

Grammar and Punctuation: Guidelines and Common Mistakes

Possessives: When you are referring to something that belongs to someone, whether it is a physical item like a book or something abstract like an idea, here is what that looks like:

Jason's book (not Jason book)

Lisa's thoughts (not Lisa thoughts)

In academic writing, you will usually be using the author's last name when you refer to them or their work:

Moltmann's theology (not Moltmann theology)

Johnson's argument (not Johnson argument)

When referring to something that belongs to a group of people, the apostrophe goes after the s.

The Israelites' exodus out of Egypt represented a new beginning

Commas: Use commas to indicate a list, set apart information, or join sentences together when using certain connecting words:

Jones uses analogies, symbolism, and irony to make his point.

Floyd, who graduated in 2010, now works at the School of Divinity.

We went to the library to find more research material, but there were no additional helpful sources.

Colons and Semi-colons: Colons are only used before a list.

The charter review committee now includes the following people: the mayor, the chief of police, the fire chief, and the chair of the town council.

Semi-colons are used when you are joining two sentences that can each stand alone.

Bailey examines several parables from the Gospel of Luke; his analysis yields some startling results.

There, Their, They're

There: a place

Example: If you go there, you should bring books with you.

Their: something that belongs to several people

Example: Please leave their books alone. Or: It was their decision to leave so early.

They're: when you want to combine they are

Example: If you are looking for John and Cindy, they're not here.

Apart vs. A part

Use apart (one word) when you want to describe something that is separate from something else

Example: He lived apart from his family for seven years.

Use a part (two words) when you are describing something that is one part of something else

Example: His decision to leave home was a part of his larger plan to meet new people.

To, Too, Two

To: a connecting word with lots of uses

Example: If you want to meet with me, we can schedule a time to do that.

Or: Please go to the store and pick up milk and bread.

Too: means also or a lot

Example: That sandwich had too much tuna on it.

Or: Can we please come too?

Two: the number 2

Example: The author spends two paragraphs defining the term soteriology.