

Grammar Vs Style

Definitions

Grammar: The arrangement of words in sentences and paragraphs to convey meaning.

Punctuation: The symbols (comma, period, question mark, etc.) used to enhance and clarify sentences.

Mechanics: The miscellaneous rules of writing such as spelling, capitalization, and how to represent numbers (2 versus two).

Usage: The application of grammar, punctuation, and mechanics in a given context. E.g., a social media post versus research paper.

Style: A subjective collection of writing rules that span grammar, punctuation, mechanics, and usage. Can vary by industry, company, or course.

Applying Grammar & Style

Colloquially, “grammar” refers to invariable rules of writing that include punctuation, mechanics, and grammar as defined above. However, most “rules” of grammar are, in fact, quite subjective. These subjective, context-dependent rules are collated into style guides that help ensure consistency within fields, industries, and/or publishers.

A common use for style guides in academic writing is formatting citations. See, for example, the [APA](#), [Vancouver](#), [Harvard](#), and [MLA](#) style guides. Each of these citation guides, however, belongs to (or was derived from) a larger collection of rules for grammar, punctuation, mechanics, and usage designed for a particular context.

Style guides vary according to field or industry, writing genre or medium, as well as both within and between publishers. Because of the variability in conventions, identifying the style guide used by your field, professor, and/or academic journal is the first step to ensuring that you use contextually accurate grammar.

The next page provides several examples of (colloquially speaking) near-universal grammar rules and corollaries that almost always vary according to style guides. Below are several sources for further understanding the differences between colloquial grammar and style.

Relevant Sources:

- [“Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace”](#) by Joseph M. Williams and Joseph Bizup
- [“The Elements of Style”](#) by William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White
- [Grammar and Style – The Word on College Reading and Writing \(pressbooks.pub\)](#)
- [Grammar Vs. Punctuation: What’s the Difference? \(thewritepractice.com\)](#)
- [What Is a Writing Style Guide, and Which One Should You Use? \(thewritelife.com\)](#)

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Grammar

- Comma after an introductory phrase.
- Apostrophes in contractions. E.g., "It's" versus "its".
- Period (or full stop) at the end of a sentence.
- Placing quotation marks around a direct quote.
- Capitalizing the first word of a sentence.
- Using "percent" when values are represented out of 100.
- Parentheticals are acceptable within parentheses (can you see (ha-ha) what I mean).
- Subject-verb agreement, e.g., multiple cats.
- Correct spelling.
- When to use ordinal numbers (e.g., first, second, third).
- The definition of "coordinate".
- Sex = male/female
Gender = man/woman/trans, etc.

Style

- Comma before the last item in a list (i.e., the Oxford comma).
- Apostrophes and possessives. E.g., James's cat versus James' cat.
- Periods in acronyms. E.g., USA versus U.S.A. and a.m. versus am.
- Placing the end quotation inside or outside of the end punctuation.
- Capitalizing abbreviations, e.g., am versus AM.
- Writing "percent" or using the symbol, %.
- Using parentheses within parentheses (()) or brackets ([]) within parentheses.
- Subject-verb agreement for scientific units, e.g., 11 kilograms, 11 kg, 11 kgs.
- US, UK, Canadian, or Australian spelling conventions.
- Whether to use superscripts for ordinal numbers (e.g., 2nd vs 2nd).
- Whether to hyphenate coordinate, e.g., co-ordinate.
- When to use sex versus gender.