

CHAPTER 8 THE MECHANICS OF WRITING

SPELLING

Spelling correctly is important to accurately convey thoughts to an audience. This lesson will cover (1) vowels and consonants, (2) suffixes and plurals, (3) homophones and homographs.

Vowels and Consonants

Vowels and **consonants** are different speech sounds in English.

The letters A, E, I, O, U and sometimes Y are **vowels** and can create a variety of sounds. The most common are short sounds and long sounds. Long **vowel** sounds sound like the name of the letter such as the *a* in late. Short **vowel** sounds have a unique sound such as the *a* in cat. A rule for **vowels** is that when two vowels are walking, the first does the talking as in pain and meat.

Consonants include the other twenty-one letters in the alphabet. **Consonants** are weak letters and only make sounds when paired with **vowels**. That is why words always must have a **vowel**. This also means that **consonants** need to be doubled to make a stronger sound like sitting, grabbed, progress. Understanding general trends and patterns for **vowels** and **consonants** will help with spelling. The table below represents the difference between short and long **vowels** and gives examples for each.

	Symbol	Example Words
Short a	a	Cat, mat, hat, pat
Long a	ā	Late, pain, pay, they, weight, straight
Short e	e	Met, said, bread
Long e	ē	Breeze, cheap, dean, equal
Short i	i	Bit, myth, kiss, rip
Long i	ī	Cry, pie, high

	Symbol	Example Words
Short o	o	Dog, hot, pop
Long o	ō	Snow, nose, elbow
Short u	u	Run, cut, club, gum
Long u	ū	Duty, rule, new, food
Short oo	oo	Book, foot, cookie
Long oo	ōō	Mood, bloom, shoot

Suffixes and Plurals

A **suffix** is a word part that is added to the ending of a root word. A **suffix** changes the meaning and spelling of words. There are some general patterns to follow with **suffixes**.

- Adding -er, -ist, or -or changes the root to mean *doer* or *performer*
 - Paint → Painter
 - Abolition → Abolitionist
 - Act → Actor

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- Adding -ation or -ment changes the root to mean *an action or a process*
 - Ador(e) → Adoration
 - Develop → Development
- Adding -ism changes the root to mean *a theory or ideology*
 - Real → Realism
- Adding -ity, -ness, -ship, or -tude changes the root to mean *a condition, quality, or state*
 - Real → Reality
 - Sad → Sadness
 - Relation → Relationship
 - Soli(tary) → Solitude
- **Plurals** are similar to suffixes as letters are added to the end of the word to signify more than one person, place, thing, or idea. There are also general patterns to follow when creating plurals.
- If a word ends in -s, -ss, -z, -zz, -ch, or -sh, add -es.
 - Bus → Buses
- If a word ends in a -y, drop the -y and add -ies.
 - Pony → Ponies
- If a word ends in an -f, change the f to a v and add -es.
 - Knife → Knives
- For all other words, add an -s.
 - Dog → Dogs

Homophones and Homographs

A **homophone** is a word that has the same sound as another word, but does not have the same meaning or spelling.

- To, too, and two
- There, their, and they're
- See and sea

A **homograph** is a word that has the same spelling as another word, but does not have the same sound or meaning.

- Lead (to go in front of) and lead (a metal)
- Bass (deep sound) and bass (a fish)

Let's Review!

- Vowels include the letters A, E, I, O, U and sometimes Y and have both short and long sounds.
- Consonants are the other twenty-one letters and have weak sounds. They are often doubled to make stronger sounds.
- Suffixes are word parts added to the root of a word and change the meaning and spelling.
- To make a word plural, add -es, -ies, -ves, or -s to the end of a word.
- Homophones are words that have the same sound, but not the same meaning or spelling.
- Homographs are words that have the same spelling, but not the same meaning or sound.

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CAPITALIZATION

Correct capitalization helps readers understand when a new sentence begins and the importance of specific words. This lesson will cover the capitalization rules of (1) geographic locations and event names, (2) organizations and publication titles, (3) individual names and professional titles, and (4) months, days, and holidays.

Geographic Locations and Event Names

North, east, south, and west are not **capitalized** unless they relate to a **definite region**.

- Go north on I-5 for 200 miles.
- The West Coast has nice weather.

Words like northern, southern, eastern, and western are also not **capitalized** unless they describe **people or the cultural and political activities of people**.

- There is nothing interesting to see in eastern Colorado.
- Midwesterners are known for being extremely nice.
- The Western states almost always vote Democratic.

These words are not **capitalized** when placed before a name or region unless it is part of the **official name**.

- She lives in southern California.
- I loved visiting Northern Ireland.

Continents, countries, states, cities, and towns need to be **capitalized**.

- Australia has a lot of scary animals.
- Not many people live in Antarctica.
- Albany is the capital of New York.

Historical events should be **capitalized** to separate the specific from the general.

- The bubonic plague in the Middle Ages killed a large portion of the population in Europe.
- The Great Depression took place in the early 1930s.
- We are living in the twenty-first century.

Organizations and Publication Titles

The **names of national organizations** need to be **capitalized**. Short prepositions, articles, and conjunctions within the title are not **capitalized** unless they are the first word.

- The National American Woman Suffrage Association was essential in passing the Nineteenth Amendment.
- The House of Representatives is one part of Congress.
- The National Football League consists of thirty-two teams.

The titles of books, chapters, articles, poems, newspapers, and other publications should be capitalized.

- Her favorite book is *A Wrinkle in Time*.
- I do the crossword in *The New York Times* every Sunday.
- *The Jabberwocky* by Lewis Carroll has many silly sounding words.

Individual Names and Professional Titles

People's names as well as their familial relationship title need to be capitalized.

- Barack Obama was our first African American president.
- Uncle Joe brought the steaks for our Memorial Day grill.
- Aunt Sarah lives in California, but my other aunt lives in Florida.

Professional titles need to be capitalized when they precede a name, or as a direct address. If it is after a name or is used generally, titles do not need to be capitalized.

- Governor Cuomo is trying to modernize the subway system in New York.
- Andrew Cuomo is the governor of New York.
- A governor runs the state. A president runs the country.
- Thank you for the recommendation, Mr. President.
- I need to see Doctor Smith.
- I need to see a doctor.

Capitalize the title of high-ranking government officials when an individual is referred to.

- The Secretary of State travels all over the world.
- The Vice President joined the meeting.

With compound titles, the prefixes or suffixes do not need to be capitalized.

- George W. Bush is the ex-President of the United States.

Months, Days, and Holidays

Capitalize all months of the year (January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November, December) and days of the week (Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday).

- Her birthday is in November.
- People graduate from college in May or June.
- Saturdays and Sundays are supposed to be fun and relaxing.

Holidays are also capitalized.

- Most kid's favorite holiday is Christmas.
- The new school year usually starts after Labor Day.
- It is nice to go to the beach over Memorial Day weekend.

The **seasons** are not **capitalized**.

- It gets too hot in the summer and too cold in the winter.
- The flowers and trees bloom so beautifully in the spring.

Let's Review!

- Only capitalize directional words like north, south, east, and, west when they describe a definite region, people, and their political and cultural activities, or when it is part of the official name.
- Historical periods and events are capitalized to represent their importance and specificity.
- Every word except short prepositions, conjunctions, and articles in the names of national organizations are capitalized.
- The titles of publications follow the same rules as organizations.
- The names of individual people need to be capitalized.
- Professional titles are capitalized if they precede a name or are used as a direct address.
- All months of the year, days of the week, and holidays are capitalized.
- Seasons are not capitalized.

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PUNCTUATION

Punctuation is important in writing to accurately represent ideas. Without correct punctuation, the meaning of a sentence is difficult to understand. This lesson will cover (1) periods, question marks, and exclamation points, (2) commas, semicolons, and colons, and (3) apostrophes, hyphens, and quotation marks.

Terminal Punctuation Marks: Periods, Question Marks, and Exclamation Points

Terminal punctuation are used at the end of a sentence. Periods, question marks, and exclamation points are the three types of terminal punctuation.

Periods (.) mark the end of a declarative sentence, one that states a fact, or an imperative sentence, one that states a command or request). Periods can also be used in abbreviations.

- Doctors save lives.
- She has a B.A. in Psychology.

Question Marks (?) signify the end of a sentence that is a question. Where, when, who, whom, what, why, and how are common words that begin question sentences.

- Who is he?
- Where is the restaurant?
- Why is the sky blue?

Exclamation Points (!) indicate strong feelings, shouting, or emphasize a feeling.

- Watch out!
- That is incredible!
- I hate you!

Internal Punctuation: Commas, Semicolons, and Colons

Internal punctuation is used within a sentence to help keep words, phrases, and clauses in order. These punctuation marks can be used to indicate elements such as direct quotations and definitions in a sentence.

A **comma (,)** signifies a small break within a sentence and separates words, clauses, or ideas.

Commas are used before conjunctions that connect two independent clauses.

- I ate some cookies, and I drank some milk.

Commas are also used to set off an introductory phrase.

- After the test, she grabbed dinner with a friend.

Short phrases that emphasis thoughts or emotions are enclosed by **commas**.

- The school year, thankfully, ends in a week.

Commas set off the words *yes* and *no*.

- Yes, I am available this weekend.
- No, she has not finished her homework.

Commas set off a question tag.

- It is beautiful outside, isn't it?

Commas are used to indicate direct address.

- Are you ready, Jack?
- Mom, what is for dinner?

Commas separate items in a series.

- We ate eggs, potatoes, and toast for breakfast.
- I need to grab coffee, go to the store, and put gas in my car.

Semicolons (;) are used to connect two independent clauses without a coordinating conjunction like *and* or *but*. A **semicolon** creates a bond between two sentences that are related. Do not capitalize the first word after the **semicolon** unless it is a word that is normally capitalized.

- The ice cream man drove down my street; I bought a popsicle.
- My mom cooked dinner; the chicken was delicious.
- It is cloudy today; it will probably rain.

Colons (:) introduce a list.

- She teaches three subjects: English, history, and geography.

At the end of a sentence, **colons** can create emphasis of a word or phrase.

- She had one goal: pay the bills.

More Internal Punctuation: Apostrophes, Hyphens, and Quotation Marks

Apostrophes (') are used to indicate possession or to create a contraction.

- Bob has a car - Bob's car is blue.
- Steve's cat is beautiful.

For plurals that are also possessive, put the **apostrophe** after the **s**.

- Soldiers' uniforms are impressive.

Make contractions by combining two words.

- I do not have a dog - I don't have a dog
- I can't swim.

Its and it's do not follow the normal possessive rules. Its is possessive while it's means it is.

- It's a beautiful day to be at the park.
- The dog has many toys, but its favorite is the rope.

Hyphens (-) are mainly used to create compound words.

- The documentary was a real eye-opener for me.
- We have to check-in to the hotel before midnight.
- The graduate is a twenty-two-year-old woman.

Quotation Marks (") are used when directly using another person's words in your own writing. Commas and periods, sometimes question marks and exclamation points, are placed within **quotation marks**. Colons and semicolons are placed outside of the **quotation marks**, unless they are part of the quoted material. If quoting an entire sentence, capitalize the first word. If it is a fragment, do not capitalize the first word.

- Ernest Hemingway once claimed, "There is nothing noble in being superior to your fellow man; true nobility is being superior to your former self."
- Steve said, "I will be there at noon."

An indirect quote which paraphrases what someone else said does not need **quotation marks**.

- Steve said he would be there at noon.

Quotation marks are also used for the titles of short works such as poems, articles, and chapters. They are not italicized.

- Robert Frost wrote "The Road Not Taken."

Let's Review!

- **Periods (.)** signify the end of a sentence or are used in abbreviations.
- **Question Marks (?)** are also used at the end of a sentence and distinguish the sentence as a question.
- **Exclamation Points (!)** indicate strong feelings, shouting, or emphasis and are usually at the end of the sentence.
- **Commas (,)** are small breaks within a sentence that separate clauses, ideas, or words. They are used to set off introductory phrases, the words yes and no, question tags, indicate direct address, and separate items in a series.
- **Semicolons (;)** connect two similar sentences without a coordinating conjunctions such as and or but.
- **Colons (:)** are used to introduce a list or emphasize a word or phrase.
- **Apostrophes (')** indicate possession or a contraction of two words.
- **Hyphens (-)** are used to create compound words.
- **Quotation Marks (")** are used when directly quoting someone else's words and to indicate the title of poems, chapters, and articles.

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PRACTICE QUIZ 1

1. Which of the following is correct?

- A. May C. easter
B. Spring D. sunday

2. Fill in the blank with the correctly capitalized form.

My favorite book in the Harry Potter series is _____.

- A. *harry potter and the prisoner of azkaban*
B. *Harry Potter and the prisoner of azkaban*
C. *Harry Potter And The Prisoner Of Azkaban*
D. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*

3. Which word(s) in the following sentence should be capitalized?

My friend's birthday is december 25. she does not like that her birthday is on christmas.

- A. christmas
B. december
C. december and christmas
D. december, she, and christmas

4. What is the sentence with the correct use of punctuation?

- A. Offcampus apartments are nicer.
B. Off campus apartments are nicer.
C. Off-campus apartments are nicer.
D. Off-campus-apartments are nicer.

5. What is the mistake in the following sentence?

The highestranking officer can choose his own work, including his own hours.

- A. *Highestranking* needs a hyphen.
B. There should be a comma after *officer*.
C. There should be no comma after *work*.
D. There should be a semicolon after *work*.

6. What is missing from the following sentence?

Classical music helps with studying, I always listen to it before a test.

- A. There needs to be a colon after studying.
B. There needs to be a semicolon after studying.
C. There should be an exclamation point at the end.
D. Nothing is missing.

7. Which of the following spellings is correct?

- A. Busines C. Buseness
B. Business D. Bussiness

8. On Earth, ____ are seven continents.

- A. their C. theer
B. there D. they're

9. What is the correct plural of bush?

- A. bush C. bushes
B. bushs D. bushies

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PRACTICE QUIZ 1 – ANSWER KEY

1. A. May. Months, days, and holidays need to be capitalized, and seasons do not need to be. See Lesson: Capitalization.
2. D. Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban. Short prepositions, conjunctions, and articles are not capitalized in publication titles. See Lesson: Capitalization.
3. D. *december, she, and christmas*. All months and holidays are capitalized. She is the beginning of a sentence and needs to be capitalized. See Lesson: Capitalization.
4. C. *Off-campus apartments are nicer*. Hyphens are often used for compound words that are placed before the noun to help with understanding. See Lesson: Punctuation.
5. A. *Highestranking needs a hyphen*. Hyphens are used for compound words that describe a person or object. See Lesson: Punctuation.
6. B. *There needs to be a semicolon after studying*. A semicolon is used to connect two related sentences. See Lesson: Punctuation.
7. B. *Business* is the only correct spelling. See Lesson: Spelling.
8. B. *There* describes a place or position and is correctly spelled. See Lesson: Spelling.
9. C. With a word ending in -sh, add -es. See Lesson: Spelling.

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PRACTICE QUIZ 2

1. Which of the following is correct?

- A. *Gone With The Wind*
- B. *Gone With the Wind*
- C. *Gone with the Wind*
- D. *Gone with the wind*

2. Fill in the blank with the correctly capitalized form.

Everyone wants to live in ____ ____, because it has nice weather and beaches.

- A. southern California
- B. Southern California
- C. Southern california
- D. southern california

3. Choose the correct sentence.

- A. Arnold Schwarzenegger was the governor of California.
- B. Arnold Schwarzenegger was the Governor of California.
- C. Arnold Schwarzenegger was the governor of california.
- D. arnold schwarzenegger was the governor of california.

4. Which sentence is correct?

- A. What is wrong.
- B. Honesty is the best policy.
- C. You dont need an umbrella.
- D. A band needs a guitarist singer and drummer.

5. What is the mistake in the following sentence?

Albert Einstein claimed "Imagination is more important than knowledge."

- A. *Albert Einstein* needs an apostrophe.
- B. There should be a colon after *claimed*.
- C. There should be a comma before *than*.
- D. There needs to be a comma after *claimed*.

6. What is the correct use of a period in the following sentence?

- A. She had a bad day
- B. She had a bad day.
- C. She had. a bad day.
- D. She. had. a. bad. day.

7. Which of the following spellings is correct?

- A. Argument
- B. Arguemint
- C. Arguement
- D. Arguemant

8. What is the correct plural of morning?

- A. Morning
- B. Mornings
- C. Morningses
- D. Morningies

9. Subjects ___ to their king to show respect.

- A. bow
- B. bou
- C. baw
- D. beau

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PRACTICE QUIZ 2 – ANSWER KEY

1. C. *Gone with the Wind*. Publication titles are capitalized. Shorter prepositions, articles, and conjunctions within titles are not capitalized. **See Lesson: Capitalization.**
2. A. *southern California*. Words such as southern are not capitalized unless they are a part of the official name. States are always capitalized. **See Lesson: Capitalization.**
3. A. Arnold Schwarzenegger was the governor of California. Individual names and states are always capitalized. Professional titles are capitalized when they precede a name or are part of a direct address. **See Lesson: Capitalization.**
4. B. *Honesty is the best policy*. All the other sentences are missing some punctuation. **See Lesson: Punctuation.**
5. D. *There needs to be a comma a ter claimed*. Commas are needed for introductory phrases and before the quoted material. **See Lesson: Punctuation.**
6. B. *She had a bad day*. A period is only used at the end of a sentence, and not anywhere in between. **See Lesson: Punctuation.**
7. A. *Argument* is the only correct spelling. **See Lesson: Spelling.**
8. B. For most words ending in consonants, just add -s. **See Lesson: Spelling.**
9. A. People *bow*, or bend down, to show respect. **See Lesson: Spelling.**