Grammar Dos and Don’ts

Commonly Misused Words
Below is a list of words to watch out for:

Affect vs. Effect

Affect is usually a verb, and effect is usually a noun. To affect something is to change or influence it, and an effect is something that happens due to a cause. (Affect as a verb can also mean, “to put on a pretense.”) When you affect something, it produces an effect. Here are examples of the words used correctly in these senses:

The tsunami ravaged the area, affecting many locals and tourists alike. (influenced, had an effect)

She affected a cheery disposition. (put on a pretense)

Gauging the tsunami’s effect will require a look at the post-tragedy tourism numbers.

(Note that effect is also a verb, more rarely, meaning, “to cause to happen, bring about, achieve a final result,” e.g, effect a change. And affect can be a noun, also more rarely, meaning (in psychology) “the conscious subjective aspect of an emotion considered apart from bodily changes; also: a set of observable manifestations of a subjectively experienced emotion,” e.g., She had a flat affect.)

Compliment vs. Complement

A compliment is a pleasantry, an expression of goodwill, admiration, or respect. As a verb, it means, “to pay someone a compliment.” On the other hand, complement means “to complete or to fit well together with.”

He complimented my typing skills. Bob and Jill complement one another beautifully as business partners.

A fine wine will likewise complement a meal, in that it will go well with a meal; wine is not gifted with the power of speech so it’s unable to give a meal a compliment.

www.superstarblogging.com
**Its vs. It’s**

Its is a possessive pronoun; it’s is a contraction of it is: *It’s certain to reach its peak today.*

**Literally**

Technically, something is literally true if it is actually true; literally is the opposite of metaphorically or figuratively. So if you say “I am so happy, I am literally walking on air,” what (many people will think) you mean is that you are so happy that your body is now violating the law of gravity and your feet are no longer in contact with the ground. It is better to say figuratively or to leave out literally altogether.

**Than vs. Then**

Than is a conjunction used in comparisons; then is an adverb denoting time.

*That pizza is more than I can eat. Tom laughed, and then we recognized him.*

**There vs. Their vs. They’re**

There is an adverb specifying place; it is also what's called (in syntax) an “expletive” (a word that performs a syntactic role but contributes nothing to meaning):

Adverb: *Sylvia is lying there unconscious.*

Expletive: *There are two plums left.*

Their is a possessive pronoun: *Fred and Jane finally washed their car.*

They’re is a contraction of they are: *They’re later than usual today.*

**To vs. Too vs. Two**

To is a preposition; too is an adverb; two is a number: *Too many of your shots slice to the left, but the last two were right on the mark.*

**Your vs. You’re**

Your is a possessive pronoun; you’re is a contraction of you are: *You’re going to catch a cold if you don’t wear your coat.*
**Dangling Modifiers**

A modifier is a word or clause that modifies or adds description to the subject of a sentence. A somewhat common mistake, though, is modifying the wrong thing in a sentence. For example: *Searching through her handbag, the sunglasses escaped detection.* The previous sentence suggests that the sunglasses were searching through the bag. Here’s the correct way to write it: *Searching through her handbag, she was unable to find her sunglasses.*

**Punctuation**

**Commas**

A few rules for comma usage:

Use it to divide items in a list of three or more items: *Have you met Abraham, Martin, and John?*

Use before for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so (mnemonic: FANBOYS) when connecting two sentences: *She ran as fast as her body would let her, yet it wasn’t enough.*

When connecting sentences without the words above, use a **semicolon** instead: *She ran as fast as her body would let her; it wasn’t enough.*

Commas can be used in a similar way to parentheses (used for asides, clarifications, or commentary) or dashes — which are used to spotlight what’s between them — but when you don’t want to break the flow. (See [http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/education/grammar/dashes-parentheses-and-commas](http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/education/grammar/dashes-parentheses-and-commas))

*She smashed her feet on the pavement, not realizing the damage she was doing, in an effort to win.*

**Apostrophes**

Apostrophes are only used to show **possession** (with nouns) and **contractions**: the man’s jacket, the boys’ meeting, Charles’s (or Charles’) hat, the Joneses’ house can’t (for cannot), isn’t (for is not), you’re (for you are), it’s (for it is), the ‘90s (for the 1990s)

Apostrophes are **never** used for plurals! *Except for single letters: mind your p’s and q’s; dot your i’s. Examples: Oreo, avocados, tomatoes, 1960s, TVs, ICBMs, iPods, dos, don’ts*
Apostrophes are never used for verbs! Examples: *goes, says, watches, needs*

Apostrophes are not used in possessive pronouns (although their use with possessive nouns would make you think so): *yours, its, hers, his, ours, theirs*

When in doubt — don’t use an apostrophe. For a fun look at apostrophe use, see: [http://theoatmeal.com/comics/apostrophe](http://theoatmeal.com/comics/apostrophe)

**Quotation Marks**

In American written English, periods and commas go inside the quotation marks. Everywhere else in the world, though, they go outside the quotation marks. E.g., US: “word.” / “word,” vs. UK, etc.: “word”. / “word”,

(As for the quotes themselves: Quoting someone in your story is good; quoting someone saying basic facts is not. The key to a good quote is when someone gives and opinion on something. But give the factual info yourself.)

**Numbers**

Write out the numbers zero to nine. Anything above nine gets the actual numeral, except when used an inexact sense: *He invited 12 people. A thousand showed up.*

**Pronouns**

**Subject** pronouns (doing the action): I, you, she, he, it, we, they

**Object** pronouns (receiving the action): me, you, her, him, it, us, them

Not OK: *Me and my friends* had a good time. OK: *My friends and I* had a good time. (It is customary to always mention other people first.) Exception: Who’s there? *Me.* It’s *me.*

Words that end in “-one,” -body,” or “-thing” are singular. For other indefinite pronouns (each, either, few, all, none, many, etc.), see [http://englishplus.com/grammar/00000027.htm](http://englishplus.com/grammar/00000027.htm).

Everyone *is* welcome. Everybody *needs* to have her own equipment.