



A Bird's Eye View of those Pesky Grammar Rules

Apostrophes

1. Use apostrophes with nouns to show ownership or possession. (Norm's nest was big; Coco's was small.)
2. Use apostrophes to make indefinite pronouns possessive. (Someone's bird escaped.)
3. Use an apostrophe to create contractions. (It's a beautiful day; let's go to the zoo.)

Capitalization

1. Capitalize the first word in a sentence. (Hummingbirds fly.)
2. Capitalize proper nouns (**specific** people, places, things, or ideas)
 - a. Major geographical names
 - i. Continents (Antarctica)
 - ii. Bodies of water (Pacific Ocean)
 - iii. Landforms (Rocky Mountains)
 - iv. Public Areas (Yellowstone National Park)
 - v. Roads and highways (Route 66, Sheridan Road)
 - vi. Regions of the Country but **not** compass directions. (She is from the South. Birds fly south.)
 - b. Historical events, documents, time periods (Crusades, Magna Carta, Dark Ages)
 - c. Months, days, holidays (but not seasons) (June, Sunday, Labor Day)
 - d. Abbreviations for historical eras (B.C.E. and A.D.)
 - e. Religions, races, nationalities, languages (Hinduism, African American, British, English)
 - i. Words referring to deities (God, Allah)
 - ii. Holy scriptures (Torah, Bible, Koran)
 - f. Ships, trains, aircrafts (Titanic, Pullman, Concord).
3. Capitalize titles and abbreviations for titles when attached to a specific name. (Dr. Mr. Mrs. J.D. Ph.D.)
4. Capitalize the pronoun I. (She asked if I wanted to go.)
5. Capitalize words such as mother, father, sister, brother, aunt, uncle **only** when directed to a specific person. (Would you, Mother, buy me a parrot?)
6. Capitalize the first word of an undivided quote. (She said, "Peacocks are beautiful.").

7. Capitalize the first word of a salutation and closing. (Dear Norm, Congratulations on your new bird house!)
8. Capitalize the first and other important words in all titles and publications, **excluding**--a, an, and, as, but, if, or, nor, and prepositions. (I am reading a great book, *The Life and Times of the most Famous Word Bird*.)
9. Capitalize specific course names. (I am registered for Birdwatching 101 and English Literature.)

Colons

1. Use a colon before a list of items that follow a complete sentence—often indicated by terms such as “as follows” or “following.” (You need to bring many things birdwatching: binoculars, notebook, field guide, and a camera.)
2. Use a colon to separate the hours and minutes. (We leave at 10:15)
3. Use a colon between two independent clauses when the second one explains the first. (The trip was a huge success: we took more than 500 pictures.)
4. Use a colon to introduce extended quotations (three or more lines).

Commas

1. Use commas to separate words or phrases in a series. (I saw hawks, eagles, and a vulture on my trip.)
2. Use a comma to separate two or more adjectives preceding a noun if you can replace the comma with the word “and,” and it would still make sense. (it was a large, intimidating bird.) However, if it does not sound right to insert an “and” do not use a comma. (It had big green eyes.)
3. Use commas before for, and, nor, but, or, and yet in a compound sentence. (The bird was injured, and I wanted to help it.)
4. At the beginning of a sentence, use a comma to offset a prepositional phrase, a participial phrase, adverb clause. (After the sun set, the owls began to hoot).
5. Use a comma after introductory words. (Interestingly, Vern knows how to dab.)
6. Use a comma to set off appositives or appositive phrases. (Gemma, a great photographer, took Addie’s picture.)
7. Use a comma to offset parenthetical phrases. (Pepe, always seeming sad, follows Norm around.)
8. Use a comma after the salutation and closing of letters. (Dear Big Bird, you are so tall.)
9. Use a comma to separate items in dates and addresses. (The eggs hatched on January 1, 2121, in Birdville, U.S.A.)
10. Use a comma to separate the speaker from a quotation. (He said, “Ishmael always looks worried.” Or “Well, maybe I am,” Ishmael responded.)
11. Use a comma to offset a noun of direct address. (Vern, how are you feeling?)
12. Use a comma to offset a non-restrictive clause. (Coco, who is small, likes cookies and candy.)

Dashes

1. Use an en-dash (based on width-size of a lower-case letter *n*.) between number references and date references. (Ducks are described on pages 19–27. Our birdwatching trip is March 3–5.)

2. Use an em-dash (based on the width size of the lower-case m) to indicate a pause, an aside, or surprising redirection. In informal writing, em dashes can replace commas, semicolons, colons, or parenthesis. (My field pack had all the gear—binoculars, camera, field guide. I walked along the path—my mind lingering in the past—and tried to focus on the present.)

Exclamation Points

1. Use an exclamation point after interjections or at the end of a sentence for emphasis. (Wow! That emu is enormous!)

Hyphens

1. Use hyphens when writing out numbers between twenty-one and ninety-nine.
2. Use hyphens expressing numbers and things to which they are connected. (Fifth-graders love birds. They are twenty-first-century Word Birds.)
3. Use hyphens when making compound adjectives. (The wide-eyed owl stared at the mouse.)

Parentheses

1. Use parentheses to enclose explanatory information or an aside. (The flock (all 500 birds) landed along the shoreline.) Addie is the cutest (as well as the most demanding) bird.
2. Use parentheses around numbers and letters when they are list indicators. (I am looking for a vet who (a) patient, (b) has experience with birds, and (c) makes house-calls.

Periods

1. Use a period at the end of declarative and imperative sentences. (Birds fly south. Hand me the camera.)

Semicolons

1. Use a semicolon to join independent clauses (complete sentences) that are closely related. (I was so sad when they flew south; I will miss them every day.)
2. Use a semicolon to connect independent clauses joined by a conjunction when at least one of the independent clauses contains a comma. (When I saw the nest fall, I panicked; and I was relieved to see Pepe was fine.)
3. Use a semicolon to join independent clauses when transition words such as, therefore, additionally, however, further are used. (We want to go birdwatching; however, a severe storm is approaching.)
4. Use semicolons to separate items in a list when the items include commas. (Bald eagles have been found in Chicago, Illinois; Ithaca, New York; and Seattle, Washington).

Question Marks

1. Use a question mark after a direct quotation. (Is that your chicken?)
2. Use a question mark when a sentence contains a statement and a question (Norm is the big blue bird, isn't he?)

Quotation Marks

1. Use quotation marks to indicate someone's exact spoken or written words or dialogue.
 - a. When a split quotation begins the sentence, include a comma within the quotation marks. ("My nest is a mess," said Addie.)
 - b. If an exclamation or question mark is part of the quote, include it within the quotation marks. ("Who made this mess?" wondered Addie. "Tell me!" she screamed.)
 - c. If a quote is more than one sentence, place quotation marks and the beginning of the first sentence and the end of the last sentence. (Addie ranted, "I am furious. I just finished cleaning. Someone is going to be in trouble.")
 - d. If there is a quote within a quote, use single quotation marks to indicate. (Addie turned toward Ajax and said, "Ajax did you do this? I said, 'I just finished cleaning.'")
2. Use quotation marks when citing/referencing information from written and other published materials. Use ellipses (...) to indicate if any portion of the text is omitted. (According to the field guide, "vultures are mysterious creatures...often misunderstood.")
3. Use quotation marks around the titles of songs, poems, articles, and chapter titles. ("On Eagles' Wings" is a beautiful song).

