

Common errors made in every day Grammar and Spelling.

1. Capital letters everywhere

Children (and adults!) routinely capitalise all nouns. In some cases words are incorrectly capitalised to highlight their importance, but whether you're writing about dogs, lions, dinner or cinemas, there is no need for a capital letter. The word does not become more important if you capitalise it, it just becomes incorrectly written!

Capital letters are only used for proper nouns and at the start of a sentence.

So remember: Don't capitalise nouns unless they are proper nouns or you are starting a sentence.

2. Too many apostrophes

The most common mistake is using an apostrophe to signify a plural, which is incorrect.

So: three cars, all the lions, mums and dads.

But: the baby's toy (the toy belonging to the baby), the car's engine (the engine of the car).

For plural possessives (where more than one noun is involved), the apostrophe goes after the 's' instead of before.

So: The puppies' mum, the girls' argument.

So remember: apostrophes are for possession, not plurals.

Also: Apostrophes are also for omission of a letter/letters that then shorten the word.

'It isn't a very nice day' It could be 'It is not a very nice day' so the apostrophe signifies the word is shortened and there is a letter missing – in this case 'o'

Hasn't, wouldn't, won't, can't, shouldn't.

3. Mixing up it's and its

So which one is correct?

'Its' is a pronoun. For example, 'The cat ate its dinner'.

'It's' is short for 'it is'. For example, 'It's a nice, sunny day'.

Explain to your learners that they can check their sentence by rewording it. For example, 'The cat and it's kittens' is incorrect because they didn't mean to say 'The cat and it is kittens'. The correct sentence is 'The cat and its kittens' – the cat and the kittens which belong to it.

So remember: It's is short for it is.

4. Using too many commas

A full stop ends a sentence. A comma acts as a short pause. Children often continue a sentence when a full stop is needed.

Tell your child to read their sentence out loud to highlight where the full stops go. A sentence is a group of words which makes sense on its own. If it seems very long and there are several pauses, then it is likely that more full stops are needed.

So remember: A comma signifies a short pause; a full stop signifies a longer pause.

5. Misplaced inverted commas

Inverted commas go at the start and at the end of direct speech – but do they go before or after the full stop? It is easy to get confused.

If a direct quote is part of the sentence, the inverted commas go before the full stop.

So: The teacher talked about "the importance of inverted commas".

If the speech is the whole of the sentence, the inverted commas go after the full stop.

So: "It's time to go home now."

So remember: If the speech is the whole sentence the full stop comes first.

What is direct speech?

Direct speech is a sentence in which **the exact words spoken are reproduced in speech marks** (also known as quotation marks or inverted commas). For example:

"You'll never guess what I've just seen!" said Sam, excitedly.

"What's that?" asked Louise.

"Our teacher has a broomstick and a black pointy hat in the back of her car. Maybe she's a witch!"

"No, silly! They're for the school play!" replied Louise, sighing.

What is indirect speech?

Indirect speech is when the general points of what someone has said are reported, without actually writing the speech out in full. It is sometimes called reported speech. For example:

Sam was excited to see a broomstick and a black pointy hat in the back of his teacher's car.

He told his friend Louise about this and that he thought their teacher might be a witch.

Louise had to point out that the things in their teacher's car were for the school play.

6. To/Too/Two

What's the difference between *to*, *too*, and *two*? It's not too difficult to use them, once you take the time to learn what they mean – and do some practicing, too.

To

To has two functions. First, as a preposition, in which case it always precedes a noun.

I'm going to the store
He went to Italy
This belongs to David

Secondly, *to* indicates an infinitive when it precedes a verb.

I need to study
We want to help
He's going to eat

Too

Too also has two uses. First, as a synonym for "also":

Can I go too?
He went to France too
I think that's Paul's book too

Secondly, *too* means excessively when it precedes an adjective or adverb.

I'm too tired
He's walking too quickly
I ate too much

Two

Two is a number.

One, two, three...
I have two cars
She ate two pieces of pie

7. Their/There/They're

Do not confuse *there*, *their*, and *they're*. That would be a serious mistake.

They're is short for they are. *They're* always expands to *they are*.

Only use *they're* if you can substitute it with *they are*.

They're going to school next week.

They're very happy today.

They're enjoying the film.

Their shows possession. It's just like my, his, her, and our. These are called possessive adjectives.

The children took their books to school.

It was their turn to get tea ready for the family.

The family went to their holiday cottage in Chania every summer.

There is a place. It's similar to here.

The word *there* is similar to the word *here* in that it represents a place. *There* and *here* are adverbs of place.

There has two uses:

(1) It is used to denote a specific place.

She is there. ✓

The book is over there.

The family went over there by the sea.

Over there is the motorway.

(2) It is used to denote that something exists.

There are two apples.

The children are over there (specific place).

There is a good reason I'm not attending the party this year (a reason exists).

8. Colons and Semi Colons

Colons and semicolons are two types of punctuation. Colons (:) are used in sentences to introduce something that follows like a quotation, example or a list.

Semicolons (;) are used to join two independent clauses, to separate main clauses joined by a conjunctive adverb or to separate items in a list that already uses commas. Still confused? See the examples below.

Colons Used in Sentences

- There are two choices at this time: run away or fight.
- We knew who would win the game: the Eagles
- He wanted to see three cities in Italy: Rome, Florence and Venice
- Remember: Two can play at that game.
- She kept repeating: “I really want that car!”
- Barry wanted to know why I didn’t respond to his text: I hadn’t received it.
- Here are three states that begin with M: Michigan, Mississippi and Maine.
- You can come pick me up now: I am feeling much better.
- Never forget this point: Think before you speak.
- This house has everything I need: two bedrooms, a backyard and a garage.
- The town reminded me of my childhood vacations: both were on the beach.
- I have several favourite genres of movies: drama, science fiction and mystery.
- I bought a lot of meat at the shop: bacon, turkey, chicken and tuna.
- These are my favourite colours: purple, turquoise, pink and yellow.

Semicolons in Sentences

- Dad is going bald; his hair is getting thinner and thinner.
- I really like beef, with mushroom sauce; pasta, with Alfredo sauce; and salad, with French dressing.
- You should stop eating so much food; you will have to go on a diet.
- You need new brakes; otherwise you may not be able to stop in time.
- Star Trek was my favourite television show during the 1960s; in fact, it is my favourite television show of all time.
- I had a huge meal; however, I am already hungry again.
- The Christmas ornaments are finally packed away: small, shiny ones; big, bright ones; and the homemade ones.
- She had self-defence training; consequently she warded off the assailant.
- We had students from Lima, Peru; Santiago, Chile; and Caracas, Venezuela
- I know you don’t like broccoli; nevertheless it is very good for you.
- Michelle drives a Jaguar; Sonya drives a Porsche.
- I have finished the main course; now I have to make dessert.
- Spring brings gentle rains and warmer weather; in addition to thunderstorms and hail.
- She calls it the bathroom; I call it the loo.
- Mom wants the chores completed; moreover she wants them done properly.
- I will be there as soon as I finish working; that is a promise I will definitely keep.
- She didn’t see the other car coming; now her car has a huge dent.
- There is mounting evidence of global warning; of course some people will never believe it

9. Me Myself and I

I and Me

Use **I** for the subject and **me** for the object in a sentence.

I walked the dog. She gave the ball to **me**.

I think most people don't have any problem with those sorts of simple sentences. The difficulty arises when there's someone else in the sentence as well.

Jane and **I** walked the dog. (correct)

Jane and **me** walked the dog. (incorrect)

She gave the ball to Jane and **me**. (correct)

She gave the ball to Jane and **I**. (incorrect)

The easiest way to see if you're using the correct pronoun in these sentences is to remove 'Jane' and see what pronoun is left. That's the correct one.

We usually put the other person before **I** or **me**.

Myself

Use **myself** to refer back to the subject of the sentence (it is a reflexive pronoun).

I gave **myself** a bunch of flowers for my birthday.

Do not use **myself** as a substitute for **I** or **me**. For instance, don't say:

Please send this to **myself**. (incorrect)