

## Guidelines for Punctuation and Grammar

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### Introduction

The quality of any paper is influenced by the wording, style, and correctness of the language used. Many fellow draft papers contain many of the common errors. Attention to this part of writing can make a difference in conveying your message.

### Common Errors to Watch For

1. Inappropriate capitalizations
  - a. Generally, only the first word in a sentence or in a bullet should be capitalized unless the word is a proper noun.
  - a. Department names should not be capitalized (finance department, not Finance department).
  - b. Committee or team names should not be capitalized.
  - c. Product names should not be capitalized unless they are brand names. For example ibuprofen would not be capitalized but Motrin would.
  - d. In titles, all words should be capitalized except articles (a, the) and conjunctions (and, but). Avoid using all capitals (ALL CAPITALS) in any application.
2. Consistency with bullets
  - a. Normally there should not be a period or comma at the end of bullet statements. This should be consistent throughout your presentation.
  - b. It is best to start each bullet with an action verb unless the information is full sentences.
  - c. Regardless of whether they are started with a verb or not, be consistent through the full bullet list.
3. Abbreviations/Acronyms
  - a. Be consistent. Do not spell out the month in one place and abbreviate in another.
  - b. For any but the most common acronyms, always spell out the whole thing the first time it is used and put the acronym in parentheses after, e.g., daylight savings time (DST).
  - c. Abbreviations (but not acronyms) will normally end in a period. The one exception I can think of is the months of the year. The abbreviation of month (mo.) would have a period but the abbreviation of January (Jan) would not.
4. Comma usage
  - a. Comma usage is tough. In general, use a comma when you would normally pause when speaking. The following link is an easy refresher if you're interested:  
<http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/comma.html>
  - b. In a list of several items, the use of a comma before the "and" is optional. But be consistent. Sometimes the comma is required for clarity as in, *"Some sandwich combinations are peanut butter and*

*jelly, ham and cheese, and cream cheese and olives.*” For that reason it may be safer to always use the comma.

- c. When two full sentences are connected by a conjunction, use a comma. If they are not full sentences, don't use a comma. Note the difference below:
  - i. The client started the meeting, and the consultant took charge.
  - ii. The client started the meeting and went through the agenda quickly.

#### 5. Tense/tense agreement

- a. Do not mix present tense and past tense. Generally better to stay in present tense.
- b. Watch for misspellings that change tense (sent instead of send). These will not be picked up by spell check.
- c. Try to stay in the active tense rather than passive (“We created a policy” rather than “a policy was created”).
- d. Do not mix active and passive tense in any bullet list.

#### 6. Plurals

- a. Watch for inappropriate use of plurals (or singular when it should be plural).
- b. In a list of things stay consistent with singular or plural
- c. To make acronyms plural, add an “s” not an apostrophe s.
  - i. Right: FTEs, GPOs
  - ii. Wrong FTE’s, GPO’s

#### 7. Possessives

- a. Put the apostrophe before the “s” when the subject is singular but after the “s” when the subject is plural. For example, the physician’s preference would refer to the preference of a single surgeon while the physicians’ preference would refer to the joint preference of a group of physicians.

#### 8. Using correct words

- a. Use of i.e. versus e.g. The abbreviation i.e. stands for “that is” while e.g. stands for “for example”. “i.e.” is used when you wish to clarify while “e.g.” is used to list or provide one of many possible examples. Always use the two periods (not ie or eg). There is always a comma after each.

#### 9. Hyphens and Dashes

- a. Hyphens – Use no space before or after a hyphen.
- b. Dashes – Type as two hyphens with no space before or after hyphens or use the longer dash symbol in your word processing program’s symbol list with no space before or after the symbol.