



Creative Force Press

Guiding Aspiring Authors to Release Their Dream

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Top 10 Most Common Writing and Punctuation Errors

1. Punctuation

Be sure to single-space after a sentence's end punctuation in your manuscript. Double-spacing is incorrect for books, despite what you may have learned in typing class. Just one space please! Why? Because double-spacing after each sentence will end up messing up the look of a book's interior, causing awkwardly large spaces in some spots once paragraphs are formatted using justify (also see point number five for more info).

2. Quotation Marks

Putting quotation marks before periods is almost always incorrect. Quote marks go after a period or other ending punctuation.

"This is correct!"

"This is not".

Here is an example when there's a comma "involved," as the same rule applies.

Here's an example of one of the only times the opposite is true. This sentence is quoting what someone else said, but is asking a question about it:

What did he mean when he said, "That won't work for me"?

3. Commas

Less is more when it comes to commas in books. Having less commas equals less visual noise for readers. As one example, when you have three items to add, include or discuss, notice a comma only separates the first and second items. A comma after the second item isn't necessary. Here are a couple more sentences as examples:

He gave me a new tool and it helped me tremendously. (consider skipping the comma you could place after the word tool in simple sentences like this)

Last Sunday we had a great time too. (this sentence could have had a couple unnecessary commas)

Lastly, whatever you decide about your comma use, be consistent. (we couldn't get away with omitting any commas from this sentence)

4. Semi-colons

In our opinion, less is more when it comes to semi-colons, too. Semi-colons are generally misunderstood and often used incorrectly. The grammar rules for semi-colon use are extensive.

This is correct; correct for semi-colon use! (there's a continuation of the same thought and words)

This one is not correct; it's just an error. (this sentence should have simply used a period)

Here are a couple more correct sentences, one using a semi-colon and the other a comma:

I saw a huge owl, and it was eating a small mouse. (notice just a comma before *and*)

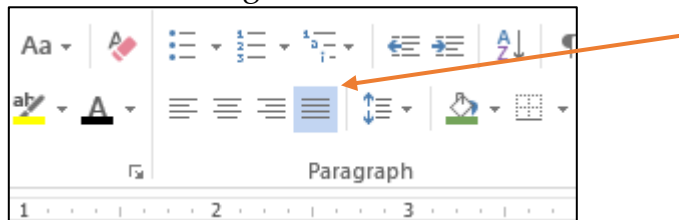
I saw a huge owl; it was eating a small mouse. (notice a semi-colon can be used instead when *and* is removed, although a period could simply be used as well)

5. Formatting

There are several formatting-related mishaps that can happen while working on a book manuscript. One of them is spacing. The optimum spacing setting for a book is the 1.15 line spacing option. Do not use double-spacing, and single spacing can look crowded. As you work on writing your manuscript, use whatever spacing setting you prefer, but for final formatting, 1.15 is best.

Also, be sure you use Word's automatic word-wrapping feature. Sometimes people use hard returns in awkward places and use tabs or manipulate margins to force placement of text and other elements rather than using their software's default features. This problem becomes most evident when plopping your manuscript into your template to prepare files for printing. To avoid formatting issues, only hard return at the end of paragraphs, not in the middle of paragraphs at the end of sentences. Use the "center" feature to center your content on the page rather than using tabs. Keep indents consistent at the beginning of each paragraph.

Lastly, all professional-looking books use the justify feature that evenly distributes text between the margins.



6. Emphasis Items

There are several ways to emphasize text in a manuscript: italics, CAPS, **bold** and exclamation points. To keep your book looking as visually clean as possible though, emphasize text very sparingly. For example, we've seen authors use an exclamation point

in every sentence in the same paragraph. This is definitely not a good idea. Keep in mind that when too many things are emphasized, nothing is.

Consistency is key when using italics in your book. Typically, authors emphasize certain emotional words, quotes, scriptures, etc., using italics. In most books, **bold** might only be used for headings and call-outs. All CAPS, again, usually shows up only in headings. Caps might also very sparingly be used to emphasize a yelling voice or mentioning a sign's wording.

Please, no overuse of:

- *Italics*
- CAPS
- **BOLD**
- exclamation points!!!

These *kinds* of "sentences" **REALLY** drive readers "crazy," and it is *complete* VISUAL **noise!!!**

7. Numbers

Consistency is key in manuscripts, and numbers show up a lot; numbers like ages, time, quantities, percentages, decades, etc. Here are a few suggestions and tips for number consistency:

Age - Spell out ages one through ten. Eleven and up, use the number unless it's the first word of a sentence (like this one was).

"When I was 13, I got a beautiful cat. I had wanted one since I was six."

Time - Use numbers unless it's the first word of a sentence. "It only took the cat 5 minutes to take over the dog's bed. Twenty minutes later, it was 10 p.m."

Percentages - Use numbers unless it's the first word of a sentence.

"Typically, 15% of cats prefer belly rubs."

"Fifty percent of dogs love cats."

Decades - With or without an apostrophe works, but always be consistent with one style throughout your manuscript (this next sentences mixes the two, which you should not).

"In the 1950s, cats were skinnier, but in the 1970's, more orange cats existed."

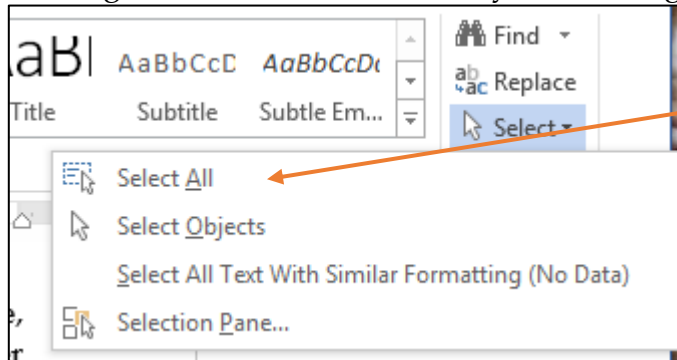
8. Fonts

In your manuscript, be sure your text is the same font throughout. One exception is your chapter or section headings. Styling and design choices will determine font choices for your main text and headings.

Popular fonts for book text are:

Times New Roman
Georgia
Book Antiqua
Minion Pro

It's easy to be sure your manuscript has all the same font throughout. In Word, you can easily use the "Select/Select All" button and then set your favorite font. Note: this will make headings the same font, so format your headings second.



Note: your font choices will affect your page count.

9. Too many sentences starting with "I."

"I don't know if you've ever read a paragraph like this. I can't believe people do this so often and don't realize it. I have seen it so many times. I know it's not working for readers."

Have you already written? Scan through your manuscript to see if you have this "I" writing habit. Getting ready to write? Keep this in mind, and intentionally change up your sentence structures. Reworking the "I" paragraph above, here's an easy way to say the same thing in a less "I" way:

"Have you ever read a paragraph like this? So often people start too many sentences with "I" and don't even realize it. I've seen it so many times, and it really doesn't work for readers."

Rather than four "I" sentences, this paragraph is now reduced to just one. Simple!

10. Conjunctions

Unfortunately many casual writers get conjunctions (and other similar words) wrong. Here are a few examples and explanations of how to use them correctly:

Your (possessive, e.g., your car is on fire)

You're (you are)

It's (it is)

Its (possessive, e.g., the cat licked its fur)

They're (they are)

Their (possessive, e.g., their hat is nice)

There (a reference to a place or location, e.g., my hat is over there)

We're (we are)

Were (a past tense Were you here earlier?)

We'd (we would)

He'll (he will)

Won't (will not)

Who's (who is) and whose (possessive) are also often mixed up. These are correct:

Who's going to the lake?

It's the person whose house is green.

Here's another note about contractions. If you're writing in a very formal style, contractions usually are thought of as not being appropriate or best used in formal-style writing. Obviously, this handout isn't that formal, otherwise we wouldn't have used all these contractions in this one paragraph ☺.