APA Formatting Reminders

- APA recommends using 12 pt. Times New Roman font or similar throughout. Do not vary the font or the size of your text, even for headings.
- Please view the sample Lab 1 carefully and make sure your paper matches the format exactly, down to the margins, the headers, and the amount of spaces in between sections.
- A Level 1 heading should be centered, bolded, and uppercase and lower case (also referred to as title case).
- A Level 2 heading should be flush with the left margin, bolded, and title case.
- For guidance on formatting tables: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/19/
- For guidance on formatting figures: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/20/
- More details are listed in the sample paper comments.
- Note: you only need ONE space in between sentences, not TWO. See #23 below.

Code for Grammatical and APA Guidelines

01 They're vs. Their vs. There
02 Its vs. It's
03 Incomplete Comparisons
04 Passive Voice
05 Dangling Modifiers
06 Possessive Nouns
07 Affect vs. Effect
18 i.e. vs. e.g.
19 Peek vs. peak vs. pique
10 Who vs. That
12 **Combine sentences; choppy writing**
13 Lose vs. Loose
14 Then vs. Than
15 Use of Commas
16 Assure vs. Insure vs. Ensure
17 Less vs. Fewer
18 Semicolons
19 Compliment vs. Complement
20 Farther vs. Further
En Dash vs. Em Dash
Between vs. Among
Space between Sentences
Sentence Structure
Subject Verb Agreement
Reword for clarity or style, seems awkward or hard to understand
Too wordy or unnecessary word
Repetition
Formatting
Capitalization
Periods
Isolated “this” or “that” “these” or “those”
Colons
Parallel structure
Hyphens
Plural vs. Singular
Spelling
Confusing pronouns
Colloquial
See sample paper for proper APA formatting
Use correct APA referencing
Unnecessary “there is” or “there are”
POV shift
Definition and inclusion in glossary is needed
Imprecise or incorrect word
Verb usage
Tense shift
Too many transitional phrases
Use stronger verbs
Team needs to have the same glossary
Fragment
Comma splice

Detailed explanation of common grammatical errors

01) They're vs. Their vs. There
One's a contraction for "they are" (they're), one refers to something owned by a group (their), and one refers to a place (there). You know the difference among the three -- just make sure you triple check that you're using the right ones in the right places at the right times. I find it's helpful to search through my posts (try control + F on PC or command + F on Mac) for those words and check that they're being used in the right context.

Correct Usage: They're going to love going there -- I heard their food is the best!
02) Its vs. It's
This one tends to confuse even the best of writers. "Its" is possessive and "it's" is a contraction of "it is." Lots of people get tripped up because "it's" has an 's after it, which normally means something is possessive. But in this case, it's actually a contraction. Do a control + F to find this mistake in your writing. It's really hard to catch on your own, but it's a mistake everyone can make.

03) Incomplete Comparisons
This one drives me up a wall when I see it in the wild. Can you see what's wrong with this sentence?

Our car model is faster, better, stronger.

Faster, better, stronger ... than what? What are you comparing your car to? A horse? A competitor? An older model?

When you're asserting that something should be compared to something else, make sure you always clarify what that something else is ... otherwise it's impossible for your readers to discern what the comparison actually means.

04) Passive Voice
If you have a sentence with an object in it -- basically a noun that receives the action -- passive voice can happen to you. Passive happens when the object of a sentence is put in the beginning of a sentence instead of at the end. With passive voice, your writing comes across as sounding weak and unclear.

Hold up. Re-read that last paragraph I just wrote -- there's waaaaaay too much passive voice. See how it seems kind of jumbled and not quite punchy? Let's try that again.

Passive voice happens when you have an object (a noun that receives the action) as the subject of a sentence. Normally, the object of the sentence appears at the end, following a verb. Passive writing isn't as clear as active writing -- your readers will thank you for your attention to detail later.

Make sense? It's kind of a complicated thing to describe, but active voice makes your writing seem more alive and clear. Want to get into the nitty-gritty of avoiding passive voice? Check out this tip from Grammar Girl.

Weak: These differences are outlined in Table 1.
Stronger: Table 1 outlines these differences.
Sometimes passive voice is okay, especially with technical writing. Learn more about the APA guidelines.

Check out https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/539/04/ and https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/539/02/

05) Dangling Modifiers
I love the name of this mistake -- it makes me think of a dramatic, life-or-death situation such as hanging precariously off a cliff. (Of course grammar mistakes are never that drastic, but it helps me remember to keep them out of my writing.)

This mistake happens when a descriptive phrase doesn't apply to the noun that immediately follows it. It's easier to see in an example taken from my colleague over on the HubSpot Sales Blog:

After declining for months, Jean tried a new tactic to increase ROI.

What exactly is declining for months? Jean? In reality, the sentence was trying to say that the ROI was declining -- not Jean. To fix this problem, try flipping around the sentence structure (though beware of passive voice).

Jean tried a new tactic to increase ROI after it had been declining for months.

Better, right?

06) Possessive Nouns
Most possessive nouns will have an apostrophe -- but where you put that apostrophe can be confusing. Here are a few general rules to follow:

If the noun is plural, add the apostrophe after the s. For example: the dogs' bones.

If the noun is singular and ends in s, you should also put the apostrophe after the s. For example: the dress' blue color.

On the other hand, if the noun is singular and doesn't end in an s, you'll add the apostrophe before the s. For example: the lizard's tail.

Simple, right? If you want a deeper dive into the rules of possessive nouns, check out this website.

07) Affect vs. Effect
This one is another one of my pet peeves. Most people confuse them when they're talking about something changing another thing.

When you're talking about the change itself -- the noun -- you'll use "effect."

That movie had a great effect on me.

When you're talking about the act of changing -- the verb -- you'll use "affect."

That movie affected me greatly.

**08) i.e. vs. e.g.**
Confession: I never remember this rule, so I have to Google it *every single time* I want to use it in my writing. I'm hoping that by writing about it here, the trend will stop.

Lots of people use the terms interchangeably when trying to elaborate on a point, but they really mean two different things: "i.e." roughly means "that is" or "in other words," while "e.g." means "example given" or "for example." The former is used to clarify something you've said, while the latter adds color to a story through an example.

**09) Peek vs. peak vs. pique**
This is another one I often see people mess up even if they know what they mean.

* Peek is taking a quick look at something -- like a sneak peek of a new film.
* Peak is a sharp point -- like the peak of a mountain.
* And pique means to provoke or instigate -- you know, like your interest.
If you're going to use one in your writing, stop and think for a second -- is that the right "peek" you should be using?

**10) Who vs. That**
This is a tricky one. These two words can be used when you're describing someone or something through a phrase like "Lindsay is a blogger who likes ice cream." When you're describing a person, be sure to use "who." When you're describing an object, use "that." For example, you should say "Her computer is the one that overheats all the time." It's pretty simple, but definitely something that gets overlooked frequently.

**11) "A lot" vs. A lot vs. Allot**

Hate to break it to all of you "alot" fans out there ... but "alot" is not a word. If you're trying to say that someone has a vast number of things, you'd say they have "a lot" of things. And if you're
trying to say that you've set aside a certain amount of money to buy something, you'd say you "allotted" $20 to spend on gas.

If you're trying to remember to stay away from "alot," check out this awesome cartoon by Hyperbole and a Half featuring the alot. That face will haunt you for the rest of your content marketing days.

12) **Inter-Exclam**

Let's clarify the "into" versus "in to" debate.

These sentences would flow better if combined.

So if you're trying to decide which to use, first figure out if the words "in" or "to" actually modify other words in the sentence. If they don't, then rely on yourself to indicate some sort of movement, if it does, you might want to use "into.

13) **Lose vs. Loose**

When people mix up "lose" and "loose," it's usually just because they're spelled so similarly. They know their definitions are completely different.

"Lose" is a verb that means "to fail to keep or maintain; fail to win; cease to have," like losing your keys or losing a football match.

"Loose" is an adjective that means "not tight" or "not closely constrained," like loose clothing or a loose tooth.

A trick for remembering the difference is to think of the term "loosey-goosey" -- both words that make up that compound word are spelled with two o's.

14) **Then vs. Than**

What's wrong with this sentence?

*My dinner was better then yours.*

*Shudder.* In the sentence above, "then" should be "than." Why? Because "than" is a conjunction used mainly to make comparisons -- like saying one thing was better
"than" another. "Then" is mainly an adverb used to situate actions in time: We made dinner, and "then" we ate it.

15) Use of Commas
There are entire courses on correct comma usage, but let's go over some of the more common comma use cases here ...

To separate elements in a series.

Each element in a series should be separated by a comma. For example: "I brought a jacket, a blanket, and an umbrella to the park." That last comma is optional. It's called an "Oxford comma," and whether you use it depends on your own internal style guide.

NOTE: Sheila prefers the Oxford comma!

To separate independent clauses.

You can use commas to separate independent clauses that are joined by "and," "but," "for," "or," "nor," "so," or "yet." For example, this is correct: "My brother is very smart, and I've learned a lot from him."

An independent clause is a sentence that can stand on its own. Here's how to test it: Would the second part of the sentence (following one of those coordinating conjunctions) make a full sentence on its own? If so, add a comma. If it doesn't, leave it out.

To separate an introductory word or phrase.

At the beginning of a sentence, we often add an introductory word or phrase that requires a subsequent comma. For example, "In the beginning, I had no idea how to use a comma." Or, "However, after reading an awesome blog post, I understand the difference." Other common introductory words and phrases include "after," "although," "when," and "while."

To learn about more use cases for the comma, check out this blog post from Daily Writing Tips.

16) Assure vs. Insure vs. Ensure
All of these words have to do with "making an outcome sure," which is why they're so often mixed up. However, they aren't interchangeable.

- "To assure" means to promise or say with confidence. For example, "I assure you that he's good at his job."
• "To ensure" means to make certain. For example, "Ensure you're free when I visit next weekend."
• Finally, "to insure" means to protect against risk by regularly paying an insurance company. For example, "I insure my car because the law requires it."

17) Less vs. Fewer
You know the checkout aisle in the grocery store that says "10 Items or Less"? That's actually incorrect. It should be "10 Items or Fewer."

Why? Because "items" are quantifiable -- you can count out 10 items. Use "fewer" for things that are quantifiable, like "fewer M&Ms" or "fewer road trips." Use "less" for things that aren't quantifiable, like "less candy" and "less traveling."

18) Semicolons
Semicolons are used to connect two independent clauses that, though they could stand on their own, are closely related. For example, you could use a semicolon in the sentence: "Call me tomorrow; I'll have an answer for you by then."

Notice that each clause could be its own sentence -- but stylistically, it makes more sense for them to be joined. (If there's a coordinating conjunction between the two clauses -- like "and," "but", or "or" -- then use a comma instead.)

You can also use semicolons to separate items in a list when those items contain commas themselves.

19) Compliment vs. Complement
These two words are pronounced exactly the same, making them easy to mix up. But they're actually quite different.

If something "complements" something else, that means it completes it, enhances it, or makes it perfect. For example, a wine can complement a meal, and two colors can complement each other.

The word "compliment" though, refers to an expression of praise (as a noun), or to praise or express admiration for someone (as a verb). You can compliment your friend's new haircut, or pay someone a compliment on his or her haircut.

20) Farther vs. Further
People often use "farther" and "further" interchangeably to mean "at a greater distance."

However, in most countries, there are actually subtle differences in meaning between the two: "Farther" is used more to refer to physical distances, while "further" is used more to refer to
figurative and nonphysical distances. So while Paris is "farther" away than Madrid, a marketing team falls "further" away from its leads goal. (Note: The word "further" is preferred for all senses of the word in the U.K., Australia, Canada, and elsewhere in the Commonwealth of Nations.)

The word "further" can also be used as an adjective or as an adverb to mean "additionally." For example, "I have no further questions."

21) En Dash vs. Em Dash
Both "—" and "——" are versions of the dash: "—" is the en dash, and "——" or "--" are both versions of the em dash. You can use either the en dash or the em dash to signify a break in a sentence or set off parenthetical statements.

The en dash can also be used to represent time spans or differentiation, such as, "That will take 5–10 minutes."

The em dash, on the other hand, can be used to set off quotation sources, such as, "'To be, or not to be, that is the question.' —Shakespeare."

22) Between vs. Among
Let’s clear this one up: The word "between" is used to refer to two (or sometimes more) things that are clearly separated, and the word "among" is used to refer to things that aren't clearly separated because they're part of a group or mass of objects.

So you choose between a red shirt and a black shirt, but you choose among all your shirts. You walk between Centre Street and Broad Street, but you walk among your friends.

23) Space between Sentences

In the days of the typewriter, two spaces were recommended between sentences. Here’s a hint: we’re no longer in the era of the typewriter. Use one space, not two, between sentences.

24) Sentence Structure
If this area is a problem in your writing, check out http://linguapress.com/grammar/word-order.htm. The most common mistake is run-on sentences that don’t actually have an action verb. Make sure your sentence is actually a sentence.

25) Subject Verb Agreement
If this area is a problem in your writing, check out https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/599/01/.
26) Reword for clarity or style, seems awkward or hard to understand

Most of the time this problem can be fixed by removing the passive voice, removing unnecessary words, tweaking sentence structure, or breaking a long sentence up into two sentences.

It’s a good idea to stop and think about what you’re really trying to get the reader to understand. Clear writing is clear thinking. Are you just filling in your paper with fluffy sounding phrases to try to sound knowledgeable? Don’t sell yourself short. Say what you mean and mean what you say, cut the excess. It just distracts from your key points.

A good test for clarity and style? Read your sentence out loud and hear how it sounds to you. It should be easy to understand.

27) Too wordy or unnecessary word

“In order to” is the most common unnecessary phrase. Try just saying “to” instead. Switching from passive voice to active voice will often eliminate excess words.

Here are a few examples:

28) Repetition

If you’ve used a word more than three times in a paragraph, try, try, try again to find another way to say it. Talking about a student? Try calling the student a user in the next sentence. Try structuring your sentence in a different way so you don’t have to keep repeating the subject of the sentence, for example. Get creative.

29) Formatting

See sample paper! See APA guidelines! Thank you very much. I hate to crush you, but your formatting choice on your paper should not be an outlet for your creativity. We’re looking for a cleanly formatted paper so your ideas, not your fonts, stand out.

30) Capitalization

If this area is a problem in your writing, check out https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/592/01/.

31) Periods

Use a period at the end of a complete sentence that is a statement. If the last item in the sentence is an abbreviation that ends in a period, do not follow it with another period. Correct: Please shop, cook, etc.

Periods go inside parentheses only if an entire sentence is inside the parentheses.

Example: Please read the analysis. (You’ll be amazed.)

This is a rule with a lot of wiggle room. An entire sentence in parentheses is often acceptable
without an enclosed period:

**Example:** Please read the analysis (you’ll be amazed).

If this area is a problem in your writing, check out https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/566/01/.

32) **Isolated “this” or “that,” “these” or “those”**

Your writing will be stronger and clearer if you keep an eye out for stand-alone occurrences of “this,” “that,” “these,” or “those.”

*Weak sentence:* These are challenges that can easily be overcome.
*Stronger sentence:* These challenges can easily be overcome.

*Weak sentences:* The user can select his or her own preferences. These offer a user-friendly feature.
*Stronger sentences:* The user can select his or her own preferences. This feature offers a user-friendly experience.

33) **Colons**

Use a colon to join 2 independent clauses when you wish to emphasize the second clause.

Use a colon after an independent clause when it is followed by a list, a quotation, appositive, or other idea directly related to the independent clause.

Lowercase the first word unless it is a proper noun or the start of a complete sentence.
- These things are some of my favorites to have for dinner: ravioli, Ethiopian food, and breakfast.
- She told me her secret ingredient: It was butter.

For more about colons, check out https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/566/01/.

34) **Parallel structure**

Parallel structure is extremely important for clear writing. It’s easy to mess this one up.

Everyone: check out https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/623/01/.

35) **Hyphens**

Check out https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/576/01/.

Easy-to-use tools
vs.
The product is easy to use.
Drag-and-drop feature
vs.
He was able to drag and drop the photo into the file.

All of the above are correct. Note that hyphens are correct when the phrase is used as an adjective.

36) Plural vs. Singular
If this area is a problem in your writing, check out http://www.eslgold.com/grammar/singular_plural.html.

37) Spelling
When in doubt, use a dictionary.

38) Confusing pronouns

If I’m not sure who “he,” “she,” “they,” or “it” is, then your writing is unclear. Watch for agreement in number, watch for agreement in person, and eliminate ambiguity. Everyone: read http://writing2.richmond.edu/writing/wweb/pronoun.html.

39) Colloquial
You’re writing, not speaking. Avoid a conversational style when writing formal college papers. Avoid use of phrases like “lots of,” “straight away,” “you know what I mean,” “huge.” Avoid contractions.

It’s worth your time to read this wikiHow article: http://www.wikihow.com/Avoid-Colloquial-(Informal)-Writing.

40) See sample paper for proper APA formatting
The sample paper is your friend.

41) Use correct APA referencing
Some of you did beautifully in this department. Others seemed to fully ignore it. Use https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/. It’s all about the details. For each item listed in your References section, check to make sure you’re listing it correctly. Handle every parenthetical reference with the same level of care. The general idea is (Author, date, page) with variations.

42) Unnecessary “there is” or “there are”
You want strong sentences. Opening a sentence with “there are” or “there is” usually results in weak sentences.
Weak: There are two reasons I want to go to the party.
Stronger: I want to go to the party for two reasons.

Weak: There are better ways to start a sentence.
Stronger: Starting a sentence with a noun usually results in clear writing.

You’ll find that eliminating these overused, weak phrases will help you avoid the passive voice. Sometimes, these phrases work for stylistic reasons. But see first if you can reword the sentence and make it stronger before you settle on “there are.”

43) POV shift
For formal writing, stick with he, she, it, and they. Avoid you and I.

44) Definition and inclusion in glossary is needed
Self-explanatory.

45) Imprecise or incorrect word
Self-explanatory.

46) Verb usage

If this area is a problem for you, check out http://www.eslgold.com/grammar/verb_list.html.

47) Too many transitional phrases
Transitional phrases are important. But don’t overuse them to fluff up your paper. Try removing the phrase to see if the writing still reads well without it. Not every sentence or paragraph needs to start with a transitional device. They serve as signposts, and if you have too many, the reader won’t know where to go.

Check out https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/574/02/ for a list of transitional devices.

48) Use stronger verbs
Whether you are competing for a job, a client, or the attention of a busy audience, one of the best ways of grabbing and keeping a reader’s to use strong, descriptive verbs.

Compare the previous sentence to this one:
To compete for a job, client, or any busy audience, use active verbs to grab and keep the readers attention.

Do you feel the improved strength and style in the second sentence? You can eliminate wordiness and boredom by replacing "to be" verbs with more powerful ones. Of course, you would never want to cut out ALL forms of "to be" (am, is, are, was, were, be, being, been), but analyze the
distribution of weak and strong verbs in your writing and then edit for maximum impact on your audience.

You can also condense and strengthen sentences by editing strings of perpositional phrases and using a strong verb instead.

**Weak**: I was a manager of a group of six people.
**Stronger**: I managed a six-person group.

**Weak**: She was responsible for collecting all the data for the school project.
**Stronger**: She collected all the school project data.

49) **Team needs to have the same glossary**
Self-explanatory.

Sources

http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/common-grammar-mistakes-list
http://www.amazon.com/Alright-Not-All-Right-Confused-ebook
www.grammarbook.com
owl.english.purdue.edu