

Grammar Rules to Consider

You should have a copy of Diane Hacker's **A Writer's Reference**, which is an excellent source for grammar and logistics questions. The following examples are to help clarify common errors or ambiguities in writing.

I. Commas

-Always use a comma before a conjunction when two complete sentences are connected.

Einstein hypothesized that electrons were particles, and he also developed the formula $E = mc^2$.

-Always use a comma after an introductory phrase. (Hacker p. 242)

Before Germer began any experiment, he carefully checked each component of his apparatus.

-Always use a comma (or semicolon if an individual list contains commas) after EACH word, phrase, etc. in a list. (Hacker p. 237)

Nobel scientists of the early twentieth century included Heisenberg, Einstein, and Pauli.

There are different rules for using commas to set apart a **descriptive phrase** within a sentence (e.g. parenthetical expressions, absolute phrases, transitional expressions, etc.). The Hacker has good examples of these on pages 242-243.

Pages 239-241 in the Hacker have good examples for how to use commas with **restrictive and nonrestrictive phrases**.

II. Colons

-Do not use a colon after a verb.

The components of the instrument are a light source, a lens, and photographic paper.

Do not use a colon after a prepositional phrase.

The results of the experiment were tabulated with a computer, a calculator, and by hand.

III. Other items

-Do not end sentences with prepositions.

-Do not use two different verb tenses in the same sentence. Also, when writing about something that has already occurred, use the past tense.

-Possessive pronouns are used to modify a gerund phrase. (Hacker p. 185)

Your using my book is ok with me as long as you don't damage it.

-The possessive form of a noun is used when the noun modifies the gerund phrase. (Hacker p. 185)

Jay's cleaning the lab apparatus saved us two hours on Tuesday.

-Spell out numbers under 101, e.g. one, twenty-one, ninety-nine, one hundred, 106, etc.

-Do not use contractions or the possessive form of a word in formal writing. (The possessive form of a name is ok in your paper.)

One **should not** dispose of aluminum cans in the trash but should recycle them.

"...the **strength of the material**..." NOT "...the material's strength..."

-Formal writing sounds better if you don't use **colloquial (or slang) expressions** too much.

For example, "get," "round to," "fixing," etc. The verb "to get" has so many other verbs that can be used in its place. Instead of "I **got** a book for Christmas." one could say, "I **received** a book for Christmas."

-When using references, quotation marks, etc., in conjunction with commas and other punctuation marks, **the punctuation mark goes before the reference number** or quotation mark.

In 1998 alone, the United States, Europe, and Asia together produced ninety-four million tons of consumer **plastics**.¹

If you have any questions about these rules, please ask.