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british society of animal science



**Guide to
Common Grammar Mistakes**

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Guide to Common Grammar Mistakes

Their, not there - a quick guide to common mistakes

Commonly confused words:

Advise – recommend, inform

Advice – recommendation, information

Affect – influence

Effect – result of...

Biannual – usually means twice a year

Biennial – every two years

Complement – make complete, contributes additional features

Compliment – express praise or admiration

Counsel – plan, warn, advise

Council – assembly

Counsellor – someone who counsels

Councillor – member of a council

Dependent – contingent or determined by

Dependant – someone who relies on someone else for support or care

Discreet – care and prudence

Discrete – separate

Principle – theoretical basis, fundamental truth behind belief/theory

Principal – most important, person

Stationary – not moving

Stationery – writing material

Which versus that

In order to make the correct choice, we first need to understand what a defining (or essential) clause is one that is essential to the meaning of the sentence. When a defining clause is removed, the sentence loses its meaning. Conversely, a non-defining clause can be removed from a sentence without changing the general meaning of the sentence.

Use 'that' with a defining (or essential clause). For example:

- 'The pet *that I had as a child* is living with my sister'
- This implies there is more than one pet and if you remove the phrase in italics you would lose that implication

Use 'which' with a non-defining (or non-essential clause). For example:

- 'The pet, *which I had as a child*, is living with my sister'
- Here, there is no implication that more than one pet exists so you can remove the phrase in italics and the sentence will still convey the overall meaning.
- Note that there is a comma before 'which'. There can, as in this example, be a comma after the phrase that can be removed.

Subordinate clauses

A subordinate clause is a phrase, flanked by commas, that can be removed from a sentence and the sentence will still make sense. For example, the phrase 'flanked by commas' is a subordinate clause as you can remove it and the resultant sentence still makes sense.

Some further examples are given below:

- The spider, which was black and white, sat on the table.
- The results, although preliminary, show a significant effect of the product
- Despite the sheep, all 10 of them, being put in a pen they still escaped

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Compare with versus compare to

These phrases are often used interchangeably but they have subtly different meanings:

- Compare with – compare something against something else that is similar or different. For example, comparing the results of one study treatment with another
- Compare to – comparing the likeness or resemblance of something to something else. For example, comparing the shape of a cloud to a dolphin.

However and therefore

These terms should be used at the start of a sentence where possible but when used in the middle of a sentence they should be flanked by commas:

- However, the results were not quite as we expected
- The results, however, were not quite as we expected

Colon versus semi-colon

- Colon : - indicates some further information is to follow
- Semi-colon ; - used to link two independent clauses or sentences that could also be used alone.

i.e. versus e.g.

i.e. – id est. This introduces clarification in a sentence and can also be thought of as saying 'In essence,....':

- 'She was too small to go on the ride i.e. she was below the required height'

e.g. – exempli gratia. Basically, this means an example is given and can be thought of as saying 'For example,':

- There are many different types of cereal grain e.g. wheat, barley and oats'

s versus 's

Use 's when something belongs to something/someone

Data versus datum

The word data is plural!!! For example:

- The data show.....
- The data have.....

The singular of data is datum

Fewer versus less

Fewer should be used if you can count the thing (noun) you are talking about. If it isn't 'countable' then use less:

- For example, in the sentence 'Now I'm working from home, I use fewer litres of petrol', the litres of petrol can be counted so 'fewer' is used.
- However, in the sentence 'Now I'm working from home, I use less petrol', the petrol per se cannot be counted so we use the word 'less'

The same is true for the terms 'amount' and 'number' – use 'number' when you can count the thing (noun) you are talking about.

Who versus whom

When talking about people:

- 'Who' – refers to the subject of a sentence (he, she, they)
- 'Whom' – refers to the object of a sentence (him, her, them)

A good way to decide which term to use in a sentence is to ask who is doing something in the sentence:

- He left the tap running = who left the tap running?
- We could tell her = whom shall we tell?

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When to use Caps and Italics

Capital letters

Capital letters are more difficult to read than lower case so should only be used when necessary:

- Start of a sentence
- Names
- Proper nouns
- Abbreviations

Italicising

- Emphasis or contrast
- Titles of works e.g. books
- Genus and species names for living organisms (genus name has capital letter)

Introductory elements and commas

- Parallel structure e.g. he wanted to study engineering, biochemist or medicine
- Subject-verb agreement - they has vs. they have. 'an important aspect have been...' 'an important aspect has been.'

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References

<https://www.oxford-royale.com>
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Common Mistakes

- You're – you are
- Your – belonging to you
- Could/would/should have = correct
- Could/would/should of = incorrect
- Try to = correct
- Try and = incorrect
- They're – they are
- Their – belonging to them
- There – location; attention grabbing
- Numbers from one to nine should be written as words; 10 and above can be written in numbers
- Numbers between twenty-one and ninety-nine should be hyphenated if they're written in words.

Abbreviations

When abbreviations are first used in text they should be written out in full and the associated abbreviation should follow in parentheses:

- 'Yeast had a significant effect on rumen fermentation parameters, including neutral detergent fibre (NDF) and crude protein (CP) digestibility. Despite these ruminal effects on NDF and CP, there was no effect on acid detergent fibre (ADF).'