**Boz and Jamie’s Grammar Cheat Sheet—*Last Revised June 28, 2022***

**#1. Subject-verb agreement**

* If two subjects are connected by “and,” use a plural verb.

*Correct: Johnny and Katie were in separate training groups.*

* In neither-nor constructions, match the verb to the subject closest to it.

*Correct: Neither Bill nor Carol is an auditor.*

* Use singular verbs with indefinite pronouns like “everyone” and “nobody.”

*Correct: Everyone says they are going to start doing a bunch of bolt-on acquisitions.*

* Watch out for pronouns like “all,” “any,” “most,” “none,” and “some,” which can be either singular or plural, depending on whether they refer to a singular or plural noun.

*Correct: Most of his friends were turning 24 this year.*

*Correct: It seems that most of my time is spent on personnel issues and trying to win clients.*

* Watch out for cases when the subject is separated from the verb by other descriptive phrases or words.

*Correct: He pulled up last year’s audit files and saw that inventory of X+ batteries was at right about six months.*

**#2. Lists and parallel construction**

* In lists, use a similar grammatical form for all elements.

*Incorrect: He loved math, numbers, and to play sports.*

*Correct: He loved math, numbers, and sports.*

*Correct: He loved to do math, crunch numbers, and play sports.*

**#3a. Coordinating conjunctions**

* When coordinating conjunctions connect two independent clauses (that is, full sentences), a comma appears before the conjunction.

*Correct: He was hoping to have a few minutes alone with Will to finish their conversation about Bob Grayson, but Will’s parents had arrived.*

* The coordinating conjunctions can be remembered with the acronym FANBOYS: “for,” “and,” “nor,” “but,” “or,” “yet,” and “so.” Words like “however” and “rather” are not coordinating conjunctions and therefore need a period or a semicolon before them instead of a comma.

*Correct: He was hoping to have a few minutes alone with Will to finish their conversation about Bob Grayson. However, Will’s parents had arrived.*

*Correct: He was hoping to have a few minutes alone with Will to finish their conversation about Bob Grayson; however, Will’s parents had arrived.*

**#3b. Sentence fragments**

* Sentence fragments are incomplete sentences; that is, the subject, the verb, or both have been omitted. They are best avoided in formal writing, as they can give off a brusque or even unprofessional tone.

*Sentence fragment (informal): Can’t go out to lunch today. Have a meeting.*

*Full sentence (formal): Unfortunately, I cannot go out to lunch today because I will be in a meeting.*

**#4. Dangling and misplaced modifiers**

* To avoid ambiguity, place phrases, prepositions, and descriptive words near what they are describing.

*Incorrect: They rode on horses with accordions. (Did they have the accordions, or did the horses?)*

*Correct: Accordions in hand, they rode the horses.*

* Ensure the subject of the action is made clear either in the introductory clause or directly after it.

*Incorrect: After a quick nap, the pineapple was ready to be cut. (Who took a nap? The pineapple?)*

*Correct: After a quick nap, Alyssa was ready to cut the pineapple.*

*Correct: After Alyssa had taken a quick nap, the pineapple was ready to be cut.*

**#5. Frequently confused homophones**

***its vs. it’s***

* “Its” is used to indicate possession. “It’s” is the contraction of “it is.”

*Correct: The company cancelled its earnings release.*

*Correct: It’s time for the company to cancel the earnings release.*

***affect vs. effect***

* Generally, “affect” is used as a verb, and “effect” is used as a noun.

*Correct: PurePower was going to have a major problem that would affect everyone.*

*Correct: The effects of the problem would reach all corners of the business.*

* There are rare instances where “affect” can be used as a noun (to mean the physical demeanor tied to emotion, primarily used in psychological jargon) and “effect” as a verb (to mean to cause to come about).

*Correct: He adopted the affect of someone who was in mourning.*

*Correct: The protests effected change in the company.*

**#6. Plural forms of acronyms**

* Generally, do not use apostrophes when making acronyms or numbers plural. Do use them to make acronyms possessive.

*Correct: There were many CPAs at the event on IRAs in the 1990s*.

*Correct: Their CPA’s schedule was fully booked, so they couldn’t get a meeting with her that week.*

**#7. Quotations, citations, and punctuation**

* Periods and commas always go inside the quotation marks.

*Correct: The report claimed that “anyone could use the help of an accountant.”*

* With question marks and exclamation marks, it depends on whether the quote or the sentence introducing the quote is asking the question/making the exclamation.

*Incorrect: Did the controller say, “Accounting is the best?”*

*Correct: Did the controller say, “Accounting is the best”?*

*Correct: I heard the controller ask, “Is accounting the best?”*

* Citations are generally placed after the closing quotation mark and are enclosed in parentheses. Any terminal punctuation goes outside the closing parenthesis.

*Correct: As the tax law indicates, “There shall be allowed as a deduction any loss sustained during the taxable year and not compensated for by insurance or otherwise” (IRC Section 165).*

**#8. “That” vs. “which”**

* “That” is used before essential information and is never preceded by a comma.

*Correct: I need the report that you were working on last week. (Without “that you were working on last week,” there are many reports “the report” could refer to.)*

* “Which” is used before nonessential information and is always preceded by a comma.

*Correct: I need the report on Q4 earnings, which I know you were working on last week. (We know exactly which report is being referred to even without “which I know you were working on last week.”)*

**#9. Compound modifiers**

* Hyphenate two or more words that work as a single unit to modify a noun unless they come after the noun or the first of the words ends in -ly.

*Correct: We are a tech-savvy population.*

*Correct: He is tech savvy.*

*Correct: We are a technologically savvy population.*

**#10. Elements with multiple accepted uses** *(\*Be consistent; refer to your company’s corporate style guide if it has one.)*

***Time of day***

* In US English, both a.m./p.m. and am/pm are considered acceptable. Use one consistently within a single document.

*Correct: I plan to log on at 8:50 a.m. for the 9:00 a.m. call.*

*Correct: I plan to log on at 8:50 am for the 9:00 am call.*

*Incorrect: I plan to log on at 8:50 am for the 9:00 a.m. call.*

***Numbers***

* There are two generally accepted rules for numbers: 1) spell out whole numbers from zero through one hundred and any large numbers that start with one through one hundred and end in “hundred,” “thousand,” or “hundred thousand”; 2) spell out zero through nine and use numerals for anything larger. In either case, if there are many numbers in a single paragraph or both large and small numbers are used in close proximity, use numerals for all.

*Rule 1: Over two hundred people attended the event.*

*Rule 2: Over 200 people attended the event.*

*Either rule: The event was attended by 2 CEOs, 27 investors, and 230 users of the technology.*

***Monetary values***

* The rules for numbers apply to monetary values, with one change: in rule 1, monetary values over one hundred always use numerals (or a combination of numerals and words if in the millions or higher). There are also many other accepted ways for monetary amounts to be styled. The most important thing is to remain consistent within a single sentence or paragraph.

*Rule 1: I’ve spent ten dollars this month at the vending machine.*

*Rule 2: I’ve spent $10 this month at the vending machine.*

*Either rule: Wouldn’t it be nice to win $10 million?*

*Incorrect (no matter which rule you follow): Whether I win five dollars or $55, I plan to spend 75 cents at the vending machine.*

***Capitalization of job titles***

* Job titles can be either capitalized or lowercased as long as all job titles are consistent.

*Incorrect: I am a Junior Marketing Specialist, and she is a senior financial adviser.*

*Correct: I am a junior marketing specialist, and she is a senior financial adviser.*

*Correct: I am a Junior Marketing Specialist, and she is a Senior Financial Adviser.*