

## Dangling Modifiers

Content includes:

- Common dangling modifier mistakes
- Identifying and addressing dangling modifiers

Discussion Questions & Activities

- A simple way to avoid dangling modifiers is to place the modifying word or phrase as close as possible to what it modifies. Consider the underlined phrase in the following sentence: "I was told that I had been awarded first place by the judge." Did the judge do the telling or the awarding? Depending on the intention of the sentence, have students suggest revisions to make its meaning clear.
- According to the *American Heritage Book of English Usage* (1996), "A modifier must never dangle unless you want your sentence to mangle." Rhymes like this are helpful reminders to students about common usage errors. Have students get creative and come up with other rhymes that warn about the use of dangling modifiers as well as other common usage errors.

## Double Negatives

Content includes:

- Using negative words in a sentence
- Avoiding double negatives

Discussion Questions & Activities

- Do two negative words really equal a positive meaning? Invite students to debate this question. As they prepare their arguments, have them consider the meaning of this sentence: "He will not do nothing." Then, consider this famous line from *The Jazz Singer* (1927), "You ain't heard nothin' yet."
- The use of double negatives has a long history in the English language. Shakespeare, for example, used them often to convey negative meaning. Engage students in an exploration of double negatives over time. When were they frowned upon and when were they widely used? While it is best to avoid the use of double negatives in Standard English, how are they used in other languages and dialects? Visit [www.bartleby.com/64/C001/023.html](http://www.bartleby.com/64/C001/023.html) for additional information about the history of double negatives.

## Faulty Comparisons

Content includes:

- How can faulty comparisons cause confusion?
- Identifying and addressing faulty comparisons

Discussion Questions & Activities

- Gather examples from student writing where faulty comparisons occur. Ask students to suggest alternative ways of revising each sentence.

## Redundancy

Content includes:

- Avoiding redundancy to make clear, concise statements
- Using redundancy for emphasis or to make a point

Discussion Questions & Activities

- Have students work in small groups and take a closer look at a redundant phrase in a sentence. Does the redundancy cause any confusion in the sentence? Is it there to add emphasis? Is it unnecessary? How would students restate the sentences in their own words?
- Discuss how a sentence can be correct in form but redundant in meaning. Have students consider the following sentences: "He drew a round circle." "The scientist observed by watching the specimen."

## Suggested Print Resources

- O'Conner, Patricia T. *Woe is I Jr.: The Younger Grammarphobe's Guide to Better English in Plain English*. Putnam Juvenile, New York, NY; 2007.
- Venolia, Jan. *Write Right!: A Desktop Digest of Punctuation, Grammar, and Style*. Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, CA; 2001.

## Suggested Internet Resources

Periodically, Internet Resources are updated on our web site at [www.LibraryVideo.com](http://www.LibraryVideo.com)

- [owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/)  
Click on "Grammar and Mechanics" for detailed explanations and examples.
- [grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/](http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/)  
The Guide to Grammar & Writing provides in-depth explanations of grammar concepts. Quizzes are also provided to test understanding.

### TEACHER'S GUIDE

Megan Carnate, M.Ed.

Curriculum Specialist, Schlessinger Media

### TITLES IN THIS SERIES

- COMMON USAGE ERRORS
- SENTENCE STRUCTURE
- USING ADJECTIVES, ADVERBS & OTHER MODIFIERS
- USING CAPITALIZATION & PUNCTUATION
- USING CLAUSES & PHRASES
- USING END MARKS & COMMAS
- USING NOUNS & PRONOUNS
- USING VERBS

Teacher's Guides Included  
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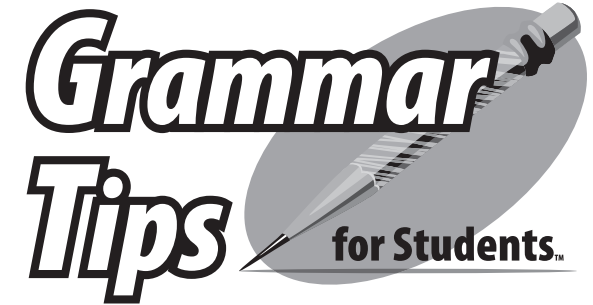


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## COMMON USAGE ERRORS

### Grades 5–12

Effective communication, both in the classroom and the real world, is important and grammar is a key element of communication. All students should understand how their choice of words, the order in which they are placed and the punctuation they use work together to express their thoughts in a clear and accurate way. *Grammar Tips for Students* is designed as brief mini-lessons that highlight specific grammar topics using clear explanations and specific examples and offering useful tests and tips for avoiding confusion and misuse.

Because each show contains a series of independent clips, clips can be viewed individually or in groups. Teachers can also choose to show the clips in an order that works for them and their curriculum.



## Program Overview

This video program identifies some common grammar errors and takes the mystery right out of them. Explore run-on sentences, sentence fragments and more! Tackle dangling modifiers and faulty comparisons to see how they can be a source of confusion, and discover ways to avoid them. Consider double negatives and redundant phrases, and revise them right out sentences. Finally, hone in on individual words. Some adjectives and adverbs are often confused and used in place of each other, like “good” and “well.” Other words are confused because they are homonyms. *Common Usage Errors* can serve as a useful tool to develop students’ oral and written communication skills.

### Supporting English Language Learners (ELLs)

- ELLs bring to English their own language experiences. The amount and type of exposure ELLs have to the English language can vary greatly. In addition, their ability to read and write in their native languages can influence their understanding of grammar as well as the type of grammar errors made.
- ELLs may not make the same type of grammar errors as native speakers. Native speakers often rely on their ability to determine if a sentence “sounds or looks right.” This is difficult for ELLs. ELLs should be encouraged to practice the tests and tips provided and may benefit from additional teaching and reinforcement.

## Vocabulary

**comma splice** — A type of run-on sentence that is made up of independent clauses incorrectly joined by a comma.

**dangling modifier** — A word or phrase that modifies the wrong word or phrase in a sentence, or does not modify any word at all.

**double negative** — The nonstandard usage of two negative words in the same sentence.

**faulty comparison** — The inappropriate or confusing comparison of two or more items in a sentence.

**fused sentence** — A type of run-on sentence that is made up of independent clauses joined with no punctuation at all.

**homonym** — Words that have the same pronunciation, and often the same spelling, but differ in meaning and origin.

**independent clause** — A group of words that contains a subject and a verb and can stand on its own as a complete sentence.

**modifier** — A word, phrase or clause that provides description in a sentence. A descriptive adjective is a modifier that reveals more about a noun by answering the question, “What kind?”

**predicate** — An essential part of a sentence, the predicate is the comment made about the subject.

**redundancy** — Unnecessary repetition.

(Continued)

**run-on sentence** — Two or more independent clauses that are joined together as a single sentence without the proper punctuation.

**sentence fragment** — A group of words that do not form a complete sentence, even though it may be punctuated as a sentence. Fragments are often dependent clauses or phrases.

**subject** — An essential part of a sentence, the subject is a word or group of words that functions as a noun to tell whom or what the sentence is about.

## Run-on Sentences

*Content includes:*

- Fused sentences
- Comma splices

*Discussion Questions & Activities*

- Contrary to popular belief, a run-on sentence depends not on its length or amount of information but on how independent clauses are joined. Students often mistakenly identify run-ons as sentences that go “on and on.” Present run-on sentences of varying lengths to students. Challenge them to revise the sentences so that they are complete.
- While a comma alone is not strong enough to join two independent clauses, a semicolon (;) can do the job. Allow students to practice using this method for joining independent clauses. Discuss when it might be helpful to use a comma and coordinating conjunction and when it might make sense to simply use a semicolon.

## Sentence Fragments

*Content includes:*

- What are the elements of a complete sentence?
- Identifying and correcting fragments

*Discussion Questions & Activities*

- In student-written texts, commonly-found fragments are loose dependent clauses that need to be attached to nearby independent clauses. Engage students in an investigation of dependent clauses: their structure and how they are attached to independent clauses; how they function as nouns, adjectives or adverbs; and how they are often signaled with a subordinating conjunction or relative pronoun. Provide students with an array of dependent and independent clauses. Ask them to attach dependent clauses to related independent clauses to create meaningful sentences.
- Not sure if you have a complete declarative sentence or a fragment on your hands? The “It is true that...” test is a simple test to check if a sentence is complete. Have students try placing the “It is true that...” phrase in front of different groups of words to determine which are fragments and which are complete sentences.

## Good/Well & Bad/Badly

*Content includes:*

- Differentiating between adjectives and adverbs
- Using the adjective “good” and the adverb “well”
- Using the adjective “bad” and the adverb “badly”

*Discussion Questions & Activities*

- When choosing between words like “good” and “well,” it helps to have an understanding of adjectives and adverbs. With your students, explore these two parts of speech and the different questions that they can answer. Adjectives tell *which one, how many, what kind* or *whose*. Adverbs tell *when, where, why, how, how often* or *to what degree*. Discuss which questions “good” and “well” answer, and then have students work in small groups to compose sample sentences that use these words.
- Through most of the clip, “well” is used as an adverb. However, “well” can also be used as an adjective or noun. Discuss how many words have more than one meaning and can function as more than one part of speech. When students read a written work, how do they determine which way a word is being used?

## They’re/Their/There

*Content includes:*

- The meaning and usage of “they’re,” “their” and “there.”

*Discussion Questions & Activities*

- Substitution tests are simple ways to tell which word to use in a sentence. To tell if “there” is the word you need, try substituting “here” in its place. To tell if “their” is the word you need, try substituting “his” or “her” in its place. To tell if “they’re” is the word you need, try substituting “they are” in its place. Students can practice applying these tests to sentences pulled from students’ writing. As an extension, investigate other homonyms, like “to,” “two” and “too.” Challenge students to create tests of their own to determine when to use each word.
- The English language has many homonyms and students can often use context clues to determine which homonym to use in a sentence. Are homonyms common in other languages? This is an opportunity for ELLs to assume a leadership role as experts in their native languages. Create a multilingual chart of homonyms and their meanings.