject or verb.**

Example: When I went to Chilifest in Snook.

To correct the fragment, simply complete the thought.

Example: When I went to Chilifest in Snook, I rode the bus from Zachary parking lot.

Homonymic Spellings

In our age of word processors and spelling checkers, the hazard of misspelling may seem to be a thing of the past. What spelling checkers miss most frequently, however, are homonymic spellings, **words that sound the same but are spelled differently**. The only way to catch these errors is to proofread your work before turning it in.

Here are some examples of these words to watch out for:

You're your	it's its	they're their there	to two too	accept except
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Modifiers

The perils of modifiers can be hazardous, but by remembering a simple rule you can rid your writing of misplaced modifiers. The rule is that the **modifier should be as close to the word it is referring to as possible**. Always strive for clarity in your writing.

Example: Broken and beaten after the game, the messy locker room looked like a dungeon to the exhausted Longhorn team.

The modifier in the sentence is "Broken and beaten after the game." To clarify this sentence, simply move the referent (the Longhorns) closer to the modifier.

Example: Broken and beaten after the game, the exhausted Longhorn team trudged to the messy, dungeon-like locker room.

Another modifier problem might involve an issue of clarity.

Example: When only a lad, my father took me to Kyle Field.

Who was "only a lad"? To avoid this confusion, clarify the modifier.

Example: When I was only a lad, my father took me to Kyle Field.

For more information on major mechanics errors and how to avoid them, consult *The Longman Handbook for Writers and Readers*, or any freshman composition text.