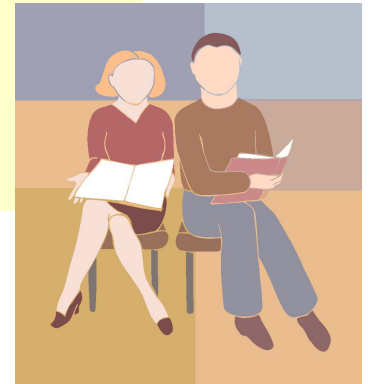


Strunk and White  
**Elements of Style**  
Chapter 1

**ELEMENTARY RULES OF  
USAGE**



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# 1. Form the possessive singular of nouns with 's

- The cat's paws
- The dog's bark
- The room's odor
- The bird's song
- The school's policy
- The judge's verdict

- Charles's friend
- Mr. Gibbs's poetry
- Mr. Jones's classroom
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- The boss's daughter

# 1. Form the possessive singular of nouns with 's

- The cats' paws
- The dogs' bark
- The rooms' odor
- The birds' song
- The schools' policy
- The judges' verdict

- Six cats walked by
- Two dogs barked
- Nine rooms were evacuated
- The birds sang
- The schools are broke
- The judges decide

# 1. Exceptions to the possessive apostrophe rule

## Right

- The laws of Moses
- The temple of Isis
- Teachings of Jesus
- For conscience' sake
- For righteousness' sake

## Wrong

- Moses's laws
- Isis's temple
- Jesus's teachings
- For conscience's sake
- For righteousness's sake

# Definite pronouns use NO apostrophe

## Indefinite pronouns use apostrophe

- The hat is hers
- The car is ours
- The floor is yours
- The piano is theirs
- Its legs are wobbly

- Somebody's hat
- Anybody's car
- Everyone's duty
- One's right to know
- Everybody's fool

What are  
these  
apostrophes  
for?



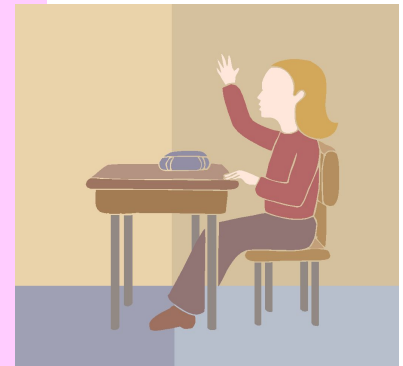
**Everybody's happy**

**Anybody's eligible**

**Somebody's at the door**

**It's hot in here**

**It's a wise dog that scratches its own fleas.**



# Mr. Gibbs's Pet Peeve

## Putting apostrophes on simple plural nouns

- Pie's for sale.
- Horse's for rent.
- Garage Sale: Many item's
- My teacher's taught me good grammar.





To ALL sports writers:  
It's the girls' basketball team, not the  
girl's basketball team.



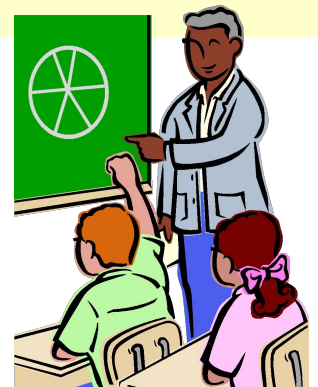


# Use apostrophe when you omit a letter

- I'm from the class of '71.
- I like rock 'n' roll.
- *Don't* forget the contractions.
  - Can't, won't, shouldn't, couldn't, didn't, let's, she's, it's

# Use 's to form plurals of single letters and numbers

- She got all *a*'s and *b*'s.
- Her scores were all 6's and 7's.
- Watch your P's and Q's.
- The French student isn't rolling his r's.



Exceptions: Do not use the apostrophe for plurals of numbers or multiple-letter combinations

- Uncle Charlie still lives in the 1960s.
- The 1950s were prosperous.
- Now I know my ABCs

Omit the apostrophe in names of organizations when the possessive case is implied and in certain geographic designations

- Citizens League
- Actors Guild
- Pikes Peak
- Hermits Ridge

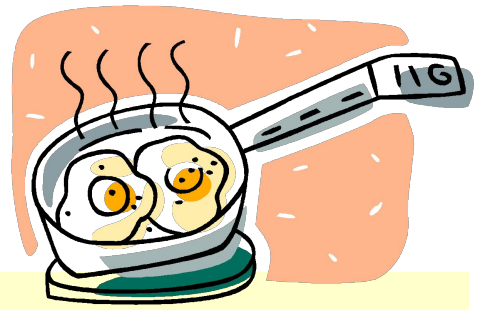


2. In a series of three or more terms with a single conjunction, use a comma after each term except the last

- The flag is red, white, and blue.
- She looked up, down, and all around.
- He walked in the room, hung up his coat, and sat in the chair.

**My favorite foods are  
tacos, tangerines, and  
peanut butter and jelly  
sandwiches.**





**My favorite foods are  
tacos, tangerines,  
peanut butter and  
jelly sandwiches, and  
ham and eggs.**

**Use the semicolon in lists where the individual items contain commas. This applies even if only one item has a comma**

- The committee included Mary Ladd, chairperson; Oliver Greenwood, treasurer; and Nellie Kim, secretary.
- They brought with them from New Orleans a box of gumbo; a large, green suitcase; and a change of clothes.
- He is afraid of bears; lions; skunks; black widow spiders; and big, ugly rats.



3. Enclose parenthetical expressions between commas

The old man, **alone with his thoughts,** continued to walk his dog.

The old man, ~~alone~~  
~~with his thoughts,~~  
continued to walk his  
dog.

The dog, hungry  
and tired,  
followed along  
behind.

The dog, ~~hungry~~  
~~and tired,~~  
followed along  
behind.

The old man jumped  
when he saw the  
stick, **thinking it  
was a snake.**

The old man jumped  
when he saw the  
stick, ~~thinking it~~  
~~was a snake.~~

# Referring to all the students

**The students, who found the material difficult, met after school.**

# Only certain students

**The students who found the material difficult met after school.**

**I have one sister**

**My sister, Mary, is visiting.**

**I have two sisters**

**My sister Mary is visiting.**



● Use a comma before which, but no comma before that.

**THAT** is a defining pronoun.

**WHICH** is a non-defining pronoun.

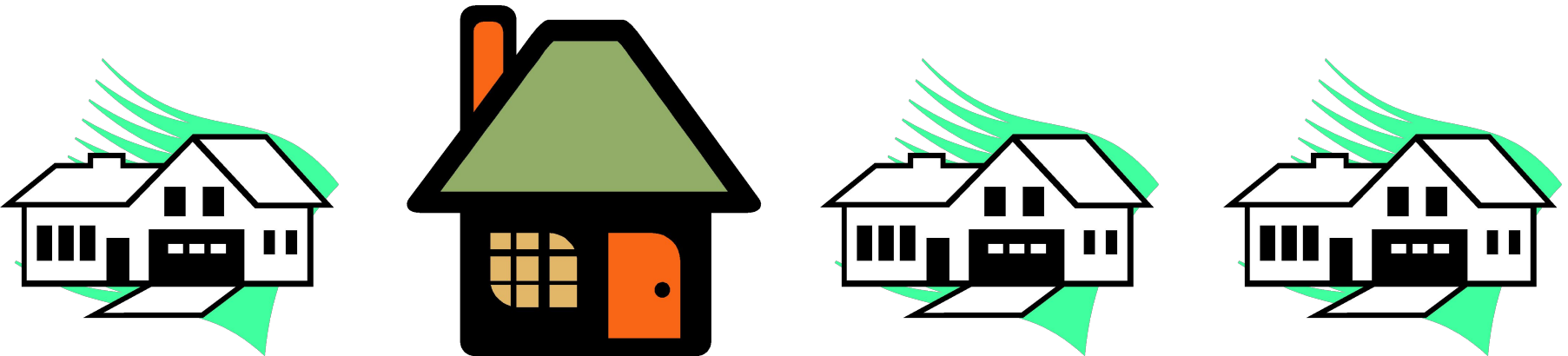
**I have several computers**

The computer that is  
broken is in the shop.

**I have one computer**

The computer, which is  
broken, is in the shop.

**This is the  
house that  
Jack built.**



**This is the  
house, which  
Jack built.**



## 4. Place a comma before a conjunction introducing an independent clause

- John went to the store, and he bought milk.
- Mary went home, and she did her homework.
- I walked in, and I sat down.

## 4. Place a comma before a conjunction introducing an independent clause

- John went to the store and bought milk.
- Mary went home and did her homework.
- I walked in and sat down.



The old man  
reached his house,  
and he opened the  
front gate.

The old man  
reached his house  
and opened the  
front gate.



The old man

reached his house.

He opened the

front gate.

## 5. Do not join independent clauses by a comma

Right

The man was pugnacious;  
fighting was his favorite  
pastime.

May was sanguine; the grin  
never left her face.

Wrong

The man was pugnacious,  
fighting was his favorite  
pastime.

May was sanguine, the grin  
never left her face.

## 6. Do not break sentences in two

### Incorrectly written:

- He was an interesting **talker**. **A** man who had traveled all over the world.
- She was **beautiful**. **A** stark and radiant figure against the moonlight.
- I met Bobby Watson at **school**. **A** new student who just arrived yesterday.

## 6. Do not break sentences in two

### Correctly written:

- He was an interesting **talker**, a man who had traveled all over the world.
- She was **beautiful**, a stark and radiant figure against the moonlight.
- I met Bobby Watson at **school**, a new student who just arrived yesterday.

7. Use a colon after an independent clause to introduce a list of particulars, an appositive, an amplification, or an illustrative quotation

Right

**My favorite musicians are as follows:** Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett, Wayne Newton, and Shaggy.

Wrong

**My favorite musicians are:** Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett, Wayne Newton, and Shaggy

## 8. Use a dash to set off an abrupt break or interruption and to announce a long appositive or summary

- “I said I’m leaving and you can’t stop –”
- “You’re not going anywhere!”
- John entered the plane – an old WWII cargo carrier with rusty hinges and cracked windows – and took his seat
- She caught the snowball – a grapefruit-sized mass of wet snow, ice, and highway grit – square in the face.

## 9. The number of the subject determines the number of the verb

- **Wrong:** The **joy** of youth – its trials, its joys, its adventures, its challenges – **are** not soon forgotten.
- **Right:** The **joy** of youth – its trials, its joys, its adventures, its challenges – **is** not soon forgotten.



## 10. Use the proper case of pronoun

- Will Jane or he be hired?
- The culprit was he.
- The last one out of the room was she.
- We big eaters would rather ride than walk.
- He likes Shakespeare more than I do.
- Virgil Soames is the candidate who we think will win.
- Virgil Soames is the candidate whom we hope to elect.



## 11. A participial phrase at the beginning of a sentence must refer to the grammatical subject

- **Wrong:** Being in dilapidated condition, I was able to buy the house cheap.
- **Wrong:** Wondering what to do, the clock struck 12.
- **Right:** Walking down the road, he saw a woman.
- **Right:** He saw a woman walking down the road



**THE  
END**