



GRAMMAR

e.g. and i.e.:

Many people think that i.e. and e.g. mean the same thing – they're distinctly different, though, and here's why... e.g. is an abbreviation of the Latin phrase 'exempli gratia' which roughly translates as 'for the sake of example'. To help remember it, you might begin to think of e.g. as standing for 'example given'. That way, you'll begin to use e.g. correctly; e.g. like this!

In contrast, i.e. means 'id est' or 'that is'. So when we write i.e., that which follows should be the same thing restated; i.e. put another way! Both of these are supposed to be written in lower case and, although there's not much call to be sticking them at the beginning of a sentence, if they do end up there, they should be lower case in that instance, too.

Molière said grammar "knows how to control even kings". Elbert Hubbard said grammar is "the grave of letters". And Bart Simpson said "Grammar is not a time of waste". And we agree. Well – we think we agree... Either way, here are a handful of things that are easy to get wrong, alongside a few tips to help put them right!

Affect and effect: The difference between 'affect' and 'effect' can be tricky to remember because these words sound so similar. Other than when it's used to describe a pretence or adopted behaviour, 'affect' is used as a verb - an action that happens. In this case, it is the action of having an influence: "Crossing the road without looking both ways can adversely affect your health..."

Meanwhile, 'effect' is more commonly used as a noun; it is a result: "One effect the smoking ban has had seems to be quieter pubs!" So you'll see that while an affect can lead to an effect, they're different things.

Naturally, there's an exception to this! You can also say "effect a change", but if you want to keep things simple, avoid that one phrase and keep in mind the nifty memory aid 'R.A.V.E.N.': Remember! Affect = Verb; Effect = Noun. This tip features in the thorough and excellent book 'My Grammar and I' by Caroline Taggart and J.A. Wines. If you're interested in picking up other tips, we can't recommend it enough.

Starting sentences with 'and' or 'but':

"But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?" If it's good enough for little Billy Shakespeare, it's good enough for us, yet it's often thought that starting a sentence with 'and' or 'but' is wrong. The thinking is that, because these words are used to join words and phrases together, you must be missing half a sentence if you kick off with one.

Well, obviously, these words can join two words or phrases together... But – we're doing it on purpose now – it's also the case that a thought can be spread across two sentences and joined in this way quite agreeably. And doing so makes your writing sound less formal and more conversational!

Me, Myself and I:

There's an old joke that has an infant school teacher addressing the class and, specifically, a little boy called Johnny. "Johnny..." says the teacher "...give me a sentence that starts with 'I...'" So Johnny starts to answer: "Okay. I is..." Interrupting immediately, the teacher says: "No, Johnny, no! You must never say 'is' after I – it's I *am*... Start again!" So Johnny says: "Sorry, Miss. I *am* the ninth letter of the alphabet..."



Hey – we said it was old, not good! In any case, the word 'I' is used when you're speaking of yourself as the subject of the sentence. In other words, when you are the one taking action: "I did what I had to do." Simple, except hardly anyone knows what the devil an object and a subject have to do with the price of fish!

So let's clear that up quickly: when people are talking about the object of a sentence, they mean the thing that is being acted upon; when they speak about the subject of a sentence, they mean the thing that is doing the action. In the sentence "I went into the garden and watered the plants", the plants are the object, and the speaker is the subject...

But people can be objects, too! In the sentence "I went into the garden and saw my neighbour" the neighbour is the object – the speaker remains the subject! We're dwelling on this because it'll help shortly...

Okay. So the word 'me' is seen as a bit of a grammatical minefield in some sentences: have you ever heard someone say "My friend and me" and thought it sounded a bit odd? "My friend and I", surely? Or the other way round, maybe? Well, it turns out it's more about the context!

With any sentence in which you are the subject of the verb – that's to say you're carrying out an action – you should say 'I'. So "My friend and I are going to the restaurant" is correct... However, when the pronoun is the object of the verb – the speaker is being acted upon – it's correct to say 'me'. "The loud noise frightened my friend and me"!

If you're getting in a tizzy about subjects and objects, though, here are a couple of tips to make it more obvious. Take a stab at the sentence, then check if you've used the correct word by seeing if things make sense when you switch the other pronoun in: "I am shopping for hats" is clearly correct; "Me am shopping for hats" is clearly wrong. Unless you're Jar Jar Binks...

Similarly, with a sentence such as "The horse suddenly reared up, startling my friend and me", you can knock out 'the other party' for a moment to see if it still works. Had you been all alone when this miscreant horse acted up, you'd simply have said: "The horse suddenly reared up, startling me". That would be correct – so stick your friend back in there between you and the horse; it'll still be correct!

Finally, some folk will say 'I' or 'me' with a sense of haunted uncertainty as to when 'myself' would be appropriate. It's advisable to use 'myself' when you've already used 'I' earlier in the sentence: "I'm not a big fan of Eminem's music myself; I think he'd make deafness a pleasure." So 'myself' can be used in a sentence to emphasise your role, or to refer to the self that is yours: "All by myself"!



Don't use no double negatives.

Not never: A double negative is the use of two negative words together in the same sentence. Whilst some of these have, historically, been accepted as a means by which to accentuate the negative, or to offer less than whole hearted agreement – “I don't not like double negatives”, for example – it is now widely felt that each of these negatives cancels out the other, making the statement positive!

In any case, there's little doubt that a double negative causes confusion more often than not, so our advice is to do away with them... In fact, if there's a way of phrasing whatever you're trying to say positively – do so; remember: double negatives are a no-no!

Split infinitives... And beyond!

Before attempting to clearly address the issue of whether or not split infinitives are acceptable, let's offer an explanation of what the heck they are... Saying a sentence has a 'split infinitive' is a posh way of highlighting that the word 'to' has been separated – by another word – from the verb that followed it. We used an example in the first sentence to make this understandable: “Before attempting to *clearly* address the issue of split infinitives...”

Did you see that? Believe it or not, that's pretty much the whole issue: adverbs like 'clearly' nudging their way betwixt the word 'to' and the verbs that follow. Can you believe people have been arguing about that for over 170 years? And it's not a scintillating argument either, rest assured! So, rather than concern ourselves with the disagreement, we focus on the one thing that most people do agree on, since it offers a way out...

You see, most people agree that the vast majority of split infinitives sound rather clumsy... So we say avoid them: avoid them not because of Latin rules, not because of German incompatibilities and not because of the so called 'descriptivist objection'... Avoid them on the grounds of elegance! There is almost always a way to more gracefully say what you intend without splitting the infinitive – or, to put it another way: there is almost always a way to say what you intend with grace... And without splitting the infinitive!

He didn't know how to use the word 'literally'. Literally.

The word 'literally' is quickly becoming one of the most abused, sickly, weak and washed out words in our language. Not literally, of course. It's a word. It cannot be sickly, weak and washed out – and this is precisely the trouble! The word means 'in a literal sense' – in other words 'actually'.

- So for someone to say “I've literally been to Hell and back” they must
- Have actually entered the fiery pits of Beelzebub's realm – and then returned
 - Have actually visited the town 'Hell' in the Cayman Islands – then returned
 - Have simply mispronounced the word 'Hull' and actually made that journey... And returned – or
 - Mean they've been to Hell figuratively: that they've had a difficult time!

Similarly, when footballer Jamie Redknapp told a press interviewer that “Wayne Rooney is literally on fire this season” it's reasonable to assume that Wayne Rooney was, in fact, not on fire. And had not been. And, one would hope, is not ever going to be. The abuse of 'literally' is one of those rare and baffling examples of a word being misused both arbitrarily and unnecessarily when, in fact, the speaker means exactly the opposite. We should all stop it before it drives someone mad. Figuratively speaking.



It's not who you know, it's whom you know:

Given that it's such a small word, 'whom' has a lot of bother about it! It's so easy to get wrong for most people and – let's face it, 'who' is the right word to use about 80% of the time – so who would take the risk of sounding like a pompous twit by sticking an 'm' on the end anyway?

Well, the pedants, of course! And while they may never again be fashionable, they will, alas, always be right on this score. Not to worry, there are a couple of ways to straighten this out... If you recall the object / subject explanation from earlier, the basic rule is this: we use 'who' to refer to the subject of the sentence – the person doing an action: "Who made the tea?". We use 'whom' to refer to the object of the sentence; the person being acted upon: "To whom should this tea be given?"

If you'd like to come at this without looking at the object / subject business, which – for many – is as confusing as having no explanation at all, try this: write out a sentence and use 'who' to start with, remembering it'll be right more often than not. For example: "This is a man who I know to be capable of great things"...

Now imagine that you're still talking about this man's capability, only paraphrase the sentiment whilst wondering if you'd say 'he' or 'him'... For example, would you say "I know him to be capable of great things" or "I know he to be capable of great things"? And get ready – this is marvelous! If 'he' makes more sense, you should use who; if 'him' makes more sense, use whom!

So in the above example we started out by saying "This is a man who I know to be capable of great things", but the 'he/him' technique shows him would be the correct term... You may safely conclude that the sentence should actually read: "This is a man whom I know to be capable of great things."

This technique also works with 'she' and 'her', of course. Here's another example: "For who did they get lunch?" requires only a tiny paraphrase to establish that "They got lunch for he" makes no sense, whilst "They got lunch for him" is agreeable... The question, therefore, should be "For whom did they get lunch?"

To sum up, here's a brief who / whom recap:
Write the sentence with 'who' and try the 'he / him' test
If it's still not clear, work out the objects and subjects
And if it's still not clear, leave it as 'who' – you'll be right more often than not!

Alrighty... We know all that's a bit complicated! We also know 'alrighty' isn't really a word. We know 'grammar' is a seven letter word. Rhythm is a six letter word with no vowels! And a dancer, apparently. Finally, 'toot' is a 4 letter word that reads the same backward as it does forward. What food for thought; tuck in!