



OLLI@UGA STYLE SHEET

Created and Compiled by Nancy Grayson
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SOURCES

Chicago Manual of Style, 16th Edition (CMS)
Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th Edition
Strunk & White, The Elements of Style, 4th Edition
Mary Norris, Between You and Me (2015)

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QUICK-REFERENCE LIST

Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, abbreviated as OLLI (all caps, except in website and email address)

OLLI@UGA (all caps)

OLLI members (not OLLIs, Ollies, etc.)

New members (now preferred over Newbies)

New Member Orientation

OLLI Times (in italics; newsletter masthead set in roman type)

Special Interest Groups, abbreviated as SIGs (*not* SIGS)

OLLI Executive Committee

OLLI President-Elect

OLLI Vice President (no hyphen)

OLLI Board of Directors

OLLI Bylaws

OLLI Conflict-of-Interest Policy

OLLI Annual Meeting

OLLI Bash and Activity Fair (previously New Member Bash)

OLLI@UGA Class Registration Form

River's Crossing

website, web page

Abila

Avecra

CD, DVD, GPS, JPEG, PDF, URL (all caps, no periods)

AB, BA, MA, MBA, JD, PhD, and other academic degrees (*CMS* now recommends omitting periods)

General Guidelines for Capitalization and Abbreviation

--Spell out less commonly used acronyms and abbreviations at their first occurrence in a letter or document.

--In general, use all capitals for acronyms.

--Capitalize OLLI Staff positions and Executive Committee offices.

--Capitalize names of OLLI committees and Special Interest Groups.

--Capitalize OLLI functions/programs (e.g., New Member Orientation, Brown Bag Lunch Series).

--Capitalize names of OLLI forms with specific titles (e.g., OLLI@UGA Class Registration Form).

--Capitalize and enclose names of OLLI classes in quotation marks (e.g., a class titled "Affordable Housing Myths"); if the subject rather than the exact title is given, use lowercase and no quotes (a class on affordable housing myths).

--Use no periods with abbreviations that appear *in full capitals*: VP, CEO, MD, etc.

--Use periods with abbreviations that end *in a lowercase letter*: p. (page), vol. (volume), a.m., p.m., Dr., Ms., etc.

--Capitalize names of federal programs (e.g., Social Security, Affordable Care Act).

--Capitalize civil, military, religious, political, and professional titles when they immediately precede a personal name, but lowercase them when they're used in place of a name (e.g., Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr., the chief justice; Pope Francis I, the pope; Professor John C. Hall, the professor). The same principle applies to institutions (the University of Georgia, the university), with the exception of institutions known by a shortened form (the Art Institute of Chicago, the Art Institute; the Smithsonian Institution, the Smithsonian).

--Lowercase most generic titles describing a person's role or occupation (e.g., the historian Eric Foner).

--Lowercase common designations of ethnic groups (e.g., black people, blacks, people of color, white people, whites).

--Lowercase articles (*a, an, the*) and most prepositions in book, section, and chapter titles, except when they appear at the beginning of the title.

Dates

January 30, 2016 (month-day-year form preferred over day-month-year)
Saturday, January 30 (*not* 30th)
Saturday, January 30, 2016, at 2:00 p.m. (in running text with a full date, a comma must follow the year)
January 2016 (no comma between month and year or after the year in running text)
December 25-January 1 *or* Dec. 25-Jan. 1 (*not* December 25-Jan. 1); date form has to be consistently spelled out or abbreviated
2010-2016 *or* 2010-16; from 2010 to 2016, *not* from 2010-2016 (spell out both *from* and *to*)
the 1990s (no apostrophe before the s); the nineties
the first decade of the twenty-first century *or* the years 2000-2009; avoid using "the 2000s"
the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; *but* from the nineteenth to the twentieth century
the winter of 2015/16

Times of Day

1:00 p.m. (preferred over "1 p.m." to avoid such mixed constructions as "1-3:15 p.m.")
1:00 to 3:15, 1:00-3:15, from 1:00 to 3:15 (*not* from 1:00-3:15—if *from* is spelled out, *to* must be also)
a.m., p.m. (use periods)
EST, EDT, PST, and other time zones (all caps, no periods)
With *o'clock*, the number is always spelled out: "The class begins at two o'clock."

Phone Numbers

706-542-7715 (use hyphens, not periods, to separate numbers)

Numbers

--In general, spell out whole numbers between zero and one hundred, as well as whole numbers followed by *hundred*, *thousand*, etc. Numerals can be used if many numbers occur within a document, but they must be used consistently within that context.

--Always spell out a number that begins a sentence. To avoid awkwardness, recast the sentence slightly: "The year 2015 was marked by . . ." (instead of "Two thousand fifteen was marked by . . .") or "In all, 150 people applied" (instead of "One hundred fifty people applied").

--Spell out simple fractions: *three-fourths*. Hyphenate fractions used as nouns, adjectives, and adverbs.

--Express percentages in numerals and spell out *percent* (except in technical contexts): "more than 65 percent of the members."

Proper Nouns (specific names of persons, places, or things)

John J. Smith Jr., John J. Smith III (no commas around *Jr.* or *Sr.* or around *II* or *III*)

P. D. James, M. F. K. Fisher, W. E. B. DuBois (insert a space between initials)

FDR, JFK (no spaces or periods if the entire name is abbreviated)

African American, Chinese American (not hyphenated as noun or adjective), *but* Anglo-American

Josiah Meigs Professor Emeritus (capitalize "Emeritus")

the Jones family, the Joneses; the Martinez family, the Martinezes

fathers-in-law, courts-martial (add "s/es" to main word in a compound noun to form the plural)

Kansas's legislature, Dickens's novels, Berlioz's works (add 's to form singular possessive of names ending in *s*, *x*, or *z*)

the Lincolns' marriage, the Martinezes' son (add ' to form plural possessive)

United States' role, Callaway Gardens' curator (add ' to form possessive)

the Jacksons live here, the Jacksons' house (don't confuse plural and possessive)

[Also see capitalization guidelines (above) and guidelines on apostrophes and forms of the possessive in Punctuation section.]

Geographical Nouns and Adjectives

--In general, capitalize nouns denoting regions of the world or of a particular country—e.g., the South, the Deep South, the North, the Midwest, Central America, Europe, Africa, the North Atlantic, the Great Plains, the Swiss Alps. Some terms derived from these regions (e.g., European) are also capitalized.

--In most instances, lowercase adjectives and some nouns pertaining to geographic regions—e.g., southern, northern, southerner, northerner (EXCEPT in American Civil War contexts, where they're capitalized).

--In running text, spell out the names of states and countries when they stand alone or follow the name of a city: United States; France; Athens, Georgia. *Where abbreviations of state names are appropriate*, use two-letter postal codes: US, GA, NY, IL, etc.

Frequently Used Words or Abbreviations

email, ebook

sign-up

award-winning

fundraising

online

ongoing

minivan

coeditor

transatlantic

cyberspace

a conflict of interest; conflict-of-interest regulations (phrasal adjectives are hyphenated)

a well-attended function; a function that is well attended

a half hour, a half-hour meeting

our members-only Abila site

nonmember, nonprofit (most words beginning with *non* are no longer hyphenated)

reschedule (most words with prefixes are not hyphenated)

multipurpose

data are (use plural verb)

different from (not than)

waiting list (noun), to wait-list (verb)

a wide range of courses (*not* "a wide-range"; *wide* is an adjective); wide-ranging courses

single- and multi-session enrollments (insert space before *and*)

U.S. (use only as an adjective); spell out United States when used as a noun

bachelor's or master's degree (lowercased if used generically)

locally owned (adverb-adjective combinations are not hyphenated if the adverb ends in *-ly*)

[See Punctuation section for general guidelines regarding hyphens.]

PUNCTUATION

Commas

- 1) Set off a group of words that function together within a sentence. Examples: September 11, 2001, lives on in our memories. (The comma after 2001 is essential to keep the date intact as a unit.) The most provocative, if not the most important, part of the statement came last.
- 2) Set off nonrestrictive clauses, those that describe or supplement a noun but are not essential in identifying it: e.g., This year, which has been dry, was bad for crops. Commas are *not* used to set off restrictive (defining) clauses: The year that just ended was bad for crops. **Nonrestrictive clauses are usually introduced by *who* or *which* and restrictive clauses by *that*.**
- 3) Set off appositives, nouns or noun phrases that define or further identify the noun they immediately follow: e.g., George Washington, our first president, was born in Virginia.
- 4) Set off introductory phrases and dependent clauses that precede a main clause. Examples: Having finished her work, she met a friend for lunch. If you know you cannot attend a class, please notify the OLLI office. Note, however, that a dependent clause following a main clause should *not* be preceded by a comma if it is restrictive (essential to the meaning of the sentence): We will agree to the proposal if you accept our conditions.
- 5) Separate items in a series. A comma should also be inserted before *and* in a series of three or more things. (Note: If the elements in a series are long and complex or contain internal punctuation, it's best to separate them with semicolons rather than commas.)
- 6) Precede the conjunctions *and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, *so*, *yet* that join independent clauses. Example: The bus never came, so we took a taxi. BUT, a comma should *not* separate the parts of a compound verb (two or more verbs with the same subject).
- 7) Set off adverbs like *however*, *therefore*, *indeed*. If *therefore* and *indeed* are essential to the meaning of the sentence or if no pause is intended, commas can be omitted.
- 8) Introduce quotations or dialogue, unless either is preceded by *that*, *whether*, or a similar conjunction.

Semicolons

- 1) Are used between two independent clauses not joined by a conjunction.

- 2) Precede *however, thus, hence, indeed, accordingly, besides, therefore, moreover*, and sometimes *then* when these transitional adverbs join independent clauses; a comma usually follows the adverb. A semicolon can also be used before (and a comma after) expressions like *that is, for example*, and *namely* when they introduce an independent clause.
- 3) Are often used to separate the items in a complex series, especially when they contain internal punctuation (see Commas, #4). Example: The United States sent six delegates to the international conference; France sent four; Germany, five; and Great Britain, three.

Colons

- 1) Introduce element(s) that illustrate or amplify what has preceded the colon—usually to convey the sense of “as follows.” **The words introducing a series or list—i.e., the words before the colon—must constitute a grammatically complete sentence.** Example: The sweater came in four colors: red, navy, light green, and black. When a colon is used within a sentence (as in this example), the first word after the colon is lowercased unless it’s a proper noun. When a colon introduces two or more sentences, a speech in dialogue, an extract, or a direct question, the first word following it is capitalized. In running text, one space follows a colon.
- 2) Introduce quotations or speech in dialogue, often in a less casual way than with a comma.

Please note: Periods and commas are inserted before closing quotation marks (double or single); colons and semicolons go after closing quotation marks (double or single).

Hyphens

- 1) Set off numbers that are not inclusive (e.g., telephone and social security numbers).
- 2) Are used with phrasal adjectives (words that function as a unit to modify a noun): e.g., a full-length study, an easy-to-read document; nineteenth-century song-and-dance numbers; a twenty-four-hour-a-day schedule. The hyphens are sometimes essential to avoid ambiguity: a small animal hospital *versus* a small-animal hospital. If two adjectives end in a common element, a suspension hyphen should follow the unattached words to show the connection: single- and multi-session enrollments (note that a space precedes *and*). A phrasal adjective that *follows* a verb or noun is usually not hyphenated: a class that is well attended (compared to “a well-attended class”).

- 3) Are not used with adverb-adjective combinations when the adverb ends in -ly: e.g., locally owned, highly paid, largely irrelevant, hugely successful.
- 4) Are increasingly not being used for compound nouns and adjectives; the trend is toward closed compounds: e.g., bookkeeping, caregiving, copyediting, crossover, online, ongoing (*but* on-site, on-screen), socioeconomic. Some compounds are left open as nouns but hyphenated as adjectives (e.g., decision making, a decision-making body). When in doubt, it's best to hyphenate only when doing so will aid readability. You can also consult the latest edition of *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*.
- 5) Are used with proper nouns and adjectives relating to geography or nationality when the first term is a prefix or *between* is implied: e.g., Anglo-American cooperation, Anglo-Americans, the U.S.-Canada border, the Franco-Prussian War. Otherwise, the noun and adjective forms are not hyphenated: African Americans, African American president, South Asian Americans.
- 6) Are increasingly not used with *most* nouns and adjectives beginning with prefixes: e.g., antebellum, antihero, bisexual, biophysical, coeditor, counterrevolution, cyberspace, email, extramural, hyperactive, infrastructure, macroeconomics, midcentury (*but* mid-1930s, mid-twentieth century, mid-twentieth-century history), minivan, nonviolent, postdoctoral (*but* post-World War II), premodern, preregistration, prewar, preempt (*but* pre-Renaissance), reschedule, reunify, semiconductor, subzero, superannuated, transcontinental, transatlantic, unfunded, underemployed, underrated, website (*but* web page). Words that might otherwise be misread (e.g., re-cover, re-creation, co-op) should be hyphenated. Exceptions: Compounds formed with the following prefixes are usually hyphenated: cross (cross-reference, cross-country), ex (ex-partner), great (great-grandmother), half (adj. forms hyphenated but noun forms open: half-asleep, a half-hour session, *but* a half hour), quasi (quasi-public), self (self-conscious, self-restraint).
- 7) Are not used with *most* compounds formed with suffixes: e.g., nationhood, penniless, worldwide. Exceptions: president-elect, family-style (as adj.), university-wide.

Dashes and Parentheses

- 1) Em dashes (formed by two hyphens, which word-processing programs fuse to approximate the width of a capital M) are used to set off explanatory elements or indicate sudden breaks in thought or sentence structure. They function as alternatives to parentheses, commas, or colons and, *if used sparingly*, can be very effective. **Note that no space separates dashes from the words surrounding them.**
- 2) Parentheses (stronger than commas and similar to dashes) also set off material from the surrounding text, including information that has no grammatical relationship to the rest of the sentence. Parenthetical material within parentheses should be enclosed in

square brackets. A period, question mark, exclamation point, or closing quotation mark precedes a closing parenthesis if it belongs to the parenthetical matter; it follows the closing parenthesis if it belongs to the surrounding sentence.

Forward Slash (Solidus)

The solidus is shorthand for *or*. It's often used for alternative spellings or names, such as he/she or Hercules/Heracles. It can also signify *and*, though still conveying a sense of alternatives (an MD/PhD program, a Jekyll/Hyde personality). The solidus is sometimes used in dates to indicate the last part of one year and the first part of the next (the winter of 2015/16).

Quotation Marks and Italics

- 1) Quotes can be run in to the surrounding text and enclosed in quotation marks, “like this,” or set off as a block quotation or extract. Block quotations start a new line, are indented from the left margin, and are not enclosed in quotation marks. Length is usually the deciding factor. Short quotations, especially those that are not full sentences, are generally run in to the text. Longer quotes (at least 6-8 lines of text) can be set off as block quotations.
- 2) Titles of books, journals, movies, and paintings—as well as names of ships and other craft, species names, and legal cases—are italicized. Titles of poems, short stories, book chapters, and journal articles are placed in quotation marks. Neither quotes nor italics should be used with titles of book series or websites.
- 3) Quotes within quotes are enclosed in single quotation marks: e.g., “To say that ‘I mean what I say’ is the same as ‘I say what I mean’ is to be as confused as Alice at the Mad Hatter’s tea party,” remarked Stephen.
- 4) Key terms, as well as unfamiliar foreign words and phrases, are italicized—at least on first occurrence in a given context. Definitions or translations of these terms appear in quotation marks. Words used as words and letters as letters are italicized: e.g., The word *llama* is spelled with two *l*'s. (Note that the plural of letters used as letters is formed by 's; the 's is in roman type, not italic.)
- 5) Periods and commas precede closing quotation marks, whether double or single. Colons and semicolons follow closing quotation marks, as do question marks and exclamation points (unless these are part of the quoted material).
- 6) “Scare quotes,” often used to signify that a term is meant in an ironic or slangy sense, should be avoided. They lose their impact and irritate readers if overused.

Apostrophes and Forms of the Possessive

- 1) The possessive of most singular nouns is formed by adding an apostrophe and *s*; the possessive of most plural nouns is formed by adding an apostrophe only. This general rule extends to proper nouns, including names ending in *s*, *x*, or *z* (in both singular and plural forms) and to letters and numbers: e.g., Dickens's novels, Marx's theories, Berlioz's music, the Lincolns' marriage, the Williamses' house, JFK's legacy, 1998's heavy snowstorm. Exceptions: nouns plural in form but singular in meaning (politics' impact, the United States' role, Callaway Gardens' founder)
- 2) Closely linked nouns are considered a singular unit in forming the possessive when the thing being possessed is the same for both: e.g., my aunt and uncle's house. When the ownership is separate, both nouns take the possessive (my aunt's and uncle's profiles).
- 3) Such expressions as "in three days' time" and "an hour's delay" require an apostrophe, which implies *of*.
- 4) A noun or pronoun followed by a gerund (a verb form ending in *-ing* that's used as a noun) should be in the possessive case: e.g., I appreciate your responding so quickly, *not* I appreciate you responding so quickly. We objected to the children's fighting in the car, *not* We objected to the children fighting in the car. [The objection is not to the children but to their fighting, just as what I appreciate (in the previous example) is *your* quick response.] Because the gerund (as a noun) cannot be modified by another noun, the noun or pronoun that precedes it must be turned into a possessive adjective in order to become part of the gerund phrase. This grammatical convention is called "the possessive before a gerund."

Periods and Ellipsis Points

- 1) A period, of course, marks the end of a declarative or an imperative sentence: e.g., We usually go on vacation in August. Don't go. Stay here.
- 2) When an entire sentence is enclosed in parentheses or square brackets, the period goes inside the closing parenthesis or bracket.
- 3) An ellipsis is the omission of a word, phrase, line, paragraph, or more from a quoted passage. Such omissions are indicated by the use of three spaced periods called "ellipsis points." They must always appear together on the same line, along with any following punctuation. A period is added *before* an ellipsis to indicate that the end of a sentence has been omitted, unless the sentence is deliberately incomplete. Similarly, a period at the end of a sentence in the original is retained *before* an ellipsis indicating the omission of material following the period. What precedes and follows the four dots (period and

ellipsis points) should be grammatically complete sentences. The first word after an ellipsis is capitalized if it begins a new sentence.

Three dots are used at the end of a quoted sentence that is deliberately left grammatically incomplete: The Declaration of Independence begins with the sentence “When in the course of human events . . .”

SEVERAL GRAMMATICAL PRINCIPLES ESSENTIAL TO CLEAR WRITING

Compared to many other languages, English has relatively few inflections (changes in the form of words to reflect their case, gender, number, person, tense, mood, and voice). For that reason, syntax—the arrangement of words in a sentence—is critically important to the clarity and comprehension of written (not to mention spoken) English.

Maintain Parallel Structure

Coordinate ideas in a sentence need to be parallel in structure, so that every element in the series has the same form (word, phrase, or clause) and grammatical function in the sentence. Otherwise, the syntax breaks down. In a parallel series of prepositional phrases, the preposition needs to be repeated unless all elements use the same one. Correlative conjunctions (*either-or*, *neither-nor*, *both-and*, *not only-but also*) must join grammatically parallel sentence elements; watch the placement of each part of the conjunction. If an auxiliary verb appears before a series of verb phrases, it must apply to all of them.

Examples:

- 1) John Smith is a former district attorney, state representative, and served two terms as attorney general. To be parallel in structure, it should read: John Smith is a former district attorney, state representative, and two-term attorney general.
- 2) I looked for my glasses in the den, the office, the bathroom, and under the bed. It should read: I looked for my glasses in the den, in the kitchen, in the bathroom, and under the bed.
- 3) Either you must grant her request or suffer the consequences. It should read: You must either grant her request or suffer the consequences.
- 4) The proposed procedure would simplify the application process, speed up admission decisions, and has saved money at other colleges. It should read: The proposed guidelines would simplify the application process, speed up admission decisions, and save money.

The principle of parallel structure applies on a larger scale to entire documents. For the sake of clarity, the major points need to be expressed in grammatically parallel ways. All items in lists should have the same format (complete sentences, dependent clauses, or phrases, not a mixture of the three), and these items should be expressed from the same point of view (e.g., all noun phrases or all verb phrases). On medical history forms that we fill out, for example, the long lists of conditions and ailments are usually expressed as nouns/noun phrases, but an occasional verb phrase will suddenly appear: High blood pressure, Heart arrhythmia, Diabetes, Cancer, Can't sleep, . . . (Substituting “Insomnia” would have been so simple.)

Avoid Misplaced Modifiers

Much confusion can arise from misplaced (“dangling”) participles and gerunds. Participles are verb forms used as adjectives; gerunds are verb forms used as nouns. (Present participles end

in –ing; past participles typically in –d or –ed. Gerunds always end in –ing.) A participle or participial phrase must refer to the nearest noun/pronoun; if it doesn't, the sentence is often illogical, ambiguous, and sometimes quite humorous. (Examples: Perched on the telephone wire, he saw a bluebird. Flying over Africa, the lions looked majestic.) Dangling gerunds usually occur when the gerund is the object of a preposition and the sentence doesn't have a proper subject: After taking a long walk, the shade tree came into view. While driving to Texas, my iPhone was lost. Clarifying the subject makes the sentence functional: After taking a long walk, I saw the shade tree come into view. While driving to Texas, I lost my iPhone.

Participles and gerunds are far from the only sentence elements that can be misplaced. As a general rule, try to place prepositional phrases as close as possible to the word(s) they modify. Use common sense. The following sentence, which appeared in the 2/24/16 issue of the *Athens Banner-Herald*, illustrates how important word order can be: "The girl reported being raped in a school stairwell to Cedar administrators Jan. 7." Perhaps it should have read "On January 7, the girl reported to Cedar administrators that she had been raped in a school stairwell."

Pay Attention to Restrictive and Nonrestrictive Elements

The concept of restrictive and nonrestrictive words, phrases, and clauses is basic to sentence structure. A restrictive element, which defines and limits the word it modifies, cannot be removed from the sentence without obscuring the identity of that word; it is *not* surrounded by commas. A nonrestrictive element, by contrast, provides further information about but is not essential in identifying the word it modifies; it is set off by commas. Restrictive clauses are usually introduced by *that*, and nonrestrictive clauses by *who* or *which*.

Examples:

- 1) My sister Mary is an artist. (Restrictive. The absence of commas tells the reader that Mary is not my only sister, so identifying her is necessary to the meaning of the sentence.)
My sister, Mary, is an artist. (Nonrestrictive. The commas signal that "Mary" is an appositive for "my sister"—i.e., is my sister's name—and that she is my only sister. The appositive can be removed without obscuring the meaning of the sentence: My sister is an artist.)
- 2) This year, which has been dry, was especially bad for crops. (Nonrestrictive. The clause introduced by *which* provides additional information about "this year" but can be removed without changing the identity of *year*.)
The year that just ended was especially bad for crops. (Restrictive. Without the clause "that just ended," it's unclear which year is being discussed.)

Be Attentive to Case and Other Distinctions among Relative Pronouns

A relative pronoun (*who*, *which*, *what*, or *that*) introduces a dependent clause and relates it to the independent clause. Remember that the dependent clause has a subject, a verb, and often an object of its own. *Who* is the only relative pronoun that declines by case: *who* (nominative), *whose* (possessive), *whom* (objective). *Who* normally refers to a person, *which* to an animal or thing, and *what* to a nonliving thing. Although *that* can refer to a person, place, or thing, it's more appropriate to use *who* rather than *that* in reference to people. Usually the antecedent of a relative pronoun is in the independent clause and, for clarity, should immediately precede the pronoun (The special exhibition that we want to see is at the Frick Museum.) *Who*, *whom*, *which*, and *what* form compound relative pronouns by adding the suffix *-ever*: *whoever*, *whomever*, *whichever*, and *whatever*.

In deciding whether to use *who* or *whom*, remember that the pronoun's function **in its own clause** determines its case (nominative or objective). *Who* or *whoever* is used when the pronoun is the subject or a predicate nominative; *whom* or *whomever* when it's the direct object, indirect object, or object of a preposition.

Examples:

- 1) I'll talk with whoever will listen. *Whoever* is the subject of the dependent clause "whoever will listen" that serves as the object of the preposition *with*.
- 2) Who should I say is calling? *Who* is the subject of the dependent clause "who is calling" that is the direct object of "should say." If you sort the words into the standard subject-verb-object syntax ("I should say who is calling"), it's easier to parse this interrogative sentence.
- 3) Whomever the group selects will be fine with me. *Whomever* is the direct object in the dependent clause ("Whomever the groups selects") that serves as the subject of the sentence.

Express Comparisons Clearly

Be sure that comparisons are not inaccurately stated or ambiguous.

Examples:

- 1) I'm closer to my sister than my brother. (Does this mean "I'm closer to my sister than to my brother" or "I'm closer to my sister than my brother is"?)
- 2) Steve boasted about his fencing skill compared to his rivals. ("Steve boasted about his fencing skill compared to that of his rivals" is clearer.)
- 3) His professionalism stands in stark contrast to the leading candidate. (It should read "His professionalism stands in stark contrast to the leading candidate's.")

Use Gender-Neutral Language without Violating Good Grammar

In *Between You and Me*, Mary Norris writes: "I hate to say it, but the colloquial use of 'their' when you mean 'his or her' is just wrong. It may solve the gender problem, and there is no

doubt that it has taken over in the spoken language, but it does so at the expense of number. An antecedent that is in the singular cannot take a plural pronoun.” Because *he* is no longer accepted as a generic pronoun referring to *he or she*, the third-person plural in its various forms (*they, them, their, and themselves*) has become a common substitute in casual writing and speech. **It is not appropriate, however, for use in OLLI’s publications, policy statements, fund-raising letters, and other types of written communication.** Sometimes *he or she* or *s/he* can be a reasonable alternative to *they* if used sparingly. There are also ways to avoid the problem. The *Chicago Manual of Style* (p. 302) suggests several techniques for achieving gender-neutral language:

- 1) Omit the pronoun: e.g., The programmer should update the records when data are transferred by the head office.
- 2) Repeat the noun: A writer should be careful not to antagonize readers, because the writer’s credibility will suffer.
- 3) Use a plural antecedent: Contestants must conduct themselves with dignity at all times.
- 4) Use an article instead of a personal pronoun: A student accused of cheating must actively waive the right to have a guidance counselor present.
- 5) Use the neutral singular pronoun *one*: An actor in New York is likely to earn more than one in Paducah.
- 6) Use the relative pronoun *who*: Employers presume that an applicant who can’t write well won’t be a good employee.
- 7) Use the imperative mood: Keep a close watch over children while monitoring the pool.
- 8) Revise the clause.

SOME PROBLEMATIC WORDS AND PHRASES*

a, an: Use *a* before any word beginning with a consonant sound; use *an* before any word beginning with a vowel sound: an honorary degree, *but* a historical society (the *h* in *historical* is pronounced).

affect, effect: *Affect* (usually a verb) means “to influence, have an effect on”; *effect* means “outcome, result” as a noun and “to make happen” as a verb.

after having [+ past participle]: Redundant; drop the *after*: Having passed her exam, she”

aggravate, irritate: *Aggravate* means “to intensify [something bad]”; *irritate* means “to annoy.”

all of: Delete the “of” whenever possible.

alter, altar: *Alter* (verb) means “to change”; *altar* (noun) is a sacramental table.

amend, emend: *Amend* (“to change or add to”); *emend* (“to correct [text]”).

amiable, amicable: Both words mean “friendly,” but *amiable* refers to people and *amicable* to relationships.

amount, number: *Amount* is used with mass nouns, *number* with nouns that can be counted.

between, among: *Between* indicates one-to-one or multiple one-to-one relationships; *among* suggests collective relationships.

bi-, semi-: *Biweekly* (every two weeks); *semiweekly* (twice a week); *biannual* (twice a year); *biennial* (once every two years).

bring, take: Ask where the action is directed. If it’s toward you, use *bring* (bring home the bacon); if it’s away from you, use *take* (take out the trash).

chair: Use in preference to *chairman*, *chairwoman*, or *chairperson*.

compare: To *compare with* is to note both similarities and differences between things; to *compare to* is to focus mainly on the similarities.

compliment, complement: *Compliment* is a praising remark; *complement* is something that completes or brings to perfection.

comprise, compose: “The whole *comprises* the parts; the parts *compose* the whole.”

comprised of: Avoid; use *composed of* or *consisting of*.

continual, continuous: What is *continual* is intermittent or frequently repeated; what is *continuous* remains uninterrupted.

couple: Not an adjective (“a couple of movies,” not “a couple movies”)

credible, credulous: *Credible* means “believable”; *credulous*, “gullible.”

data: Use with a plural verb (*data are*) except in very informal writing.

decide whether, decide if: The first expression is preferable; the second is more colloquial.

different from, different than: The first expression is much preferred (and more logical). Remember that one thing differs *from* another, not differs *than*.

discreet, discrete: *Discreet* means “circumspect, judicious”; *discrete*, “separate, distinct.”

disinterested, uninterested: *Disinterested* means “impartial, not having a personal interest at stake”; *uninterested* means “unconcerned, bored.”

disk, disc: The usual spelling is *disk*, but *disc* is preferred in a few instances (e.g., *compact disc, disc brakes*).

due to: Avoid using adverbially; use *because of* or *owing to* instead. *Due* is a verb.

each other, one another: *Each other* refers to two things or people; *one another* refers to more than two.

emigrate, immigrate: *Emigrate* means “to leave one country to live in another”; *immigrate*, “to enter a country to live.”

enervate, innervate: These are antonyms. *Enervate* means “to weaken or drain of energy”; *innervate*, “to stimulate or provide with energy.”

ensure, insure: *Ensure* means “to make sure something will or won’t happen”; *insure*, “to underwrite financial risk.”

enthused: Avoid; use *enthusiastic* instead.

equally as: Delete *as*.

every day, everyday: The first is adverbial; the second, adjectival: You can wear your everyday clothes every day.

etc.: *Et cetera* means “and other things.” Do not use *etc.* in reference to people.

farther, further: Use *farther* for a physical distance and *further* for a figurative distance (look no further).

feel: Avoid as a substitute for *think* or *believe*.

feel bad/good: Sense verbs (like the verb *to be*) are followed by adjectives rather than adverbs. The correct expression is *feel bad* or *feel good*, not *feel badly* or *feel well*.

fewer, less: Use *fewer* for countable things, *less* for amounts or mass nouns (fewer people but less water).

finalize: Jargon; substitute *finish*.

first, firstly: When enumerating items, use *first, second, third*. Avoid the *-ly* forms.

flaunt, flout: To *flaunt* means “to show off ostentatiously”; to *flout* is “to treat with disdain or contempt.”

forego, forgo: To *forego* is to go before; to *forgo* is to do without or renounce something.

gibe, jibe: A *gibe* is “a biting insult or taunt”; *jibe* means “to fit.”

graduate: A person graduates *from* college; he or she does not graduate college.

half of: Delete the *of* when possible.

help to: Omit the *to* when possible.

historic, historical: *Historic* refers to what is momentous in history; *historical*, to anything that pertains to or occurred in history.

hopefully: Avoid using.

if, whether: Use *whether* in most cases to avoid ambiguity. “Let me know *if* you can come” implies that a response is necessary only if you’re coming. “Let me know *whether* you can come” means that you should respond regardless of your answer.

imply, infer: The writer or speaker *implies* (suggests); the reader or listener *infers* (deduces).

incredible, incredulous: *Incredible* means “unbelievable” or “astonishing”; *incredulous* means “disbelieving, skeptical.”

in regard to: The correct phrase (rather than *in regards to*); however, a single-word substitute (*about, regarding, concerning*) is preferable.

irregardless: Use *regardless* instead.

its, it's: *Its* is the possessive form of *it*; *it's* is the contraction for *it is*.

lay, lie: *Lay* is a transitive verb (i.e., it has to take a direct object); its inflected forms are *lay-laid-laid* (I laid the book there yesterday; these rumors have been laid to rest). *Lie* is an intransitive verb and never takes a direct object; it is inflected *lie-lay-lain* (She lay down and rested).

led: This is the correct spelling of the past tense and past participle of the verb *to lead*. (It's often misspelled *lead*.)

lend, loan: Use the verb *loan* for transactions involving money and *lend* (past tense *lent*) for all other uses of the verb. *Loan* is the noun corresponding to both *lend* and *loan*.

like, as: *Like* is a preposition and should *not* be used to introduce a clause (as in the jingle "like a cigarette should").

myself: Avoid using as a pronoun in place of *I* or *me*. *Myself* is properly used reflexively (I did myself a favor) or emphatically (I myself have tried to climb that mountain).

none: Generally takes a singular verb if followed by a singular noun, a plural verb if followed by a plural noun.

notoriety: The state of being widely and *unfavorably* known. It's the bad (not the good) kind of fame.

off: The correct form is *off* ("We got off the bus"), not *off of*.

only: Whenever possible, place *only* directly before the word it modifies.

persuade, convince: *Persuade* is associated with actions; *convince*, with beliefs or understandings. *Persuade [to do something]* is preferred over *convince [to do]*.

precipitate (adj.), *precipitous*: The adjective *precipitate* means "sudden or rash"; *precipitous* means "dangerously steep."

previous to, prior to: Avoid in favor of *before*.

proscribe, prescribe: To *proscribe* something is to prohibit it; to *prescribe* is to appoint or dictate (a rule or action) or to specify a medical remedy.

proved, proven: Use *proved* as a verb (it was proved to be true), *proven* as an adjective (a proven success).

purposely, purposefully: What is done *purposely* is done intentionally; what is done *purposefully* is done with a certain goal in mind.

sensual, sensuous: *Sensual* implies indulgence of the senses; *sensuous* suggests aesthetic enjoyment.

toward, towards: The preferred form in American English is *toward*. The same is true for other directional words: *upward, downward, forward, backward, and afterward*.

try to: The correct expression is “*try to [do something]*,” not “*try and*”; the same goes for *be sure to . . .*, not *be sure and . . .*

unique: Since *unique* means “one of a kind,” avoid phrases like *very unique, more unique, or somewhat unique*.

whether: *Whether* implies an alternative, so *whether or not* is redundant.

which, that: See section on grammar fundamentals.

who, whom: See section on grammar fundamentals.

your, you’re: *Your* is the possessive form of *you*. *You’re* is the contraction for *you are*.

*Most of the words and phrases on this list come from a glossary in the *Chicago Manual of Style (16th Edition)*, pp. 263-300.