

BASIC GRAMMAR RULES

(Partially adapted from Strunk and White's *Elements of Style*)

1.) Only use an 's ONLY to show that something belongs to someone.

- Lakishia's book = the book belonging to Lakisha
- the student's test = the test belonging to the student

If the possessor's name ends in s (like Carlos or students) only use an 's

- Carlos' book = the book belonging to Carlos
- the students' test = the test belonging to the students (plural)

2.) When listing things, use a comma between each thing but NOT before and (if only listing two things).

- I bought milk, eggs, and bread.
- She is taking psychology, physics, math, and English.
- I like peanut butter and chocolate. (Do not use a comma if listing only two things)

3.) Use a comma around **parenthetical expressions** (phrases that add more information to the sentence but could be taken out).

- My sister, who lives in Parkchester, came to visit last weekend.
- Barack Obama, who was born in Hawaii, is the president of the United States.

4.) Use a comma after introductory words or phrases.

- However, he is not always a friendly person
- Upon waking up in the morning, I usually want to go back to sleep.

5.) Do not use commas to join sentences (this is a comma splice). Use a period, joining word, or semi-colon instead.

- Incorrect: I was worried about the final, I thought I would not pass.
- Correct: I was worried about the final. I thought I would not pass.
- Correct: I was worried about the final because I thought I would not pass.
- Correct: I was worried about the final; I thought I would not pass.

6.) Do not break sentences in two (unintentional fragments).

- Incorrect: I felt lousy all weekend. Because I have allergies.
- Correct: I felt lousy all weekend because I have allergies.

- Incorrect: I met up with my friend. And then we went out to a club.
- Correct: I met up with my friend and then we went out to a club.

COMMONLY CONFUSED WORDS: These are words that SOUND alike but mean different things

- 1.) There = at a certain place or point (He walked over there.)
 Their = belonging to them (It is their cat.)
 They're = they are (They're both students.)

- 2.) Its = belonging to it (The cat has its collar.)
 It's = it is (It's very hot outside.)

- 3.) To = expressing movement or direction (She went to the store.)
 Too = in addition or an excessive amount (He likes dogs too. I ate too much candy.)
 Two = the number 2 (I have two sisters.)

- 4.) Whether = used when referring to alternatives (I don't know whether I should stay or go.)
 Weather = the conditions outside (The weather outside is frightful.)

- 5.) Which = what one (Which pie do you like best?)
 Witch = commonly used to refer to a woman who can do magic (I dressed up as a witch for Halloween.)

- 6.) Passed = having completed the act of passing (I passed the test.)
 Past = gone by in time (In the past, people did not have indoor plumbing.)

- 7.) Through = in one place and out the other (I went through the tunnel into New Jersey.)
 Threw = to have physical thrown something (She threw the football to her teammate.)
 Thru = NOT A WORD!

- 8.) Affect = to influence something or someone (The movie *Precious* really affected me.)
 Effect = result (The effect of the movie was that I wanted to help change society.)

- 9.) Lose = to misplace or not win (She tried not to lose her purse. I didn't want to lose the game.)
 Loose = not tight (The ribbon was loose so it fell off my dress.)

- 10.) Accept = to receive or consent to (Oprah accepted the award. I accept that I will never be as rich as Oprah.)
Except = to leave something out (I hate all celebrities except Oprah.)
- 11.) A lot = a great amount (I like cheese a lot.)
Alot = NOT A WORD!

THINGS YOU SHOULD CAPITALIZE:

- 1.) The first word in every sentence

NOTE: Every sentence must end with a PERIOD (.), QUESTION MARK (?), or EXCLAMATION POINT (!)

- I do not want to have a root canal.
- Why do I have to have a root canal?
- I hate root canals!

- 2.) Proper nouns (names of SPECIFIC people, places, or things)

- Lady Gaga
- Borough of Manhattan Community College
- New York
- Chambers Street
- New Jersey
- Kim Kardashian
- Darth Vader
- Empire State Building
- Batman

- 3.) Titles (such as of articles, books, movies, magazines, television shows, and websites)

NOTE: All titles should also go in QUOTATION MARKS when writing BY HAND. When typing, titles of LONG things (like websites, books, and movies) go in *ITALICS* and titles of SHORT things (like essays) go in QUOTATION MARKS. This is because it is not possible to write italics by hand.

- “Family Guy” (by hand), *Family Guy* (typing)
- “Fast Five” (by hand), *Fast Five* (typing)
- “Wikipedia” (UGH! – by hand), *Wikipedia* (typing)
- “Civil Disobedience” (both by hand and typing because this is an essay)
- “The Ballot or the Bullet” (both by hand and typing because this is an essay)