

Chapter 11: Rules of Grammar

Overview

English is one of the most difficult languages to learn and speak well because of its many rules and exceptions. This chapter presents a variety of grammatical and punctuation rules (and exceptions) to assist administrative assistants in written and oral communication. It is important to demonstrate effective grammar skills in all situations; the impression you can make may impact the success of your organization. *Remind students that there are many reference manuals they can use to assist them on a day-to-day basis. Also, remind them that some publishers have a few differences in their rules, so what they read in this text may vary from what they have learned before.*

Lecture Notes

A. Grammar and Word Usage

Effective use of the English language can be difficult; yet, it is very important in order to appear professional and qualified in your business.

1. **Primary Elements of a Sentence** include the subject and predicate.
 - a. Subject is the noun/topic of the sentence; each sentence requires at least one subject.
 - b. Verb tells what the subject has done, is doing, or will be doing. When a verb expresses a condition, it is a linking verb; otherwise, it is an action verb.
 - c. Object completes the sentence. Action verbs are usually followed by a direct object that answers what or whom after the verb. Verbs ending in “ing” are followed by an indirect object that names the receiver of the direct object, precedes the direct object, and answers to whom, to what, or for what.
 - d. Complement is the noun in the predicate that refers to the subject when a linking verb is used.
2. **Secondary Elements of a Sentence** are found in most sentences.
 - a. Modifiers describe other words; they add descriptive details to key words. Adjectives and adverbs are the most common types of modifier.
 - b. Clauses that are independent contain a subject and a verb; they can stand alone as a sentence. Dependent clauses contain both a subject and a verb; however, they begin with a conjunction and cannot stand as a sentence.
 - c. Phrases are modifiers that connect to a sentence with a verb or preposition; they cannot stand as sentences because there is no subject or predicate.

B. Punctuation

Using incorrect punctuation can change the entire meaning of a sentence; therefore, it is important to understand what type of punctuation should be used in particular situations. *Many students might bring up the change to one space after colons and end-of-sentence punctuation. Using only one space is very common now; however, they must understand that different texts present rules just a little differently. They need to be flexible.*

1. The **Apostrophe** is very important in business writing.

- a. To show possession, an apostrophe is used.
 - b. For plurals, use an apostrophe when it creates clarity (with letters or numbers).
 - c. With symbols – an apostrophe is used to represent feet on forms or in tables.
 - d. Contractions use an apostrophe to show the omission of one or more letters.
2. A **Colon** is keyed with two spaces after it, except when it is used in time.
- a. After an introduction, a colon can be used before a long direct quotation, enumerated items, or a series that starts with *these*, *as follows*, or *the following*.
 - b. Time expressed in figures uses a colon to separate the hours from minutes.
3. A **Comma** is the most commonly used mark of punctuation. *Tell students that it might be the most misused mark as well. Emphasize the importance of knowing when to use a comma (and when not to).*
- a. After an introductory word or phrase, a comma can be used to set it off from the main clause.
 - b. A comma is used to separate items in a series when there are three or more items in the list. If a conjunction is used before the last item in the series, the comma is optional.
 - c. Compound sentences can use a comma to separate two independent clauses that are connected with a conjunction.
 - d. Direct quotations are set off from the rest of the sentence with a comma.
 - e. Parenthetical expressions that are not necessary to the grammatical completeness or meaning of the sentence can be set off with commas.
 - f. An appositive is set off from the rest of the sentence with commas.
 - g. Nonrestrictive clauses (usually begins with *which*, *who*, or *whose*) are set off from the rest of the sentence with commas.
 - h. A comma is used to separate two adjectives modifying the same noun that are not separated by the word *and*. The adjectives must be equal in rank in order to use the comma separator.
4. A **Dash** emphasizes one or more parenthetical words; be selective in using a dash to preserve its forcefulness.
5. An **Ellipsis** shows the omission of words within a sentence; it is created with three periods in a row.
6. An **Exclamation Point** is used at the end of a statement for emphasis.
7. A **Hyphen** is keyed without any extra spaces before or after it.
- a. Compound adjectives are separated by a hyphen.
 - b. Replace “to” or “through” with a hyphen in statistical writing.
 - c. Separate a prefix from the word when the prefix is a word on its own.
 - d. Word division uses a hyphen at the end of a line when part of a word is moved to the next line.

- e. Suspended hyphens are used when there is a series of hyphenated words having the same ending. One space follows a suspended hyphen.
8. **Parentheses** are used to enclose words or phrases that are used for clarification but not emphasized.
- a. Enumerated items might use parentheses to enclose the identification number or letter.
 - b. Instead of a comma or dash, parentheses can be used to deemphasize an expression.
 - c. References to tables, pages, or other items can be placed in parentheses.
 - d. Place parentheses around a complete sentence. Punctuation following parentheses *within* a sentence goes outside, and the first letter is not capitalized.
9. A **Period** is a very common mark of punctuation, and it is used in many ways.
- a. A period ends a sentence.
 - b. A polite request is followed by a period when a positive response is expected.
 - c. Abbreviations end in a period; if periods are used inside an abbreviation, there are no spaces inside.
 - d. Numbers use the period as a decimal point to separate whole numbers from parts.
 - e. Enumerated items might use a period following the identification number or letter.
 - f. An outline uses a period following each level letter or number.
 - g. Paragraph headings are followed by a period; the headings are also underlined for emphasis.
10. A **Question Mark** is used at the end of a sentence to ask a direct question.
11. **Quotation Marks** are used in different types of statements.
- a. Direct quotations, the exact words spoken, are surrounded by quotation marks.
 - b. Titles of articles, chapters of books, lectures, or reports are enclosed in quotation marks.
 - c. Single letters that are referenced in a sentence might be enclosed in quotes.
12. **Semicolons** have two major uses.
- a. Compound sentences use a semicolon to separate independent clauses that are not joined with a conjunction.
 - b. When a series contains a series, a semicolon is used to separate the main series and commas separate the inner series.
13. **Underscore** is used for emphasis; however, sometimes the same text is formatted in italics instead.
- a. Titles of books, periodicals, magazines, movies, and newspapers are underlined.

- b. Specific words that should be emphasized might be underlined.
- c. Paragraph headings are underlined so they are seen as a separate part of the paragraph.
- d. Single letters that are referenced in a sentence might be underlined.

C. Capitalization

Proper capitalization is considered a demonstration of good manners. *Remind students of those e-mails they receive that do not have any capital letters (and maybe no punctuation). Improper capitalization looks very sloppy.*

1. The **Beginning of Every Sentence** should include a capital letter.
2. A **Sentence within Parentheses** should begin with a capital letter.
3. The **Beginning of a Quotation** should be capitalized if it is a complete sentence.
4. The **Pronoun “I”** is always capitalized.
5. **Titles of People** are capitalized when they are used as a part of the person’s name or in place of their name.
6. **Book and Article Titles** should have the first letter of each word capitalized (nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositions of five or more letters).
7. **Academic Courses** (specific high school or college courses, not general subjects) are capitalized.
8. **Geographic Locations** and directions used to identify geographic areas should be capitalized.
9. **Organization Names** should be capitalized, but articles and prepositions in the names should not.
10. Public and Private **Institutions** should be capitalized, unless it is a general reference to a category of institution.
11. **Group Names** that identify national, political, religious, or ethnic groups should be capitalized; however, not names of economic or social groups.
12. **Department Names in Organizations** should be capitalized within your own organization.
13. **Objects** (including brand names, structures, documents, trade names, and artifacts) should be capitalized.
14. **Elements of Time** (month, day, holiday, etc.) should be capitalized, but the names of seasons should not.

D. Spelling

Review the general guidelines presented on p. 375; these things can help everyone become a better speller.

1. **Vowel Combinations ie and ei** can be easily mixed up. Use the rhyme: *i before e except after c, or when sounding like a, as in neighbor and weigh.*
2. A word with an **Ending ie** drops the *ie* and adds a *y* before adding the suffix *ing*.

3. **Silent e Ending** is dropped before a suffix that begins with a vowel.
4. **Silent e with Compounds** is retained whether or not the second word begins with a vowel or consonant.
5. **Words Ending in ee** keep both e's when adding a suffix (unless the suffix begins with an e).
6. **Words Ending in cle** are nouns and those ending in **cal** are adjectives.
7. **Sounds Like ph, gh, ch, and i** may take on the sound of another letter (f, k, y).
8. **Words Ending in cede, ceed, and sede** must be memorized; there is no rule for determining which one to use.
9. **Y Ending Preceded by a Vowel** keeps the y when adding a suffix, and an s is added to make the word plural.
10. **Y Ending Preceded by a Consonant** must be replaced with an i; to form a plural drop the y and add ies.
11. **The Suffix ful** ends in one l; do not double the consonant for any suffix except ly.
12. **Doubling the Ending Consonant** is done before adding a suffix if the suffix begins with a vowel, if the final consonant is preceded by a single vowel, or if a word is accented on the last syllable.
13. **Compound Words** are sometimes hyphenated; however, there is no rule used to decide when a hyphen is used.

E. Numbers Usage

1. **Numbers One through Ten** should be spelled out in words; for numbers above ten, use figures.
2. **Specific Numbers Ten and Under** will use figures: measurements, temperatures, dimensions, chemical terms, scores, percents.
3. **Sets of Numbers in a Sentence** should be expressed consistently; use figures for all numbers.
4. **Money** should be expressed in figures.
5. **Percentages** should be expressed in figures with the word *percent* following it.
6. **Mixed Numbers** should be expressed in figures.
7. **Numbers Beginning a Sentence** should be written out in words.
8. **Hyphens in Numbers** should be used when 21-99 are written using words.
9. If **Two Numbers Describe One Word**, the smaller number should be in words.
10. **Dates** should be figures, except in very formal writing.
11. **Time** is in written figures unless the word *o'clock* is used with it.
12. **Groupings of Numbers** (SSN, telephone number, policy number) should not use commas as separators.
13. **Express Large Numbers** using a numeral along with the word million or other descriptor.

14. **Spell Out Other Forms of Numbers**, like ordinal numbers (first, second, etc.).
15. **Numbers in Legal Documents** are expressed using both words and figures for clarification.
16. **Descriptive Numbers** follow words like chapter and page; they should be written in figures. Do not use “number.”
17. **Age** is expressed in words, unless days and months are given too.
18. **Street Names** should appear the way the city identifies them.
19. **Plurals of Numbers** are expressed with an ’s, although just an s is acceptable as well.

F. Word Division and Hyphenation

1. **Hyphenation with Word Processing Software** is helpful.
 - a. **Automatic hyphenation** divides words according to the rules set in the software.
 - b. **Manual hyphenation** allows the user to decide the placement of the hyphen.
 - c. A “**no gyphenation**” option wraps words that are too long instead of inserting a hyphen.
2. **General Suggestions for Word Division** (*These tips are very helpful in deciding whether or not hyphenation is a good idea before applying the rules that are presented.*)
 - a. Divide words only when it is necessary.
 - b. Do not divide a word when it appears at the end of the first line of a paragraph.
 - c. Do not divide the last word keyed on a page.
 - d. Avoid dividing words at the end of more than two consecutive lines.
 - e. Do not divide a proper noun, if possible.
3. **Word Division Rules**
 - a. Only divide between syllables and if syllables have three or more letters (-ed is not a syllable).
 - b. Do not divide words that have four or five letters; be cautious dividing six-letter words. A divided syllable should have at least three characters in each division.
 - c. Divide hyphenated words at the hyphen.
 - d. Divide compound words between the elements.
 - e. Making a word past tense doesn’t necessarily add a syllable.
 - f. In a three-syllable word with a one-letter syllable, divide after the one-letter syllable.

- g. In a word with a double consonant, divide between the consonants. Use the pronunciation of the word as a guide.
- h. If a consonant is added to the end of a word before a suffix to create a double consonant, divide between double consonants.
- i. If the double consonant is the ending of the root word, separate the word from the suffix.
- j. Words ending in *able, ible, ical, cian, cion, sion, gion, tion* should be divided at the end of the root word.
- k. If the word ending is *ble* or *cal*, the preceding vowel is considered part of the root word.
- l. Divide between two one-letter syllables.
- m. Do not divide a word when it separates a syllable without any vowels.
- n. Divide between the day and year in dates; then a hyphen is not necessary.
- o. Do not divide a proper noun, if possible.
- p. If necessary, divide address at logical reading point.
- q. Do not divide figures, amounts of money, or Web addresses.

Additional Resources for Students

Recommended readings (no texts should be more than two years old):

- Boone, Louis E. and David L. Kurtz. *Contemporary Business Communication*. Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Bovee, Courtland L. and John V. Thill. *Business Communication Today*. McGraw-Hill, Inc.
- Guffey, Mary Ellen. *Business and Administrations Communication*. South-Western Publishing Co.
- Himstreet, William C. and Wayne M. Baty. *Business Communication*. Kent Publishing Co.
- Lesikar, Raymond V. *Basic Business Communication*.
- Ober, Scott. *Contemporary Business Communication*.
- Wolf, P. and S. Kuiper. *Effective Communication in Business*.

Current issues of periodicals or business publications are also an excellent resource. Some of the following periodicals have an accompanying Web site.

Current Periodical

Web Address

*Gregg Reference
Manual*

<i>IAAP Complete Office Handbook</i>	http://www.iaap-hq.org/products/handbook.htm
<i>Modern Office Technology</i>	
<i>OfficePro</i>	http://www.iaap-hq.org/officepro/toc.htm
<i>The Office</i>	