

Seabury Hall Writer's Handbook



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I. PARTS OF SPEECH

A. NOUNS—A **noun** is a word that names a person, place, thing, or idea.

Our **class** won the **contest**.

There are two types of nouns: **common** nouns and **proper** nouns.

1. A common noun names any of a class of people, places, things, or ideas.

The **ocean** is calm.

2. A proper noun names a specific person, place, things, or idea. Proper nouns are always capitalized.

We flew over the **Pacific Ocean**.

B. PRONOUNS—A **pronoun** takes the place of a noun.

1. Personal pronouns refer to specific people or things.

Singular: I, me, you, she, her, he, him, it

Plural: we, us, you, they, them

2. Possessive pronouns indicate ownership.

Singular: my, mine, your, yours, her, hers, his, its

Plural: our, ours, your, yours, their, theirs

3. Relative pronouns refer to previously mentioned nouns or pronouns and introduce dependent clauses that function as adjectives.

which, that, who, whom, whose

C. VERBS—A verb shows action or links the subject to a word or phrase that tells about the subject.

Our class **collected** the most cans. The whole school **is** proud of us.
(*collected* is an action verb; *is* is a linking verb)

In a verb phrase there are **helping verbs** and a **main verb**. **Helping verbs** include forms of *have*, *do*, and, *be*.

We **are going** to the store.
I **have been looking** for you all over.

Some verbs are **transitive** and some are **intransitive**. A **transitive verb** carries an action from a subject to an **object**—something that receives the action of the verb.

My brother **smelled** the burning bread.

An **intransitive verb** does not need an object to complete its meaning.

My brother **smelled** bad.

D. ADJECTIVES—An **adjective** is a word used to modify or describe a noun or pronoun. An **adjective** usually answers one of these questions: Which one? What kind of? How many?

Adjectives usually precede the words they modify; however, they may also follow linking verbs, in which case they describe the subject.

Twenty six students read the **difficult** book.
The student was **eager**.

E. ADVERBS—An **adverb** is a word used to modify a verb, an adjective, or another adverb. **Adverbs** usually answer one of these questions: Where? When? Why? How? To what degree?

Run **quickly** to Coach's office.
It is **very** hot **outside**.

F. PREPOSITIONS—A **preposition** is a word used to connect a noun or pronoun to another word in the sentence. A **preposition** usually specifies a relative location or direction, or a relationship between the noun or pronoun and another word in the sentence.

A **preposition** appears as a part of a phrase and is followed by a noun or pronoun called the **object of the preposition**.

prep **op**
I hid **under** the **desk**.

G. CONJUNCTIONS—**Conjunctions** join words, phrases, or clauses, and they indicate relationships between the elements joined.

There are several types of **conjunctions**:

1. Coordinating conjunctions connect equal elements: *and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet*

Joyce **and** Tom went to the movies together.

2. Correlative conjunctions are pairs of conjunctions that connect equal elements: *either . . . or, neither . . . nor, not only . . . but also, both . . . and*

Either men **or** women can use that restroom.

3. Subordinating conjunctions create dependent clauses and indicate their relationship to the rest of the sentence. Some examples include the following: *because, after, although, when, since, as, until, while, if*

Because they were hungry, they went to a restaurant.

H. INTERJECTIONS—**interjections** express surprise or emotion. (Oh! Hey! Wow!)

II. THE SENTENCE

A **sentence** is a group of words that has a subject and a verb and expresses a complete thought. A **sentence** contains the following parts:

A. SUBJECT—The **subject** names who or what the sentence is about.

The **simple subject** is always a noun or a pronoun. Simple subjects often have modifiers. The **complete subject** consists of the simple subject and all of its modifiers.

SS

Historical **books** that contain no lies can be tedious.

To find the **complete subject**, ask Who? or What?, insert the verb, and finish the question. What can be tedious? *Historical books that contain no lies.*

To find the **simple subject**, strip away all modifiers in the **complete subject**.

A sentence may have a **compound subject** containing two or more **simple subjects** joined with a **coordinating conjunction** such as *and* or *or*.

SS

SS

Much **industry** and little **conscience** make us rich.

In **imperative sentences**, which give advice or commands, the subject is an understood *you*.

[**You**] Hand me the phone.

Although the **subject** ordinarily comes before the verb, occasionally it does not. When a sentence begins with *There is* or *There are*, the **subject** follows the verb. The word *There* is an empty word in such constructions, serving merely to get the sentence started.

There is no **substitute** for victory.

Inverted sentences can be used for emphasis.

Happy is the **team** that wins all its games.

In questions, the **subject** may appear before the verb, after the verb, or between parts of the verb.

Who will take the first step?

Why is **the first step** so difficult?

Will **you** take the first step?

B. VERB—The **verb** tells the action or the state of being of the subject. Verbs that denote state of being are called **linking verbs**. Some examples are forms of the verbs *to be*, *to seem*, *to become*.

He **threw** the ball. (action verb)

Love **is** blind. (linking verb)

Some verbs are **transitive** and some are **intransitive**. A **transitive** verb transfers an action to a noun or noun phrase called a **direct object**. An **intransitive** verb does not transfer action to an object. **Transitive** verbs are always followed by direct objects.

The pilot **flew** the plane to San Francisco. (transitive)

The bird **flew** over the ocean. (intransitive)

C. DIRECT AND INDIRECT OBJECT— If there is an **action verb**, the action may flow to a noun or pronoun called a **direct object**.

s v do
The boy hit the **ball**.

The direct object of an action verb may be preceded by an **indirect object**, a noun or pronoun telling to whom or for whom the action of the sentence is done.

v **io** do
Throw **me** the ball.

D. SUBJECT COMPLEMENT— If there is a **linking verb**, the word or phrase that tells about the **subject** is called a **subject complement**. The **subject complement** either renames or describes the subject. When the **subject complement (sc)** renames the subject, the **sc** functions a noun or pronoun and is called a **predicate nominative**; when the **sc** describes the **subject**, the **sc** functions as an adjective and is called a **predicate adjective**.

s **lv** -----**sc**-----**(predicate nominative)**
She is the best basketball player in the school.

s **lv** **sc (predicate adjective)**
The girl is happy.

III. PHRASES

A **phrase** is a group of related words that does not contain a subject and a verb.

Three types of phrases are **prepositional**, **appositive**, and **verbals**.

A. PREPOSITIONAL—A **prepositional phrase** begins with a **preposition** and ends with a **noun** or **pronoun**, called its **object**.

prep. **object**
I ran **around the track**.

The phrase nearly always functions as an adjective or adverb.

The road **to hell** is paved **with good intentions**.

To hell functions as an adjective because it modifies the noun *road* (which road?). *With good intentions* functions as an adverb because it modifies the verb *is paved* (how is the road paved?).

B. APPOSITIVE—An **appositive phrase** identifies or explains nouns and pronouns.

Michael, **a former track star**, keeps in shape by running every day.

C. VERBALS—A **verbal** is a verb form used as another part of speech. There are three types of verbal phrases:

1. Participial phrases contain verbs used as adjectives. **Participials** use the *-ing* or *-ed* forms of verbs.

Shaking with fear, the defendant stood before the jury.

Her french fries were **drenched in ketchup**.

2. Absolute phrases modify clauses or sentences. They contain nouns combined with *-ing* or *-ed* forms of verbs.

Engines roaring, tires screeching, the dragsters began the race.

She listened to the news of the accident, **her eyes filled with tears**.

3. Gerund phrases contain verbs that function as nouns. **Gerunds** always end in *-ing*.

Swimming with the dolphins is a great experience.

4. Infinitive phrases function as adjectives, adverbs, or nouns. They use the infinitive forms of verbs, which always begin with the word *to*.

To give money to charity is a wonderful thing to do.

IV. CLAUSES

A **clause** is a group of related words that contains a subject and a verb. There are two types of clauses—**independent** and **dependent**.

A. An INDEPENDENT CLAUSE can stand alone as a sentence.

The boys swam.

Vanilla is my favorite flavor.

B. A DEPENDENT CLAUSE contains a subject and a verb but is not a complete thought, and thus cannot stand alone. Dependent clauses created by subordinating conjunctions function as adverbs. Those created by relative pronouns function as adjectives.

After the boys swam, they went for ice cream. (dependent clause acting as adverb)

Tommy, who loved vanilla, got a banana split with hot fudge. (dependent clause acting as adjective)

V. TYPES OF SENTENCES

A. SIMPLE sentence—one **independent clause**

ic

I am going to the movies.

B. COMPOUND sentence—two **independent clauses** joined together with a comma and a **coordinating conjunction** (*and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet*)

ic, but ic

Jim lost his wallet with ten dollars in it, but later he found a watch worth \$200.

C. COMPLEX sentence—an **independent clause** joined to a **dependent clause**.

dc, ic

Because Henry was caught cheating on the test, he was given an automatic "F."

ic dc

Henry was given an automatic "F" because he was caught cheating on the test.

Note: When the **dependent clause** comes first in a **complex sentence**, it is separated from the **independent clause** by a comma. If the **independent clause** comes first, there is no comma.

D. COMPOUND-COMPLEX sentence—two or more **independent clauses** and at least one **dependent clause**.

dc, ic, but ic

Before Alice left her house, she got dressed, but she didn't put on any makeup.

VI. MECHANICS

A. Sentence Errors

1. A sentence FRAGMENT occurs when a **phrase** (no subject and verb) or a **dependent clause** (an incomplete thought) is presented as a sentence.

Fishing in the bathtub. (phrase)

After the boys swam. (dep. clause)

In order to correct a sentence **fragment** that is a **phrase**, you must add a subject and / or a verb:

I enjoy fishing in the bathtub.

In order to correct a fragment that is a **dependent clause**, you must add an **independent clause**:

After the boys swam, they ate lunch.

2. A RUN-ON sentence (also called fused sentence) occurs when two independent clauses are run together without a comma and a proper connecting word.

Herb talks too much nobody seems to mind. (ro)

3. A COMMA SPLICE occurs when two independent clauses are run together with a comma, but with no connecting word.

Marla smiles all the time, everyone thinks she must be hiding something.
(cs)

4. A RUN-ON sentence or COMMA SPLICE can be corrected in several ways:

a. It can be rewritten as two separate sentences.

Marla smiles all the time. Everyone thinks she must be hiding something.

b. It can be rewritten as two independent clauses joined with a comma and a conjunction.

Marla smiles all the time, but everyone thinks she must be hiding something.

c. It can be written as **two independent clauses** joined with a **semicolon**.

Marla smiles all the time; everyone thinks she must be hiding something.

d. It can be written as **two independent clauses** joined with a **semicolon** and a **transitional expression**.

Marla smiles all the time; **however**, everyone thinks she must be hiding something.

B. Comma Usage

1. **Commas** follow **introductory** words, phrases, and clauses.

Suddenly, I saw a light at the end of the tunnel.
Knowing you, I'd bet there's no food left in the house.

Because it is the right thing to do, I will return the wallet.

Note: The introductory clause above is also called dependent clause. It is followed by an independent clause (a clause that can stand alone as a sentence). When a sentence contains a dependent clause after an independent clause, there is no comma used between the two clauses.

I will return the wallet because it is the right thing to do.

2. **Commas** set off **interrupting (parenthetical)** words, phrases, and clauses.

There are times, however, when you really make me sick.

The Chicago Bulls, the NBA dynasty of the 1990's, have no chance of making it back to the playoffs this year.

The sport of sumo, which is thought to be over a thousand years old, is attracting many fans in the United States.

Note: An **interrupting (parenthetical) element** only takes commas when it is not crucial to defining the meaning of the word or phrase that precedes it. When the element is necessary to the meaning of the sentence, then it does not take commas.

The man who stole my wallet is somewhere in this room.
The apples that I bought are rotten.

3. Commas separate two independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet*).

The girls went shopping, and the boys went to the movies.

You'd better get out of my house, or I'll call the police.

4. Commas separate items in a **list of three** or more.

I want pepperoni, anchovies, black olives, and onions on my pizza.

I like peanut butter and jelly, tuna and egg, and ham and cheese sandwiches.

5. Commas separate coordinate adjectives (adjectives that stand in equal relationship to a noun). Adjectives are coordinate if you can logically insert the word “and” in the place of a comma.

Mother has become a **strong, confident, independent** woman.

Adjectives that refer to the number, age (*old, young, new*), size, color, or location are not coordinating adjectives (they cannot be logically scrambled), and they do not take commas.

I ordered a **dozen large blue** dresses.

6. Commas separate parts of dates, addresses, geographical locations, titles of individuals, and long numbers.

Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, was bombed on Sunday, December 7, 1941.

7. Commas are used to set off nouns of **direct address**.

Ms. Gomez, where did you study oceanography?

C. Punctuating Dialogue

1. Use a comma between the quotations and phrases used to introduce or conclude a quotation (dialogue tag). In some cases the comma may be replaced by a question mark or exclamation point. **Dialogue** can be punctuated in the following ways:

Mama said, "Son, you've got to be a man."

"Hello," he said, "is Deirdre home?"

"I've got a great idea!" she exclaimed.

"Can I borrow a pencil?" he asked.

Note: End punctuation always appears inside closing quotation marks, except when using MLA style parenthetical reference.

2. Start each new sentence of dialogue with a **capital letter**.

"Son, you've got to be a man," she said. "Take responsibility for your actions."

Mama said, "Son, you've got to be a man. Take responsibility for your actions."

3. Begin a new paragraph each time the speaker changes.

Mama said, "Son, you've got to be a man. Take responsibility for your actions."

"But, Mom, I'm just a kid," Tony responded.

4. Use single quotation marks to set off a quotation within a quotation.

"I remember when you said, 'Darlene will never fall in love.' Now she's getting married!"

D. Subject / Verb Agreement

1. A verb agrees with its subject in **number**.

Howard goes to the movies every Saturday.

Howard and his friend go to the movies every Saturday.

Howard, who is known for his great sex appeal, goes to the movies every Saturday.

2. The object of a preposition cannot be the subject of a verb. Skip over the prepositional phrase when matching subject and verb.

The **dogs** in my neighborhood **bark** for no reason.

The **dog** behind the bushes **barks** for no reason.

3. Compound subjects are plural.

Carter and Alan play basketball together.

4. With subjects connected by *or* or *nor* , make the verb agree with the part of the subject nearer to the verb.

A driver's license or credit **card is** required.

A driver's license or two credit **cards are** required.

Either the cat or the **dogs are** making noise.

Neither the dogs nor the **cat is** loose in the street.

5. When the subject is an indefinite pronoun, use the correct form of the verb.

a. Most indefinite pronouns are singular: *another, anybody, anyone, anything, each, either, everybody, everyone, everything, neither, nobody, none, no one, somebody, someone, something.*

Everyone on the team **supports** the coach.

b. Some indefinite pronouns are always plural: *both, many.*

Many of the girls **agree** that Neil is the best looking boy.

c. A few may be singular or plural depending on the nouns they replace: *all, any, some.*

Some of the pizza **has** disappeared.

Some of the golf balls **were** slippery.

6. Make the verb agree with its subject even when the subject follows the verb.

There **are** many **students** who love studying grammar.

E. Parallelism— Items in a series must appear in the same grammatical form.

Incorrect:

I like skiing, surfing, and to go shopping.

Correct:

I like skiing, surfing, and shopping.

Incorrect:

The plan suffered from poor preparation, there wasn't enough money, and lack of leadership.

Correct:

The plan suffered from poor preparation, insufficient funds, and lack of leadership

F. Problems with Pronouns

1. An antecedent is the word which is replaced by a pronoun. A pronoun agrees with its antecedent in number and gender.

Bobby gave his phone number to Jenny.

Jenny told all her friends the number.

2. Watch out for indefinite pronouns that have indeterminate gender. These are singular antecedents and take singular pronouns.

Each of the students must have **his or her** book.

3. When a pronoun appears as part of a compound structure, use the pronoun that would be appropriate if the noun were omitted.

Sally and **I** went to the movies.

All those who want to join the philosophy club, speak to John or **me**.

4. Use who and whom correctly. **Who** and **whoever** are used as subjects or subject complements. **Whom** and **whomever** are used as objects.

Whoever has the most toys at the end, wins.
Ask not for **whom** the bell tolls / It tolls for thee.

5. Use reflexive pronouns correctly. The **reflexive pronouns** are *myself, yourself, himself, herself, itself, ourselves, yourselves, themselves*. Reflexive pronouns are used when the object and the subject of the sentence refer to the same noun.

I love **myself**.
Seabury Hall considers **itself** one of the top schools in the state.

G. Problems with Verb Tense

1. Maintain consistent verb tense.

Incorrect:

Just as I **was starting** to drown, a stranger **comes** along and **saves** me.

Correct:

Just as I **was starting** to drown, a stranger **came** along and **saved** me.

2. Use the present tense to describe fictional events.

Incorrect:

Macbeth **killed** Duncan while the king **slept**.

Correct:

Macbeth **kills** Duncan while the king **sleeps**.

3. Also use present tense when expressing general truths and scientific principles, and when quoting, summarizing, or paraphrasing an author's views.

Galileo taught that the earth **revolves** around the sun.

4. Use the active voice. In the **active voice**, the subject of the sentence does the action; in the passive, the subject receives the action.

Active: The Yankees won the World Series.

Passive: The World Series was won by the Yankees.

H. Possessives

1. Form the possessive of singular nouns by adding 's.

The **family's** vacation was fun.

2. Form the possessive of plural nouns ending in -s by placing the apostrophe after the "s."

The **families'** vacations were always spent in Hana.

3. Form the possessive of plural nouns not ending in -s by adding 's after the noun.

The **children's** books were left by the lockers.

4. To form the possessive of singular nouns ending in -s, add 's unless it sounds awkward (like "z").

Lois's sister spent last year in India.

Sophocles' plays are among my favorites.

5. Apostrophes are not needed to create plural nouns.

The **families** always vacation in Hana.

6. Possessive pronouns have no apostrophes (*hers, his, ours, theirs, yours, its*). A common error is to write **it's** for **its**, or vice versa. The first is a contraction, meaning "it is." The second is a possessive.

It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood.

The dog wagged **its** tail.

I. Other Punctuation: semicolons, colons, dashes

1. Use a semicolon between closely related independent clauses not joined with a coordinating conjunction.

I did well on my report card; my parents were thrilled.

2. Use a semicolon between independent clauses linked with a transitional expression.

I did well on my report card; therefore, my parents were thrilled.

3. Use a semicolon to separate long or possibly ambiguous items in a series, especially when those items already include commas.

The elected officers are Alexi Kasparof, president; Ngyuen Vu, vice president; Malik Jefferson, secretary; and Juan Espinoza, treasurer.

4. Use a colon after an independent clause to direct attention to an explanation, a list, an appositive, or a quotation.

Faith is like love: it cannot be forced.

The team included at least the following: a steady point guard, an outstanding shooter, and a clumsy center.

My roommate is guilty of two of the seven deadly sins: gluttony and sloth.

Consider the words of Alfred E. Neuman: "What, me worry?"

5. Use a dash to set off parenthetical material that deserves emphasis. It can come in the middle or at the end of a sentence. A dash is formed by typing two hyphens.

The beauty of Maui—from its lovely beaches to its lush rain forests—continually bedazzles visitors.

Consider the average middle school student's diet--two hundred pounds of sugar per year, ninety percent more than that consumed by our ancestors.

Note: many word processing programs make it possible to type a dash without having to type two hyphens (—rather than --).

J. Titles

1. Capitalize the first, last and all major words in titles and subtitles of works such as books, articles, and songs.

To Kill a Mockingbird
"I Want to Hold Your Hand"

2. Underline or italicize titles of longer works (i.e. novels, plays, films, software, web sites, magazines).

Othello
Death of a Salesman
CBSSports.com
Seventeen

3. Use quotations marks on titles of shorter works (i.e. short stories, poems, songs, articles, episodes of television and radio programs, and chapters of books).

"The Tell-Tale Heart"
"The Road Not Taken"

K. Quoting lines of poetry in an essay

1. Use a slash to represent line breaks when quoting lines of poetry in an essay. This also applies to quoting lines of a play when those lines are written in verse form.

In his poem "Harlem," Langston Hughes asks, "What happens to a dream deferred?/ Does it dry up/ like a raisin in the sun?" (1-3).

Upon seeing Juliet in her window, Romeo exclaims, "But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?/ It is the east, and Juliet is the sun" (2.2.2-3).

2. When quoting a longer passage of poetry (four lines or more), use an indented quote. Indent ten spaces, and type the poem exactly as it appears in the original; you do not need to use quotation marks. Cite the line numbers in parentheses.

Margaret Atwood's poem turns on a startling double entendre:

you fit into me
like a hook into an eye

a fish hook
an open eye (1-4)

L. Commonly Confused Pairs

accept / except—*Accept* is a verb meaning "to receive."

Except is usually a preposition meaning "excluding."

advise / advice—*Advise* is a verb; *advice* is a noun.

affect / effect—*Affect* is usually a verb meaning "to change." *Effect* is usually a noun meaning "result."

all right—*All right* is always written as two words. There is no such word as "alright."

all ready / already—*All ready* means completely prepared. *Already* is an adverb which means "previously."

a lot—*A lot* is always written as two words. There is no such word as "alot."

complement / compliment—*Complement* is a noun meaning "something that completes," or a verb meaning "to go with" or "to complete." *Compliment* is a noun that means "a flattering remark" or a verb that means "to flatter."

good / well—*Good* is an adjective and *well* is an adverb.

its / it's—*Its* is a possessive pronoun. *It's* is a contraction meaning "it is."

lay/lie—*Lay* is a transitive verb meaning "to place" or "to put." Its four principal parts are *lay, laid, laid, and laying*. *Lie* is an intransitive verb meaning "to recline." Its four principal parts are *lie, lay, lain, and laying*.

principal / principle—*Principal* is a noun meaning "a head of a school" or "a sum of money." It is also an adjective meaning "most important." *Principle* is a noun meaning "a basic truth or law."

than / then—*Than* is a conjunction used for comparison. *Then* is an adverb denoting time.

their / there / they're—*Their* is a possessive pronoun. *There* is an adverb specifying a state of being or a place. *They're* is a contraction meaning "they are."

to / too / two—*To* is a preposition denoting direction. *Too* is a word meaning "also" or signifying degree. *Two* is a number.

that / which—*That* is usually reserved for interrupting clauses that are essential to the meaning of the sentence, while *which* is usually reserved for non-essential interrupting clauses.

whose / who's—*Whose* is a possessive pronoun. *Who's* is a contraction meaning "who is."

would have—Never use nonstandard *would of*.

your / you're—*Your* is a possessive pronoun. *You're* is a contraction meaning "you are."