

Grammar Crimes Sheet

Below is a list of common grammar mistakes. What are some “grammar crimes” that you tend to commit? Identify the grammar rules you struggle with and refer to improve your writing.

1. Failure to underline book titles

Titles that should be underlined or italicized (if you are using a computer) include:

books, book-length poems, plays, magazines, pamphlets, published speeches, long musical works, movies, television programs, works of visual art, ships, and foreign phrases.

Titles that should be in quotation marks are:

short stories, songs, short poems, articles in magazines, essays, episodes of a television program, and chapter titles in a book.

Correct examples:

book: *The Giver*

short story: “The Scarlet Ibis”

short poem: “Ozymandias”

long poem: *The Odyssey*

movie: *Men in Black*

2. Speeding through contractions

Never, never, never write: *should of, could of, would of.*

The correct way: *should have, could have, would have*

The correct contraction: *should've, could've, would've*

Correct example: The boy *should've* been nicer to his sister.

By the way, try to avoid using contractions in formal writing, please!

3. Illicit use of the word *like*

Avoid the use of the word *like* at all costs when you are using it to cite examples.

Replace *like* with *such as, for example, for instance, etc.*

4. Use of R.I.P words

The following words are to be laid to rest in formal writing: *a lot, all right, stuff, really, very, gonna, wanna, kinda* (of course, the last three words can be used in their correct format: *going to, want to, kind of*).

5. Improper matching of pronouns: *they to their, and he/she to his/her*

If the beginning of the sentence says:

The mother wanted to make the boy happy,

Then the rest should say:

so she gave her favorite old toy to him.

Make sure the descriptive words *their, his, her* refer to the correct subject.

If the subject is a single thing, then don't use *their*.

6. Illegal use of *because* and *until*

If you want to use *because* and *until*, then use the complete form of the word.

Never use *cause* or *til*. (Note: Sometimes you will see *till* used in poems and advertisements.)

The correct contractions for these words are 'cause and 'til. Avoid using contractions in formal writing.

7. Mixing up *this, that, and who*

Never say: There was *this* boy and *this* tree . . . Correct example: There was a boy and a tree . . .

Only use *this* when the thing is right there in front of you.

Never say: The story is about a young boy *that* loves a tree. Use *who* when referring to people.

The boy is a person, so the sentence should read: The story is about a young boy *who* loves a tree.

Use *that* for objects and things, not people.

8. Illegal use of *it's* and *its*

Correct examples: *It's* the right thing to do. (contraction for "it is")

The building cast *its* shadow.

(The shadow belongs to the building, so *its* is a possessive, and does not use an apostrophe. Most other possessives use an apostrophe: John's book, Joe's shoe.)

9. Illegal use of *your* and *you're*

Everyone spells these alike because they sound alike. BEWARE!

Correct examples: *You're* almost ready to try it alone. (contraction for "you are")

Here is *your* paper. (*your* is a possessive, the paper belongs to you)

10. Illegal use of *their* and *there* and *they're*

Three more words that everyone spells the same because they sound the same. Correct examples:

There is another door over there. (shows location or existence)

Their ice cream cones are melting all over their shoes. (possessive)

They're not ready to go yet. (contraction for "they are")

Set an alarm in your brain that goes off every time you are about to use one of these words, and make sure to stop and check that you are using the correct form before you go on.

11. Illegal use of the apostrophe

An *s* is put at the end of a word for two reasons: to make it plural or to show possession.

Correct examples:

Plurals: books, students

Possession: the book's pages, the student's desk.

When you add an *s* to make something plural, *do not use* an apostrophe. (Note: the only exception is shown in Grammar Crime No. 8 above).

12. Illegal use of *to*, *too*, and *two*

Use *too* when you are exaggerating. Example: It was *too* much.

Too can also mean *also*. Example: I want to go *too*.

Two means the numeral 2.

Correct example: I want to go *too* so I can buy *two* pieces of candy.

13. Improper matching of verbs

If the subject of the sentence is singular, use a singular verb.

Examples: It walks, rides, was, is says, tries, decides, spoke, can, will, does.

If the subject of the sentence is plural, then use a verb that goes with the plural.

Example: They walk, ride, were, are, say, try, decide, spoke, can, will, do

14. Using double negatives

In other languages, such as Spanish, the more negatives you have in a sentence, the more negative the statement. But in English, you can have only one negative per sentence, so make sure you don't put more than one of these words in the same sentence: Negatives: *not, don't, can't won't, shouldn't, couldn't, wouldn't, didn't, no, neither, nothing*

Here is an example of too many negatives from a student paper: Having no trees aren't nothing. (There are three negatives in that sentence.)

15. Mixing up *will* and *can*, *would* and *could*

If you are writing in the present tense, use verbs such as *are, is, or does*. Then when you want to use the future tense, use *will* or *can*.

If you are writing in the past tense, use verbs such as *were, was, or did*. Then when you want to use the future tense, use *would* or *could*.