Grammar for Engineers

Sentence Construction

Simple
A simple sentence has one independent clause (can have more than one subject and verb).
- The cat ran.
- The cat and dog ran and jumped.

Compound
A compound sentence has two independent clauses joined by a semicolon (;) or a comma with a conjunction (and, or, but, for, nor, so, yet).
- The dog barked, so the cat ran.
- The bird flew; the cat leaped.

Complex
A complex sentence has one independent clause and one dependent clause (which, that, where, since, because, etc.)
- Since the dog barked, the cat ran.
- The bird flew because the cat leaped.

Compound – Complex
A compound – complex sentence has at least two independent clauses and at least one dependent clause.
- While the dog was barking, the cat was running, and the bird was flying.

Subject / Verb Agreement
The subject and verb must agree in number.
- A singular subject needs a singular verb while a plural subject needs a plural verb.
  - We are trying a new approach.
  - I am trying a new approach.
- Ignore phrases and clauses that separate a subject with the verb.
  - The computers in the box are fragile.
  - The director, along with the customers, is at the meeting.
- If multiple subjects are joined with and, use a plural verb.
  - The engineer and the manager are working together.
- If multiple subject are joined with or, use a singular verb. When the subjects have different numbers, make the verb agree with whichever is closest (hint: singular first, it sounds better).
  - The engineers or the manufacturer drafts the changes.
  - The manufacturer or the engineers draft the changes.
- A singular verb should be used after each, everyone, everybody, nobody, somebody, every, one, another, and much.
  - Every engineer is required to be on time.
- A plural verb should be used after both, few, many, others, and several.
  - Several were upset with the new policy.
- If a group is acting as unit, a singular verb is used. If the members of the group are acting separately, a plural verb should be used.
  - The Board of Directors has the final vote.
  - The board members were not in agreement.
Noun / Pronoun Agreement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nominative</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>he</th>
<th>she</th>
<th>we</th>
<th>they</th>
<th>who</th>
<th>you</th>
<th>it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>me</td>
<td>him</td>
<td>her</td>
<td>us</td>
<td>them</td>
<td>whom</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possessive</td>
<td>my</td>
<td>his</td>
<td>her</td>
<td>our</td>
<td>theirs</td>
<td>whose</td>
<td>your</td>
<td>its</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexive</td>
<td>myself</td>
<td>himself</td>
<td>herself</td>
<td>ourselves</td>
<td>themselves</td>
<td>yourselves</td>
<td>itself</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- If *I, he, she, we,* or *they* can be exchanged, use *who* or *whoever.*
  - Who was chosen? (He was chosen.)
- If *me, him, her, us,* or *them* can be exchanged, use *whom* or *whomever.*
  - Whom did you ask? (I asked him.)
- Pluralize to avoid gender issues.
  - Each engineer must meet with his interns.
  - Engineers must meet with their interns.
- Reflexive tense only appears if the subject is mirrored in the sentence.
  - You must see it for yourself.

Passive versus Active Voice

- Passive voice is when the verb contains a derivation of “to be.”
  - Passive: The results were presented by the manager.
  - Active: The manager presented the results.
- Passive voice is when the main verb is written in the past form.
  - Passive: It was recommended to accept the proposal.
  - Active: The manager recommends the acceptance of the proposal.
- The sentence often contains a prepositional phrase beginning with “by.”
  - Passive: The results were presented by Kathy.
  - Active: Kathy presented the results.

Disadvantages of using the passive voice are that it is wordy, confuses the meaning, hides the doer, and is boring.

Advantages of using the passive voice are that the doer does not have to be known, the doer is unimportant, and it tends to be more tactful. Engineers write in the passive voice because it de-humanizes the work.

Punctuation

**Quotation Marks**

- Use quotation marks when the exact words of the speaker are used.
  - Dr. Joe said, “The exam is tomorrow.”
- Use quotation marks when words or phrases are being used as expressions.
  - Mark the envelope “Confidential.”
- Periods and commas always go inside the quotation marks. Colons and semicolons always go outside of the quotation marks. Question marks and exclamation points can go either place.
  - The speaker asked, “How many people like Six Sigma?”
  - When will the speaker stop saying “um”?
**Commas**

- Use a comma where there is a list of three or more items. Do not use a comma if there are only two items.
  - The dog, cat, and bird ran.
  - The cat ran and jumped.
- Use a comma in a sentence where two complete thoughts are used and separated by *and, or, but, for, nor, so,* or *yet.*
  - The scientists found the results, but the engineer disagreed.
- Use a comma to set off an introductory dependent clause.
  - Because the results were wrong, the project was rejected.
- Use a comma to set off parenthetical information.
  - Dr. Joe, the professor, was late to class.
- Use a comma between consecutive adjectives where the *and* is eliminated.
  - It is difficult to go to class on a clear, sunny day.
- Use a comma if addressing someone by name.
  - Be sure to lock the door, John, before you leave.
- Use a comma to separate the year from the day, but a comma is not used to separate the year from the month.
  - December 30, 2014
  - December 2014

**Semicolons**

- Use a semicolon instead of a coordinating conjunction (*and, or, but, for, nor, so,* or *yet*).
  - The scientist found the results; the engineer disagreed.
- Use a semicolon when two independent clauses are joined by a transition expression (*however, furthermore, therefore, accordingly,* etc.).
  - The scientist found the results; however, the engineer disagreed.

**Colons**

- Use a colon after a salutation in a business letter.
  - Dear Dr. Joe:
- Use a colon to separate a title from a subtitle or hours and minutes.
  - *Grammar for Engineers: A Complete Guide*
  - 1:10
- Use a colon to represent to word “to” in a ratio.
  - 5:1
- Use a colon for a long list.
  - The part lists includes the following items: speakers, CD player, keyboard, mouse, and monitor.

**Dashes**

- Use a dash to indicate emphasis.
  - We should diagnose—before calling maintenance—the problem.

**Parentheses**

- Use parentheses to de-emphasize information.
  - The managers (all engineers) were successful in winning the proposal.
Apostrophes

- Use apostrophes to show possession.
  - Woman’s, women’s
- Apostrophes can be used for contractions; however, in technical writing, contractions are not allowed.
- Use apostrophes to form a plural if the omission of it would be confusing.
  - Instead of “dotting the is,” it would be “dotting the i’s”

Hyphens

- Use hyphens when a compound noun does not have a noun as one of its elements (two-by-four), ends with a prepositional phrase (jack-of-all-trades), has a single letter in front of it (x-ray or e-mail), and when two nouns signify one thing (editor-publisher).

Capitalization

- Capitalize all official titles of honor and respect when they precede personal names.
  - President Joe
- Do not capitalize the title if the name follows it or is set off by commas.
  - Joe, the president, is over there.
  - The president, Joe, is over there.
- Capitalize the first, last, and all principal words of books, plays, and television programs. Articles, conjunctions, and short prepositions (less than five letters) are not capitalized; unless, they are at the beginning of the title.
  - Fiddler on the Roof
  - Going Through Changes
- Capitalize the full and shortened names of government agencies, departments, etc.
  - Please contact the Department of Defense.
- Capitalize all academic degrees that follow a name, whether they are abbreviated or written out.
  - Joe Bob, Ph.D.
- Capitalize all academic and religious titles such as doctor, professor, dean, and bishop when they precede a name, but not capitalize them if they stand alone.
  - Doctor Joe is over there.
  - The doctor will be here in five minutes.
- Capitalize trade names.
  - Post-it notes
- Capitalize official names of buildings, streets, and other public places.
  - The Palmer Engineering building is on Record Street.
- Do not capitalize seasons or time (a.m. or p.m.)
- Always capitalize the following
  - Days of the week, months, holidays, periods (events in history), special events, official documents, formal epithets, geographical names, sections of a country, landforms, bodies of water, and public places.
Misused Words

Affect / Effect
Affect: to influence, to change
Effect: impression, results

Among / Between
Among: used for more than two things
Between: used for only two things

Continual / Continuous
Continual: action that occurs with pauses and intermissions
Continuous: action that occurs without pauses

Disinterested / Uninterested
Disinterested: impartial, showing no preferences or prejudice
Uninterested: bored or lacking interest

Eager / Anxious
Eager: enthusiastic
Anxious: worried

Farther / Further
Farther: physical measure of distance
Further: degree or extent

Imply / Infer
Imply: to throw out a hint or suggestion
Infer: to take in a hint or suggestion

Lay / Lie
Lay: to put or place something (object)
Lie: to rest or recline (people)

Less / Fewer
Less: used for quantities
Fewer: used for individual units, numbers

Principal / Principle
Principal: main (person)
Principle: a theory, idea, or law

Stationary / Stationery
Stationary: still, fixed
Stationery: letter paper

Numbers
Basic Rule: Numbers from zero to ten are expressed as words. Numbers from 11 and above are expressed as figures.

Express as Words
- If the number begins a sentence.
- If two numbers are being used together (use smaller of two)
  - Two 3-pocket file folders
- For approximations
  - About a thousand
- If using ordinals
  - The eleventh person
- If the work “o’clock” is understood
  - It is five.

Express as figures
- For dates and times
- If the number follows a noun such as page, chapter, etc.
- If a unit follows the number
**Watch Consistency**

For example, we could say “two-by-four inch piece of wood.” We could also write “2 in. x 4 in.” wood. Both are correct, but you cannot mix them together. For example, do not write “2 by 4 inches.”

Units are always abbreviated and separated by the number with a space. It is 5 m long. Units should always be given in the SI terms. If there was a reason for choosing silly looking SI units because they made sense when they were in U.S. units, you should note that. For example, a piece of wood with the dimensions of 5.08 cm x 10.16 cm (2 in. x 4 in.) is chosen for this project. Note that non-SI units are followed by a period (they are considered abbreviations); SI units do not have a period (they are considered symbols).

**Tips for Proofreading**

- Proofread important or technical material at least twice.
- To check numbers, try to read numbers digit by digit backwards.
- Use a yellow sheet of paper to go line by line.
- Read the material backwards. It prevents your brain from filling in missing information.
- Check all calculations in tables. This is especially important when using Excel with formulas. Excel will calculate several decimal places even if it only displays a few decimals places.
January 19, 2016

Joe Bob, Ph.D.
1234 Tree Street
Reno, NV  89557

Dear Dr. Bob:

The mechanics of how to write a business letter are detailed. First of all, this business letter will be written in block style. Please notice that everything is aligned to the left of the page.

The business letter begins with the return address. Notice that the name of the sender does not appear. There is a space, and then the date is inserted. The full date should be given. There is another space, and the name and address of the receiver are placed in the document. After one more space, the salutation is given. Please note that a colon, not a comma, is used for business letters.

The text of the business letter then follows.

The business letter concludes with closing remarks. Four spaces are left between the closing and the printed name so that a signature can be placed above the printed name.

Sincerely,

(signature here)

Candice Bauer
To: Engineering Communications Class  
From: Candice Bauer  
Date: January 19, 2016  
Subject: How to write a memo

The formatting needed to write a memo is detailed. Please take note of how the header should appear. Memos can be several pages long. The first page is not numbered, but every page after that should be.

If using the default settings in Word, to get single space for the heading, click on the bottom corner arrow for the Paragraph icons. In the Spacing Section, select “0 pt” for “Before” and “After.” Also, for “Line spacing,” select “Single.”

Traditionally, the memo is written in block style where all of the text is aligned to the left. Aligning to the right is optional.

Memos do not have salutations or closing remarks.

If a memo is mailed electronically, a signature is not needed. If a memo is handwritten, a signature is not needed. If the memo is typed, the sender should initial by their name with a blue or black pen.