

# GRAMMAR

(Courtesy of the Faculty of English)

This is intended to serve as reference for basic grammatical points which are common sources of confusion. It was written by Dr S L Manning for the English Faculty and has been adapted for use by Philosophy Faculty students.

If you feel your grasp of grammar is shaky, use these guidelines.

## SOME BASIC SPELLING RULES

1. 'i' Before 'e' except after 'c'. When the 'i' and the 'e' Make the Sound Double 'e'.

ceiling      achievement      deceitful      siege      receipt

This rule always works except for the few exceptions which you have to learn:

weir      weird      protein      seize

2. When you add an 's' to a word that ends in 'y', then the 'y' changes to 'ie' unless there is a vowel before the 'y'.

try = tries      annoy = annoys      fly = flies      horrify = horrifies

3. Prefixes

In a compound word formed by adding a prefix like dis- or un-, it is often helpful to think about how the word was originally spelt.

dis+appear	disappear	un+necessary	unnecessary
dis+appoint	disappoint	un+inspiring	uninspiring
dis+satisfied	dissatisfied		

4. Words and names commonly mis-spelt in essays by students:

analytic	practice (noun), also: advice
argument	Russell
definite	separate
definitely	simile
existence	who's (may only be used as an abbreviation for 'who is')
Parfit	whose = 'belonging to whom'
practise (verb)	also: advise

(See below: section on the apostrophe)

## PUNCTUATION

(What follows is an abbreviated handy guide only to a few common misunderstandings and mistakes)

### The Apostrophe

1. History of the apostrophe: Latin and the older forms of English are known as 'inflected' languages. This means that the endings of words changed to indicate the person of the verb or the case of the noun. In modern English there are very few inflections left, e.g. 'I walk' but 'he walks' (the final /s/ is a third person inflection). The Latin phrase *in loco parentis* (in the place of the parent) has two inflected endings: 'loco' is the form of the noun 'locus' used when we want to say 'in' or 'by' or 'from', 'parentis' is the form of 'parens' which we use when we want to say 'of.' This 'of' case (or genitive case) is one of the inflections which has lasted into modern English. It is sometimes called the Saxon Genitive and is marked by the apostrophe + s. It is easy to see what has happened in modern English if we go back to Chaucer's (nb the genitive) English. The titles of two of the *Canterbury Tales* are: 'The Clerkes Tale of Oxenford' and 'The Nonnes Preestes Tale'. We would translate those as: 'The Clerk's Tale of Oxford' and 'The Nun's Priest's Tale'. The apostrophe (') is normally used to indicate that a letter has been omitted. Here the /e/ in the final /es/ syllable has been omitted in modern English. The reason that it has been omitted is that we no longer pronounce the /es/ syllable. We retain the form, however, because it is a useful way of being able to indicate the 'of' relationship. Otherwise we would have to say 'The Tale of the Priest of the Nun.' (Cf the French 'La Plume de ma tante.')
2. Use of the apostrophe in the singular. The apostrophe may be used in the singular. (The test in all cases is that you can put the phrase into other words using 'of'):

my wife's father (the father of my wife)  
his family's support (the support of his family)  
the prisoner's release (the release of the prisoner)

3. When a singular noun ends in /s/. There are a number of nouns, often names, which end in /s/, e.g. Burns, Jones, Dickens. The writer has a choice when making the genitive. Either form within the following pairs is correct -

Dickens' novels or Dickens's novels  
Burns' poetry or Burns's poetry  
Barnabas' nose or Barnabas's nose

Dicken's novels or Burn's poetry or Barnaba's nose is not.

To form the plural possessive, these add an apostrophe to the /s/ of the plural in the normal way, e.g.

bosses'      the octopuses' tentacles      the Joneses' dog      the Thomases' dog

4. The apostrophe in the plural /s/. With plural nouns the apostrophe comes after the /s/. (Again, you can always test whether to use the apostrophe, and where, by rephrasing the expression with 'of'):

ten days' absence (an absence of ten days)  
the lecturers' common room (the common room of the lecturers)  
nun's habits (the habits of a nun)

5. The apostrophe with irregular plurals. English has a number of irregular plural forms, e.g. child/children, man/men, woman/women. In the plural, these forms take apostrophe + /s/ and not /s/ + apostrophe:

children's shoes  
a women's college

6. Plural nouns used as adjectives. This is a source of potential confusion and, in some cases, a grey area. A number of expressions use a plural noun as an adjective to modify a following noun; in these cases the plural noun is not in the genitive case (in an 'of' relationship) and therefore no apostrophe is required. Some examples will make this clear:

the arms race

(This cannot really be rephrased as 'the race of arms'; it is analogous to 'the egg and spoon race', although metaphorical)

a sports car

(Again, we cannot say 'a car of sports'; 'sports' is being used here as an adjective, as opposed, say, to a 'family' car.)

7. Names ending in -es pronounced iz are treated like plurals and take only an apostrophe, e.g.

Bridges'            Moses'  
Hodges'            Riches'

8. It is customary in classical works to use the apostrophe only, irrespective of pronunciation, for ancient classical names ending in /-s/, e.g.

Ceres'                    Herodotus'            Venus'  
Demosthenes'            Mars'                    Xerxes'

9. Jesus' is an accepted liturgical archaism, but in non-liturgical use, Jesus's is acceptable (used, e.g. in the NEB, John 2-3).

10. Traditionally, expressions in the form: 'for --sake' take the apostrophe without the /s/:

for goodness' sake for conscience' sake

11. After -x and -z, use -'s, e.g., Ajax's, Berlioz's music, Leibniz's law, Lenz's law.

12. Some other uses of /s/. In the following sentence:

My car is faster than John's

'than John's' means 'than John's car is'. The apostrophe here indicates an omission of more than a single letter. Cf. also

I'm going to the dentist's

1. The difference between 'It's' and 'Its' is quite a separate issue, but it also relates to the use of the apostrophe. Again, the apostrophe is used in 'it's' to indicate that a letter has been omitted. Here it is the /i/ of 'is' (It's = it is). In all cases when you can rephrase the expression to say 'it is', you should use 'it's' with the apostrophe:

It's a long, long way to Tipperary                      I wonder whether it's going to work

Its, on the other hand, is the form of the third-person singular possessive adjective used with 'things' (the neutral). The other third-person singular forms are 'his' and 'her'.

The chair was in its usual place  
The pound held its own against the mark

In both cases, 'its' cannot be rephrased to 'it is'. Finally, do not use the apostrophe:

- a) with the plural non-possessive -s: notices such as 'CREAM TEA'S' are often seen, but are wrong
- b) with the possessive of pronouns, hers, its, ours, theirs, yours. The possessive of 'who' is 'whose'. There are no words her's, our's, their's, your's.

### The colon:

- 1. Links two grammatically complete clauses, but marks a step forward, from introduction to main theme, from cause to effect, or from premise to conclusion, e.g. 'To commit sin is to break God's law: sin, in fact, is lawlessness.'
- 2. Introduces a list of items (a dash should not be added), e.g. 'The following were present: J. Smith, J. Brown, P. Thompson, M. Jones.' It is also used after such expressions as 'for example,' 'namely,' 'the following,' 'to resume,' 'to sum up.'

### The semicolon

separates those parts of a sentence between which there is a more distinct break than would call for a comma, but which are too closely connected to be made into

separate sentences. Typically, these will be clauses of similar importance and grammatical construction, e.g.

'To err is human; to forgive, divine.'

#### The comma:

The least emphatic, and most over-used, separating mark of punctuation. Its proper uses include:

1. Between adjectives which each qualify a noun in the same way, e.g. 'A cautious, reticent man.' When adjectives qualify the noun in different ways, or when one adjective qualifies another, no comma is used, e.g. 'A distinguished foreign author,' 'a bright red tie.'
2. To separate items (including the last) in a list of more than two items, e.g. 'Potatoes, peas and carrots', 'Potatoes, peas or carrots', 'Potatoes, peas, etc.'
3. To separate co-ordinated main clauses, e.g. 'Cars will turn here, and coaches will go straight on.' But not when they are closely linked, e.g. 'Do as I tell you and you'll never regret it.'
4. To mark the beginning and end of a parenthetical word or phrase, e.g. 'I am sure, however, that it will not happen,' 'Fred, who is bald, complained of the cold.' A common mistake is to begin a parenthesis with a comma, but fail to complete it in the same way.
5. After a participial or verbless clause, a salutation, or a vocative, e.g. 'Having had breakfast, I went for a walk;' 'The sermon over, the congregation filed out,' or 'The sermon being over, the congregation ..;' 'My son, give me thy heart.' *Not* 'The Sermon, being over, (etc.). No comma is necessary with expressions like 'My friend Lord X' or 'My son John.'
6. To separate a phrase or subordinate clause from the main clause so as to avoid misunderstanding, e.g. 'In the valley below, the villages looked very small;' 'He did not go to church, because he was playing golf;' 'In 1982, 1918 seemed a long time ago.' A comma should not be used to separate a subject from its object (predicate), or a verb from an object that is a clause:  
  
'A car with such a high-powered engine, should not let you down' and 'They believed, that nothing could go wrong' are both incorrect.
7. Following words introducing direct speech, e.g. 'They answered, "Here we are."'
8. Following 'Dear Sir,' 'Dear John,' etc., in letters, and after 'Yours sincerely,' etc. No comma is needed between month and year in dates, e.g. 'In December 1982' or between number and road in addresses, e.g. '12 Acacia Avenue.'

### Full stop:

1. Used at the end of all sentences which are not questions or exclamations. The next word should normally begin with a capital letter.
2. Used after abbreviations: 'see pp. 18f.' If a point making an abbreviation comes at the end of a sentence, it also serves as the closing full stop, e.g.

'She also kept dogs, cats, birds, etc.' but 'She also kept pets (dogs, cats, birds etc.)'

3. When a sentence concludes with a quotation which itself ends with a full stop, question mark, or exclamation mark, no further full stop is needed, e.g.

'He cried "Be off!" But the child would not move.'

But if the quotation is a short statement, and the introducing sentence has much greater weight, the full stop is put outside the quotation marks, e.g.

'Over the entrance to the temple at Delphi were written the words "Know thyself".'

### Question mark

1. Follows every question which expects a separate answer. The next word should begin with a capital letter. Not used after indirect questions, e.g.

'He asked me why I was there.'