QuickMarks Glossary: Explanations of Some of The Most Common Writing Errors

QuickMarks Glossary

QuickMark	Explanation
-/—	It's important to know when to use a hyphen (-), sometimes called an en-dash, and a dash (—), sometimes called an em-dash. A hyphen (-) is for connecting words (e.g. He knew it was a low-budget film). We use a dash (—) to create a dramatic pause (e.g. *She was small—but strong nonetheless*). Neither a dash nor a hyphen is preceded or followed by a space.
;	A semicolon is used to separate two independent clauses that are closely linked thematically. Each clause must be independent, otherwise a comma would be more appropriate. Of course a period could separate two independent clauses, creating two separate sentences, but that may create too sharp a division between the ideas expressed in each clause.
?	This is unclear. I don't understand.
…	You may use ellipses (three dots) to indicate that you've removed some language, but you cannot change what the statement means. For example, if the original says, *"I don't like cake,"* you can't write, *"I . . . like cake."* You also have to make sure that what you have left makes grammatical sense. So you also can't write, *"I . . . cake."*
'	The only time in the English language that one may use single quotation marks is when quoting something within a quotation. For adding emphasis or referring to a word as a word, use either double quotation marks or italics. **Example**: *She said that her doll was her "special friend."* The quotations are added for emphasis. **Example**: *I told her not to say "portray" as it was the wrong word.* Here, the speaker refers to the word "portray," not the concept it imparts.
"quote"	When referring to words that you have taken from a source, do not use the term "quote" or "quotation." In borrowing the language, YOU make it a quote, but in explaining the source's meaning, it functions as a statement, line, question, etc., not a "quote."

"usage"	The meanings of "use" and "usage" do overlap sometimes, but they are not true synonyms. The word "use" has many more meanings and applications than the word "usage." Some people use the word "usage" as though it were just a fancier form of the word "use," but this is not the best way to use the word. In general, if it seems that either "use" or "usage" could work in a sentence, the best choice is probably "use" as this is a more commonly used word with more meanings. The word "use" can in fact be either a noun or a verb and in many dictionaries this word has over 15 different definitions. On the other hand, the word "usage" is always a noun and the majority of time has a meaning related to a "customary" or "habitual" nature. —adapted from Transparent Language.
"Word"	Use quotation marks or italics when referring to a specific word and not the meaning it conveys. (e.g. *"Violence," when used correctly, is appropriate*.) Now imagine that sentence without the quotation marks. It means something entirely different.
¶	When a paragraph gets too long your reasoning may appear jumbled and confused. Paragraphs are the steps that allow your reader to make progress through the points of your paper. Without enough steps, your ideas can become difficult to follow. Usually there are subtle shifts of emphasis within a long paragraph that can become paragraph breaks. Try to figure out what your paragraph's main point is so that your reader doesn't have to.
#s	Expressing Numbers: If expressing a number in words requires more than two words, use digits to express it. If expressing a number in words requires only one or two words, use words to express it. There are two exceptions to this rule: 1) if you're using many numbers in a fairly short space (such as with data or statistics), always use digits, 2) if a number comes at the beginning of a sentence, always use words.
‖	Coordinate ideas should be expressed in parallel form. All expressions that are similar in content and function should be expressed similarly.
1P	Writing in the first person is not a problem, but saying *"I believe"* or *"I feel,"* etc., is unnecessary as it is your paper and therefore obvious that the beliefs expressed therein are yours.

2P	Avoid 2nd Person: In most cases it is best not to use the 2nd person form of narration. Sometimes replacing "you" or forms of "you" with "one" or the 1st person plural "we" can correct the problem. Sometimes, however, you may have to reconstruct at least a portion of your sentence.
A/E	"Affect" is a verb and means "to influence or produce an effect on." "Effect" is a noun and is a result of some external influence. "Effect" can be a verb and means "to bring into existence."
ab	Avoid using abbreviations.
BD	Bloated Diction: What makes diction sophisticated is not necessarily the biggest or most complicated word, but the *right* word. The level of complication in your diction should be fairly even across your piece and be consistent with your audience and purpose.
BlQt	Blocked Quotation: A quotation that takes four lines or more in your paper must be put into blocked format. For specific formatting instructions see "Long Quotations" here: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/03/
Bnl	This is banal: so lacking in originality that it is obvious and boring. Most importantly, this does nothing to move your point forward.
BQ	Avoid Begging the Question: Assuming in a premise or claim a warrant with insufficient backing: *"We should outlaw bicycles because they are the most dangerous means of transportation."* The claim here is that bicycles should be outlawed, and it depends upon the warrant that they are the most dangerous means of transportation, the backing for which is still in question because we don't really know if they are the most dangerous means of transportation. This statement, then, begs the question, *"Are bicycles, in fact, the most dangerous means of transportation?"*
C/S	Comma splice: A comma splice occurs when two independent clauses are joined with a comma without an accompanying

	coordinating conjunction.
CA	Compound Adjective: When we use two or more words to function as a single modifier, this is a compound adjective and you must place a hyphen between each word. **Ex.** *"It was an adults-only event." "She is a six-year-old dancer."*
CAPS	This link will provide some tips on how to capitalize correctly.
Case	You've made an error in case. You need to know how a pronoun functions in a clause or sentence. The nominative (or subjective) case is when the pronoun functions as the subject of the clause or sentence. The objective case is when the pronoun or noun functions as an object. Usually, we get this correct intuitively. For example, the pronoun one uses to refer to him or herself is either "I" (nominative) or "me" (objective). When you are the subject in a sentence, you wouldn't use the objective case, *"Me am going to the concert tonight."* And if you were the object in a sentence, you wouldn't use the nominative case, *"Mom said she would pick I up after the concert."* However, "him," "her," "he," and "she" can sometimes be more confusing. The reflexive case can also be tricky in the first person "myself." You should only use "myself" when you are already the subject or object of a clause and are now going to refer to yourself in the objective case. **Example:** *"I (nominative) was afraid to go, myself (reflexive), but I told my friends to."* Look here for a more detailed explanation.
Cl	Cliché: Tempting as they may be, clichés and stock phrases really just demonstrate to your reader that you're not willing to put in the time or effort required for original diction or syntax. Avoid using them.
Coh	Cohesiveness: It is important that your line of thinking make sense. One idea should lead naturally to the next.
Coll.	The use of slang, cliché phrases, and idiomatic expressions can confuse your readers and diminish the formal tone of your writing.

Conc.	Conclusions: A conclusion should leave your reader with a sense that your paper has been building toward an important idea. That idea, expressed in the conclusion, should have a sense of discovery that logically follows all that you've written up to that point. To simply summarize what you've already said or make a series of overly obvious statements is not only anti-climactic, it is counterproductive in getting your reader to understand your perspective. The reader should sense the importance and clarity of your argument after finishing the paper. There's no simple formula for an effective conclusion, but a thought-provoking question, a revelation that comes as the natural result of information and evidence you've provided, or a combination of the two can be very effective. Regardless of what you do, you must put genuine thought into it. Anything less is going to be obvious to the reader. If it's boring to write, it's even more boring to read.
Dict.	Diction: When you use a word or expression that has little or no applicable meaning to your point this dilutes your meaning. You must "say only what you mean and really mean what you say." The only exception to this aphorism is artfully employed expressions that carry non-literal but generally understood meaning. When you do otherwise, your reader learns to distrust what you say.
DM	A dangling modifier is a word or phrase that modifies something that is not present in the sentence. Check this out.
Dscs	When one reports what others have said word for word, this is called "direct discourse." It is generally signaled by the presence of quotation marks: **Ex.** *Philippe said, "I'll come if I have time."* When one paraphrases the words of others, writing them so as to avoid direct quotation, this is called "indirect discourse": **Ex.** *Philippe said that he would come if he had time.* Be sure to know which form of discourse you're using and punctuate accurately.
E/O	Either/Or Thinking : Avoid Either/Or Thinking: The tendency to see an issue as having only two sides: *"In the war on terror you're either with us or against us."*

EDIT	Editing Mistake: You've made a simple error because of poor editing. This could indicate that you took little or no care in writing your paper and could compromise your credibility.
Evdy	Everyday/Every day: The word "everyday" is an adjective used to describe something that is common, as in *"These are my everyday shoes, nothing special."* "Every" and "day" are two separate words when you are using "day" as a noun that is modified by "every," as in *"I brush my teeth every day."*
FA	Avoid False Analogy: A comparison of two scenarios that may seem, superficially, to make sense, but a closer examination reveals that the principle that governs the one scenario does not transfer to the other. **Ex.** *"Just like a car tire, without enough air, we cease to function properly."* This is a false analogy because, while it is true superficially, humans and tires need air for very different reasons and use air in different ways.
Font	You must use the same size and font throughout the piece. For formal writing you should be using 12 pt. Times New Roman font.
FP	Faulty Predication: Faulty predication takes place when either the predicate of a sentence does not logically match the subject or does not grammatically match the subject.
Frag.	Sentence fragment: A sentence must have a subject (the main noun) and a verb (an action that that noun takes). A sentence fragment violates this basic requirement by either not having a subject or not having a verb. **Example:** *"Yesterday, sitting on the patio."* In this case, there is no subject doing the "sitting."
Gap	Mind the Gap: Your version of Word adds a partial line space to the line-spacing each time you press "return" or "enter." You must turn this function off. The spacing between paragraphs should be set to "0." If possible, make this the default setting. Click here for instructions.

H & T	In order to properly format your heading and title, please click here.
Hdr	See this for how to properly format a header.
Hpble	Be careful of hyperbolic language. Inexperienced writers frequently overuse it, rendering it, at best, meaningless, and at worst, distracting.
ID	If you mention an expert's name in your narrative (as opposed to a parenthetical citation), then unless he or she is commonly known (e.g. Abraham Lincoln, Socrates, etc.) you need to provide his or her credentials when first using his or her words. **Example:** *"According to Eugene Schleppenflopper, an astrophysicist at NASA, sandwiches taste better in zero gravity."*
i.e./e.g.	The abbreviation "i.e.," which from the Latin is "id est," means "that is" or "that is to say." Use this abbreviation when providing another way to say something. For **example**, *"Julia was indisposed (i.e. sick)."* The abbreviation "e.g.," which from the Latin is "exempli gratia," means "for example." Use this abbreviation when providing examples to clarify your meaning. For **example**, *"The men moved the heavy things first (e.g. the dressers, the couches, the tables)."*
InCn	A good writer handles his or her conclusion with great care. You should lead your reader naturally to your concluding thoughts. If you point out in some overly obvious way that you're concluding, you belittle your reader's intelligence and demonstrate that you've chosen not to put forth the effort to employ a more unique or sophisticated transition.
Insert ","	Though it may not always be grammatically necessary, a comma can often help to prevent a misreading. When a sentence opens with an introductory element (a phrase, clause, or word that is logically related to another phrase or clause in the same sentence), it is a great help to your reader to place a comma after that introductory element. Such phrases will often begin with words like "because," "while," or "although," as in the following **example**: *"While everyone was fighting, the bear wandered away."* Without the comma, the sentence would be confusing.

Int	Any collection of data networks that are combined constitute, by definition, an internet. However, the one you are referring to here is a specific internet, managed principally by two organizations (ICANN and the IETF). As such, when we refer to this particular network of networks, which encompasses the World Wide Web, we are referring to a proper noun—the Internet, and it must be capitalized. You will find, however, that many writers, especially outside of North America, do not observe this rule.
IS	Primary sources are always preferable, but if you use a secondary source, see "Citing indirect sources" on this page for instructions on correctly citing an indirect source.
k	Awkward: This construction is either cumbersome, confusing, or lacks appropriate sophistication. Consider re-writing.
L/F	Use "less" in reference to that which can only be measured as in *"There is less flour in a cookie than a cupcake."* Use "few" or "fewer" in reference to that which can be counted as in *"There were fewer ducks in the water than on the shore."*
M/V	Words like "many" and "very" are functional and necessary for our language. They are, however, stock intensifiers and through excessive use do not hold serious meaning. You are generally better off either finding a more suitable replacement or omitting the intensifier altogether.
Margins	Your margins must be set to one inch all the way around. If you're using a header (for MLA format), the header margin must be set to half an inch.
MLA	You must adhere to all MLA formatting guidelines. Consult either the MLA Handbook or go to the Purdue Online Writing Lab.
MM	Misplaced Modifier: A misplaced modifier is a word or phrase that, because of its placement in the sentence, is ambiguous about what it is modifying.

Msqt	Misquoting: Misquoting a source is a serious error. Quoting accurately requires little more than careful editing. When you fail to do so, you waste your reader's time. When using quoted material, you must be absolutely sure that you have quoted accurately. To do otherwise seriously undermines your credibility. MLA format accommodates changes that you may need to make in order for the quotation, while not taken out of proper context, to be altered to maintain syntactical integrity. There's even a way to account for a source's errors. Look here for details.
No ","	Unnecessary comma: Commas have a wide variety of uses: setting off introductory phrases, separating items in lists, separating adjectives, enclosing appositives, and preceding coordinating conjunctions that are used to join two complete thoughts. However, commas should not be used alone to join two complete thoughts or to unnecessarily break apart long sentences. Careful comma usage is necessary to avoid confusing your readers.
NS	Non Sequitur: Avoid Non sequitur ("It does not follow"): An inference or conclusion that does not follow from established premises or evidence: *"Jeremy is very tall, so should like peanut butter on his celery."*
NSEW	When referring to a specific geographical region you must capitalize the name of the region. **Example:** *"I grew up in the West but have lived in the East for the last 25 years."* When referring to the compass direction, you do not capitalize the word. **Example:** *"I told them to drive east for seven miles and then turn north for another five."*
Num/Am	Numbers/Amount: When referring to something that you could count, use the word "number" (e.g. *"There were a large number of books in the closet"*). Because books can be counted, we refer to the "number" of books. When referring to something that can only be measured, use the word "amount" (e.g. *"The amount of water on the floor was surprising"*). Water cannot be counted, but can be measured so we refer to the "amount" of water.

OV	Oversimplification: Avoid Oversimplification: The tendency to provide simple solutions to complex problems: *"If we could convince OPEC to be more reasonable, oil prices around the world would stabilize,"* OR to assign simple causes to complex circumstances: *"There is too much crime in the world because people don't respect one another."*
OxCma	Oxford Comma: The comma that comes before a conjunction in this construction is called an "Oxford" or "Harvard" comma. There is disagreement about its necessity, but while using it can help to clarify, it rarely, if ever, confuses. Consider the following **example:** *"We invited the clowns, Victor and Brian."* Here, it seems that Victor and Brian are the clowns. Now, *"we invited the clowns, Victor, and Brian."* Here, it appears as though Victor and Brian are not the clowns, but are invited **in addition** to the clowns. This is one of many such possible constructions where the Oxford comma provides clarification. Many reputable sources on writing techniques regard its use as obligatory (e.g. Strunk and White's *Elements of Style*, section one, rule #2).
P/A	Pronoun/Antecedent Agreement: A pronoun refers to another noun (usually placed before the pronoun) in the text—the antecedent. A pronoun must match its antecedent in terms of number and gender, if applicable. For **example**, in the sentence, *"When a person sees their relatives, they should be friendly,"* the pronouns "their" and "they" refer to the antecedent "person." Since "person" is singular and "their" and "they" are plural, this sentence demonstrates an error in pronoun/antecedent agreement. In this case, either the pronouns need to be changed to their singular forms *"When a person sees his or her relatives, he or she should be friendly"*), or the antecedent must be changed to a plural form (*"When people see their relatives, they should be friendly"*). **Exception:** The previous rule only applies when the antecedent's gender identity is singular. Some have chosen to be gender neutral and prefer the "they" form of the personal pronoun. In such cases, it is correct to do so.

P/V	Passive voice: Passive voice constructions do not tell your reader as much as the corresponding active version would. For instance, in the phrase *"it is understood,"* a reader cannot know who or what is doing the understanding. A more active version requires that you tell your reader who is performing the action: *"Students understand."* While there are rare occasions when a writer cannot avoid the passive voice, the more informative version is almost always a better choice. Changing passive constructions to active always makes writing more lively and accessible.
PCF	Look here for the correct format of a parenthetical citation.
PHEPH	Post Hoc Ergo Propter Hoc: Avoid Post hoc, ergo propter hoc ("After this, therefore because of this") logic: Confusing chance or coincidence with causation. Because one event comes after another one, it does not necessarily mean that the first event caused the second: *"After the hockey game I had a terrible stomachache. Hockey makes me sick."*
Pl/Pos	Plural/Possessive: You must know when a word is possessive and when it is simply plural. When spoken they may sound the same but they are not spelled the same.
PprTtl	Your title should give some indication about an important theme or idea in your work. It should be such that it appears to your reader that you took some time in creating it. You must also be sure to adhere to all guidelines for formatting your own title. See this page for details.
PQ	Punctuation with Quotations: In American English we ALWAYS put periods and commas inside quotation marks. Go here for more information on how to use quotation marks with punctuation. You can also find this information in Strunk and White's *Elements of Style*, chapter 3, "A Few Matters of Form."
Qt. w/in Qt.	Quotation Within a Quotation: When quoting dialogue or language that otherwise utilizes quotation marks, you must use single quotation marks to show where your source uses quotation marks and then use double quotation marks to show where you are quoting. Go here for clarification.

Qte. Int.	When integrating a quotation into your work, it must maintain grammatical and logical integrity.
R-O	Run-on sentence: Contrary to what many people think, what makes a run-on sentence has little, if anything, to do with the actual length of the sentence. A run-on sentence is a sentence in which two or more independent clauses are joined without appropriate punctuation or conjunction. **Ex.** *"I like Jane she is nice."* This is a run-on even though it is so short. This is because it connects the independent clause *"I like Jane"* with the independent clause *"she is nice"* without the use of appropriate punctuation or conjunction. In this case, I would recommend using a conjunction to fix it: *"I like Jane BECAUSE she is nice."*
Red	Redundant: You've essentially said the same thing twice.
Rep	Repetitive: You should avoid using the same word or phrase too frequently, especially in close proximity with one another. This often happens as we get a word or phrase "in our heads" as we write. That's OK as long as we correct the problem during the editing phase.
SBJV	When you write an idea that expresses what is imagined or wished or a possibility, it is in the **SUBJUNCTIVE** mood. The subjunctive is used to express situations that are hypothetical or not yet realized and is typically used for what is imagined, hoped for, demanded, or expected. Among other things, this means that the past tense form of the "to be" verb is "were" instead of "was." **Examples:** *"She wished it **WERE** her on the stage instead of Angela." "If I **WERE** to go, then I would have to be back by Monday."*
SDT	Show; don't tell: When you can, it is preferable to use imagery to show your reader the concept that you are trying to get across. Simply telling may achieve your purpose on a superficial level, but in order for your reader to truly understand, you must invite him or her into the experience. This is especially useful in creative writing.

SM	Summarizing: Do not summarize. Instead, focus on your assertion. If you must bring in information from a story, only bring in what is absolutely necessary and even then, construct your sentences in such a way that places the focus on your assertion.
sp	Check spelling.
SVA	Subject/verb agreement: Subjects and verbs should match in number and person. Singular subjects require singular verbs; plural subjects require plural verbs.
SXT	Sexist Language: Traditionally, when using a singular personal pronoun for a hypothetical point, you must use "he or she" unless the concept, by its very nature, precludes the use of one gender or the other. **Ex.** *"When a cow gives milk, she is alleviating her own discomfort while benefitting the farmer and his or her business."* Here, while a cow can be male or female, only the female can give milk, so naturally only the female personal pronoun is necessary. However, since a farmer can be either a man or a woman, both pronouns must be used in order to avoid stereotypes and gender bias. **Note:** as we now recognize that some individuals do not identify as a specific gender, the pronoun *they*, and forms thereof, are acceptable references when the antecedent individual prefers it or when their preferred pronoun is unknown.
TFB	You may use first-person pronouns, but since you are the author of the paper, there's no need to say what you think, feel, or believe. It's obvious that any thoughts, feelings, or beliefs contained in the paper are yours.
Title	Titles must be properly denoted. Titles of full-length works (those that are published and released by themselves) should be italicized. Works that are only published and released as part of a collection or anthology (e.g. poems, short stories, essays) must be put in quotation marks. Titles of sacred texts are neither italicized nor put in quotation marks. Your own title should not be italicized, underlined, or put in quotation marks. An exception would be any portion of your title that is a title of a published work. In that case, only that portion must be denoted in accordance with the aforementioned rules.

TN	Then/Than: "Then" is an adverb used to describe placement in time. "Than" is a conjunction used in comparisons.
Tns	Tense: When discussing the text itself, use the present tense, regardless of when the piece was written. **Example**: "*Cooper's use of description **involves** elaborate images*." This differs from an essay about historical events, in which readers generally expect that you use the past tense. **Example**: "*Cooper's writing often **involved** elaborate imagery because he **was** so taken by nature's beauty*."
Trans	Although paragraphs are separate individual parts of your paper, it is important to demonstrate a clear and logical connection between them. This is the purpose of transitions. As our writing becomes more mature, so should our transitions.
TS	Tense Shift: Sometimes a shift in tense is a necessary function of the way that a writer wishes to establish a sense of time. However, when it's merely the result of oversight, it can be very confusing. Be sure to make tense consistency one of the points you read for when editing.
TT2	To/Too/Two: "To" is a preposition indicating either an action, a process, or that the following verb is an infinitive. "Too" is an adverb meaning an excess. "Two" is the number following one.
TTT	"Their" is a plural pronoun. (e.g. *It is their responsibility to bring water*.) "There" refers to a location. (e.g. *Put the cards over there.*) "They're" is a contraction for "they are." (e.g. *They're the best people for the job.*)
Vague	When conveying a point or idea in your paper, it is a common mistake to not offer enough details. A paper is always stronger when your claims are as specific as possible. The more detailed evidence you offer, the more reference points your reader will have. Remember that someone who reads your paper will not automatically know what you mean to express, so you have to supply details to show your reader what you mean.
WC	Reconsider your word choice.

wc/pc	**Citation Discrepancy:** Whatever word you used to classify your entry on the works cited page should be the first word used in the correspondent parenthetical citation. If that word is part or all of a title, it must be properly denoted using either italics or quotation marks, whichever is applicable. Likewise, if the works cited entry is classified using the last name of an author or editor, that is what must appear in the parenthetical citation. Look here for the correct format of a parenthetical citation. For information on how to format your works cited page, go here.
WCF	**Works Cited Format:** Your works cited entry must adhere to all formatting requirements of MLA 8. See our MLA 8 Citation Sheet or go here.
Wdy	**Wordiness:** In order to make yourself understood it is best to be concise. Concision is the result of precise diction and disciplined syntax. Make sure that every single word carries meaning and is therefore necessary.
wh/th	"Which," when used as a relative pronoun (*"Her car, which was green, was brand new"*), should generally be preceded by a comma. An exception to this is when "which" is preceded by a preposition (*"The laws of physics, to which we must all adhere, are immutable"*). Otherwise, use "that." So instead of, *"the book WHICH she dropped was mine,"* use *"the book THAT she dropped was mine."*
WW	**Wrong Word:** This word does not correctly convey the idea that you're trying to express.