GCSE (9–1)

ENGLISH LANGUAGE
ENGLISH LITERATURE

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For first teaching in 2015

The Little Book of Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar (SPaG)

Version 2

This guide has been written by **Frank Danes**. It contains interactive activities which you can access at:
http://english.ocr.org.uk/course/view.php?id=144

You will be required to login as a *Guest User* using the following login details:

Username: spag
Password: spagspag

Introduction

This little guide is intended as a handy reference tool for students and adults.

English is a tricky, confusing and constantly changing language, governed erratically by apparently arbitrary rules upon which not even grammarians or English teachers can agree. Sometimes, for example, alternative uses are equally correct: "focused" can be spelt with one s or two: "focussed". No wonder we all make mistakes in our English.

English spelling is notoriously odd and we have not necessarily benefited from the American nineteenth century practice of regularising our spelling. Gnat has a silent g because the g was sounded in Chaucer's time – the fourteenth century – but why does it still have the g when we haven't sounded it for hundreds of years? Why should traveller have an extra l when travel has one? Why should humorous drop the u of humour?

As for grammar: does someone feel disorientated or disoriented? ("Disorientated" is British English but "disoriented" is American English.) Should you send someone an invitation or an invite? ("Invitation" is usually preferred as the noun but "invite", usually the verb, was used as a noun from the nineteenth century.) And do you give a quote from Shakespeare or a quotation?

Language changes all the time. We can tell this by the fact that we no longer speak Middle English, Old English, Anglo Saxon, Latin, or - going even further back – Cro-Magnon grunts. Yesterday's bad usage is today's correct grammar. Fifty years ago, it was correct usage to write "to-day" and "to-morrow". "Today" and "tomorrow" – without the hyphens - are imported Americanisms, but no-one would dream of using the hyphenated, but British, versions now. We must beware of being told that such and such is "correct" grammar: answering "It is I" to the question "Who is that?" is perhaps only correct if we want to sound like Jane Eyre. As language changes every day, the best we can do is record what is currently considered acceptable usage and note the alternatives.

Making mistakes in English does not make you a bad person and is not morally wrong. Winston Churchill, one of our greatest statesmen and writers, asked his publishers in 1933 to help correct his "questionable" grammar, repetition, and dull, boring passages. He was also troubled about his use of hyphens. *

Our hope, though, is that this little guide will help you to avoid some of the pitfalls of English. There are alternatives to some of the usages given but the usages in this guide do represent one correct usage, even among the equally correct alternatives.
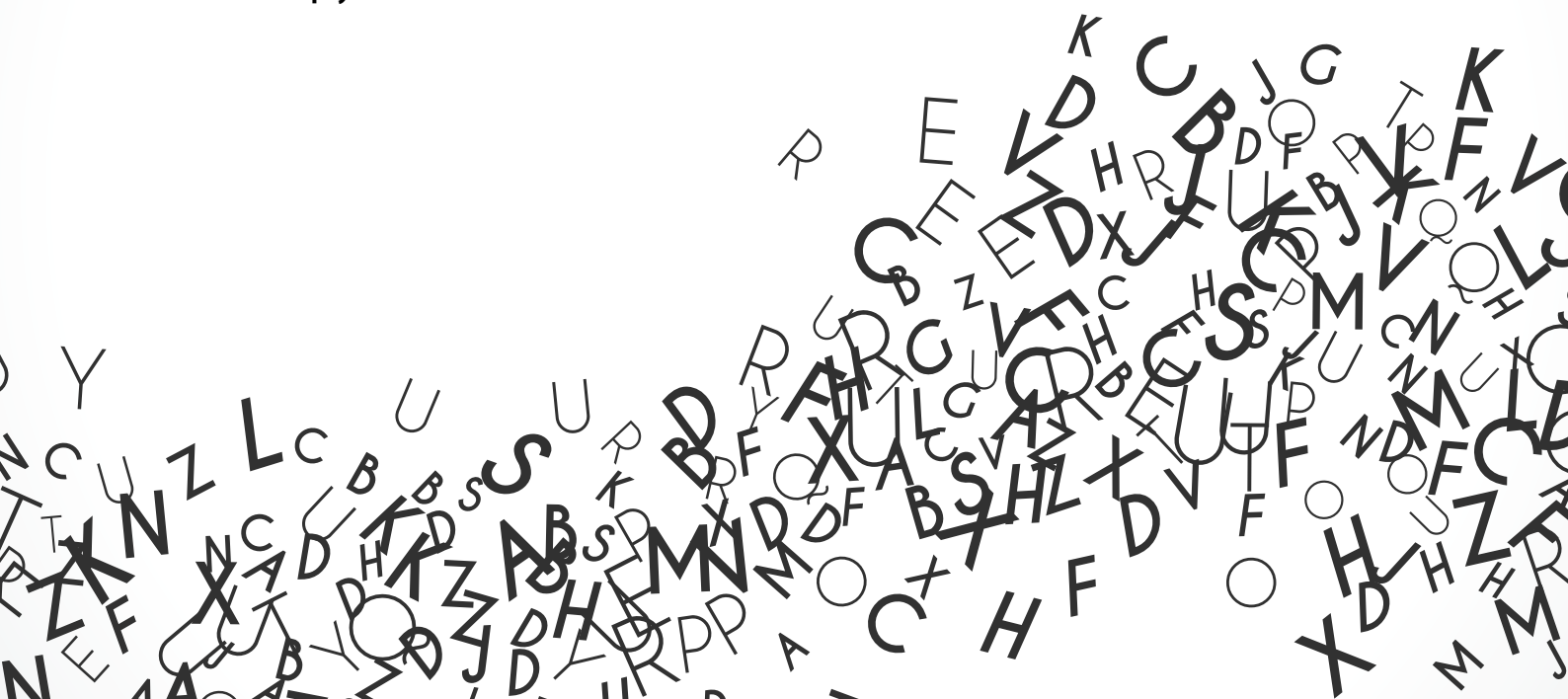
The guide is ordered alphabetically to make it as easy as possible to use, rather than putting grammar, spelling and punctuation in separate sections.

*see Roy Jenkins, *Churchill*, p.450 (Macmillan, London, 2001)

Contents

Abbreviations

An abbreviation is a shorter form of a word.

A common form of abbreviation in English is the **elision**: a word in which the vowel is omitted.

So
- **Do not** becomes **don't**
- **Cannot** becomes **can't**
- **Will not** becomes **won't**
- **Is not** becomes **isn't**
- **Should not** becomes **shouldn't**

and so on. An apostrophe is used to show where the vowel and other letters have been left out. You should avoid using elisions when writing **formal English** – for example, an academic essay or a formal letter:

I'm sorry that I've not applied for the job

is not considered as correct as

I am sorry that I have not applied for the job.

Similarly, it is preferable to use the full form of some abbreviations – etc., e.g., i.e. – when writing formal English. So, write:
- **And so on** rather than **etc.** (=Latin, et cetera, meaning "and so on")
- **For example** rather than **e.g.** (=Latin, exempli gratia, meaning "for example")
- **That is** rather than **i.e.** (=Latin again, id est, meaning "that is").

Another common abbreviation is the straightforward shortening of a word (or words):
- Prof. = professor
- Dr. = doctor
- Mr. = mister
- Rev. = reverend
- Rt. Hon. = Right Honourable
- Etc. = et cetera.

It is usually considered correct to end such straightforward abbreviations with a full stop. The full stop indicates to the reader that this is an abbreviation. (The full stop is optional with titles like Dr, Mr, Rev, Prof.)

E.t.c. for "etc." is a common mistake.

A third form of abbreviation is the shortening of an institution, job title, company etc. by its initial letters:
- **BBC** = **B**ritish **B**roadcasting **C**orporation
- **ITV** = **I**ndependent **T**ele**v**ision
- **MP** = **M**ember of **P**arliament
- **MSP** = **M**ember of the **S**cottish **P**arliament
- **CBI** = **C**onfederation of **B**ritish **I**ndustry.

It used to be considered correct to add a full stop after each letter to show that these were abbreviations (M.P.) but it is quite correct, and more common, not to bother.

If you (must) end a sentence with an abbreviation, it is, strictly speaking, correct to use two full stops: one for the abbreviation and one for the end of the sentence:
- The shop was crammed with pens, pencils, tin openers, shoelaces, milk, greetings cards, foil, mugs, etc..

However, your computer may object to two full stops and substitute one full stop only. This is increasingly accepted as correct punctuation for ending a sentence with an abbreviation ending in a full stop.

Advise and Advice

See *Practise and Practice*

Affect and Effect

Affect is a verb: to affect

- Ben's strange behaviour began to affect the whole class, who also started to moan and gibber.
- Clara's sad story affected him deeply and he began to cry.

Effect is a noun: the effect

- The effect of drinking so much sugary tea was to make Rory over-excited.
- One effect of Santa's cutbacks was a rise in the number of unemployed elves.

The phrase "special effects", often seen at the end of television programmes and films, might help you remember that effect with an e is a noun.

However, there is also a verb to effect (spelt with an e), which means, to bring about:

- Abanazer had to effect a change quickly, so he swapped the new lamp for the magic lamp when Aladdin wasn't looking.
- Some voters were fed up with the Coalition government, so they effected a change by voting for a Conservative one.

The verb to effect is, however, not often used. For everyday English, it is a safe rule of thumb to remember the mnemonic:

Affect is the verb which begins with an A,
But special effects start with E, they do say.

A lot

"A lot" is two words, although a lot of people spell it (incorrectly) as one word (alot).

"A lot" is not particularly interesting or elegant a phrase anyway so you could use an alternative, such as: a number, many, some, a majority etc.

The verb "allot" is one word, however, and means, to give out. It is the root of the word "allotment", where people go to grow their own produce, and literally means something given out by the council: here, an area of land.

"To allot" is not to be confused with "a lot".

Apostrophes

Apostrophes are tricky and it's unlikely that more than one in four adults, let alone students, uses them correctly. George Bernard Shaw argued we should therefore get rid of them completely, and his plays often exclude them.

On the other hand, apostrophes can enhance and clarify meaning. The writer Kingsley Amis was asked for an example of a sentence whose meaning would change with the addition of an apostrophe. Amis thought for a bit and came up with:

Those things over there are my husband's. (i.e., Those things over there belong to my husband.)

or:

Those things over there are my husbands. (i.e. My husbands are those ghastly objects over there.)

Like them or not, we are stuck with them. Mistakes with apostrophes and comma splicing (using a comma instead of a full stop at the end of a sentence) are said to be the two things which annoy English Language GCSE examiners more than any other English mistake. For that reason alone, it's worth students using them properly.

Apostrophes are used for two purposes:

1. **To show that letters have been left out or omitted:** don't, can't, isn't, couldn't, they're

2. **To show possession or ownership:**

Sasha's belt; Simon's lawnmower; the waitress's trays; the waitresses' trays

Apostrophes are never used to make plurals. This is the most common mistake with apostrophes. (It is sometimes known as "The Greengrocer's Apostrophe" as greengrocers are allegedly more guilty than other vendors of using the apostrophe wrongly to make plurals.) Thus

Apple's 70p a lb

is completely wrong. So is

The cat's drank their milk

and

The horse's enjoyed their outing.

1. **Use an apostrophe to show letters, or a letter, have/has been missed out:**

Do not becomes don't (the o is left out)
Cannot becomes can't (the no is left out)

and so on. (Words in which the vowel is left out are called elisions.)

The apostrophe goes where the missing letter should be, and not where two words join. So:

Do'nt is wrong
So is should'nt.

2. **The apostrophe for possession: to show ownership**

This is the rule that gives people most trouble, so here goes.

The apostrophe shows that one thing belongs to something else: ownership or possession. If we were being long-winded, we could write:

The hat of the horse.

But it is much easier and simpler to write and say:

The horse's hat.

The rule for using the apostrophe for ownership is that **the apostrophe goes after the owning word.**

The **owning word** is the word doing the owning.

In

The horse's hat

the horse is doing the owning: therefore, **horse** is the **owning word**.

The rule the apostrophe goes after the owning word helps when we want to show plural nouns owning something (plural=more than one).

Thus

The teeth of the dinosaur (singular)

becomes

The dinosaur's teeth.

The apostrophe goes after **dinosaur**, the **owning word**. So **dinosaur** must be singular.

But if we want to write

The teeth of the dinosaur**s** (plural)

in a more usual way, the apostrophe **still goes after the owning word – dinosaurs** – and we get:

The dinosaurs' teeth.

The position of the apostrophe thus tells us whether the owning word is singular or plural, because the apostrophe goes after the owning word. Thus

The fridge's contents

is singular but

The fridges' contents

is plural.

Confusion sometimes arises because singular and plural owning words can sound the same (words that sound the same are called **homophones**). The singular "the fridge's contents" sounds exactly the same as the plural "the fridges' contents". We can't tell how many fridges there are from hearing the words, but we can from seeing where the apostrophe goes when the phrase is written down (always after the owning word).

It is **usually** a safe rule of thumb that:

The apostrophe before the s shows a singular owning word

and

The apostrophe after the s shows a plural owning word:

The carpet's bloodstains (one carpet)

but

The carpets' bloodstains (more than one carpet).

Problems with apostrophes

1. Problems sometimes arise with using the apostrophe for possession with plural nouns that end in –ies. You can't write

The babie's food

because the owning word would then be "babie" and the singular spelling is "baby". So the apostrophe for this example must go after the s of "babies" as two or more babies own the food:

The babies' food.

2. James' books or James's books?

Which is correct? Actually, both are. The former is a little more old fashioned, but still correct.

It is a safe rule of thumb that, if the second s is sounded, then it should be written down.

Thus

Jesus' stories

is perfectly correct but might sound like "Jesus stories" when read; it is confusing because it doesn't clearly indicate the intended pronunciation.

Jesus's stories

might be better punctuation because it more clearly indicates there is a second s to be pronounced.

3.   Apostrophes to show separation

A third use of the apostrophe, which is rapidly going out of fashion, is to show separation. We might write

The 1970's

with an apostrophe to show the separation between the numerals and the letter. Similarly, we could write

M.P.'s

as the plural of M.P., using the apostrophe to show the difference between the abbreviation (M.P.) and the "ordinary" writing, the letter s. (However, since the full form is "Members of Parliament", the abbreviation should logically be M's.P. But English rules are not always based on simple logic.)

However, it is perfectly correct – and simpler – to write

The 1970s

M.P.s (or even to drop the full stops: MPs).

Most people no longer bother using apostrophes to show separation, perhaps because pointing out such

separation does not always make anything clearer to the reader, whereas, say, the possessive apostrophe does.

An exception is using the apostrophe for separation with plurals of letters, which can make the meaning clearer:

There are two o's in "moose"

is clearer than

There are two os in "moose".

Test Yourself

Have a go at correcting the use of apostrophes in different sentences by completing the ***Use of apostrophes*** activity.

To access the activity you need to log in as a *Guest User* using the following login details:

Username: spag

Password: spagspag

http://english.ocr.org.uk/mod/quiz/view.php?id=10145

Blond or Blonde?

As in French,

The male – masculine – is spelt blond
The female – feminine – is spelt blond**e**.

Thus

John has blond hair

but

Cathy has blonde hair.

Brackets

See *Dash and Hyphen*

Capital Letters

Capital letters are used for:

- the first word in a sentence
- the first person pronoun "I"
- days of the week
- months of the year
- special days of the year (Christmas Day, New Year's Day)
- names of places of entertainment (The Almeida Theatre, Odeon, Old Trafford)
- shop names (Sainsbury's, Aldi)
- titles of books, bands, films, television programmes, songs, plays, poems, novels
- particular nouns (my Mother [particular noun] but anyone's mother)
- **proper nouns, that is**:
  - people's names
  - nicknames
  - street names
  - towns
  - counties
  - countries.

Tricky exceptions:

- Seasons of the year don't use capital letters: spring, summer, autumn, winter
- It's optional to use capital letters for points of the compass: north, south, east, west or North, South, East, West
- "My birthday" doesn't take a capital letter, even though it is a special day for me, although "My Wedding Anniversary" can be written with capital letters. (Irritating, isn't it?)

In more detail:

1. In British English, small words in titles (of films, television programmes, newspaper headlines etc.) don't usually take a capital letter:

"Pride and Prejudice"
New Leader of the Labour Party Elected
"Pirates of the Caribbean"
Stratford-upon-Avon
Marks and Spencer.

2. Capital letters are used for **particular nouns** but not **general nouns**.

My Dad is a **particular noun**, because I am distinguishing between my Dad and anyone else's dad.

"Everybody's dad loves knitting": here, dad is a general noun because it means everyone's dad, as distinct from my Dad. So:

My Uncle (but everyone's uncle) forgets my birthday.
My Mother (but everyone's mother) didn't much enjoy childbirth.
Please, Dad, can I have another twenty quid? Everyone else's dad has paid up.
My Aunt has invited me to stay, as is the way with aunts.

Strangely, some words like sister and brother – my brother, my sister – don't take capital letters, although they can be particular nouns.

Colons and Semi-colons

Colons and semi-colons, like full stops and commas, are punctuation marks that indicate a pause. Punctuation is in part a system of pauses to help the reader to make sense of what she or he is reading.

If a comma is a short pause to take a breath,
And a full stop is a long pause to take a deeper breath
Then a colon is a pause to take a medium breath,
And a semi-colon is a pause to take a deeper breath.*

(*Some would say a colon or semi-colon is a pause as long as a full stop. It is actually very hard to measure.)

We could express the pauses as musical notes:

Comma,	Semi-colon;	Colon:	Full stop.
Crotchet (one beat)	Minim (two beats)	Minim (two beats)	Semi-breve (four beats)

The important point to remember is that **colons and semi-colons are pauses in your sentence**. Some writers scatter them around all over the place like confetti, which is wrong if it disrupts the natural rhythm of the sentence. A good tip is to read your sentence aloud after you've punctuated it: do the pauses sound right for the sentence or do they disrupt its rhythm?

Use of the semi-colon (;)

A semi-colon is called a semi-colon because it is half (semi) a colon. It has the top dot but not the bottom dot:

; semi-colon

: colon.

People confuse the semi-colon with the colon, not least because they look like each other.

The semi-colon is used to join two groups of words which could make sense as sentences on their own.

For example:

He threw away his smelly socks. He went for a jog in fresh ones.

Both groups of words are sentences as they make sense on their own. However, we could join them with a semi-colon:

He threw away his smelly socks; he went for a jog in fresh ones.

Note that there is no capital letter after the semi-colon, when there is, of course, one after a full stop.

Unlike sentences which contain a colon (:), there is no strong link in meaning – such as, an ironic link – between the two parts of the sentence before and after the semi-colon.

Why bother to use semi-colons? Basically, for variety and sometimes clarity. Interesting writing contains short sentences, long sentences, medium sentences, simple sentences and complex sentences. Semi-colons enable writers to add spice and interest to their writing and readers love variety. Dickens could write over 600 words without using a full stop because he employed the full range of alternative punctuation, including the semi-colon, and he was a master of witty and wonderful writing.

Use of the colon (:)

The colon has two uses:

The colon shows that something is to follow: often a list.

For example:
A.   My sister told me to buy the following: a drill; a leather jacket; a pair of false teeth and a green bucket.
B.   She said:
     "I'm not surprised you don't understand. You're clueless."

In A, the colon is used to introduce a list. In B, the colon is used to introduce the woman's speech. (If "she said" or "he said" is on the same line as the words said, then the words said are preceded by a comma. If you start the words actually said on a new line, use a colon. The use of the colon in B also introduces a pause and a sense of anticipation which would not be gained by a comma.)

The second use of the colon is to imply a strong relationship between the group of words before the colon and after the colon:

For example:

C.   He got the job in spite of his poor qualifications: his Mother was the manager.

D.   I will not buy this table: it is scratched.

In example C, the colon is used to indicate an ironic relationship between the two halves of the sentence: the reason he got the job was because of favouritism on the part of his mother. In example D, the second half of the sentence tells us more about the first half: here, the reason why he wouldn't buy the table.

In both examples, the colon creates a pause and a sense of anticipation for the reader. The reader wants to know what is coming next.

(Note: colons and semi-colons are tricky and some people find them too confusing to use. A **dash** (–) can be used as an alternative to the semi-colon and colon in all the examples above. However, a dash can't be used as an alternative to the colon and semi-colon in **lists** (see below).

Lists

Lists are introduced with a colon:

You will need: a mixing bowl; self-raising flour; two eggs and some raisins.

Items in a list are joined with a comma if each item in the list is only one or two words long:
Do not climb on the following: walls, fences, trees, furniture, chairs or grandpa.

Items in a list are joined with a semi-colon if each item in the list is more than two words long:

To build a vampire trap, you will need: garlic; a consecrated wafer; Holy Water blessed by a Roman Catholic priest; a cross; a magic circle of blood or chalk; iron and a wooden stake.

Note: there is no comma or semi-colon before the last item on the list if it is preceded by words like "and" or "or".

If most of the items in the list are more than two words long, but some are only one word long (as in the example above), use a semi-colon to separate them.

If most of the items in the list are one or two words long, and only a couple are longer than one or two words, use a comma to separate them.

Test Yourself

Have a go at adding a comma, a semi-colon or a full stop in the middle in each sentence by completing the *Use of commas and semi-colons* activity. To access the activity you need to log in as a *Guest User* using the following login details:
Username: spag
Password: spagspag

http://english.ocr.org.uk/mod/quiz/view.php?id=10147

Commas

Commas are short pauses which allow the reader to take a breath and to make sense of a sentence. They mark the natural pauses in a sentence:

•   Ben pounded down the street, crying as he ran.
•   Vicky counted out the woman's change, found it was short and rooted around for another twenty pence.

Commas are shorter pauses than a full stop (.), colon (:) or semi-colon (;).

Not least because commas are shorter pauses than full stops, a comma cannot be used as a substitute

for a full stop. Using a comma when you need a full stop is called comma splicing. Comma splicing is a very common error. The other is mis-use of the apostrophe.

The trouble with comma splicing is that it doesn't give the reader enough pause to take a breath. Reading a passage which is comma spliced ignores the natural rhythm of writing and can leave the reader breathless and exhausted:

In an arm-chair, with an elbow resting on the table and her head leaning on that hand, sat the strangest lady I have ever seen, or shall ever see, she was dressed in rich materials – satins and lace and silks

– all of white, her shoes were white, she had a long white veil dependent from her hair and she had bridal flowers in her hair, but her hair was white, once, I had been taken to see some ghastly waxwork at the fair, once, I had been taken to one of our old marsh churches to see a skeleton in the ashes of a rich dress, that had been dug out of a vault under the church pavement, now, waxwork and skeleton seemed to have dark eyes that moved and looked at me, I should have cried out if I could.

(from *Great Expectations*, by Charles Dickens. Pip encounters Miss Havisham for the first time.)

2. Commas can also be used to mark a phrase or a clause inserted into the main part of a sentence to give more information about the sentence:

Steven, who was very territorial, resented having to give up his cabin to another passenger.

The sentence makes sense without the words marked off by the commas ("who was very territorial"):

Steven resented having to give up his cabin to another passenger.

In the complete sentence

Steven, who was very territorial, resented having to give up his cabin to another passenger.

the words inside the commas give extra information in addition to the main part of the sentence. At the same time, the commas preserve the natural pauses and rhythm of the sentence.

Thus commas here work as a **parenthesis** (like brackets: see Dash and Hyphen, below).

3. The word "and" does not usually take a comma in front of it:

Simon liked Peter, Bill and Colin but disliked Tom and Patrick.

4. Commas are used to separate items in a list when each item is only one or two words in length (see Colons and Semi-colons, above):

Ian stared in dismay at the list of exercises he had to complete this morning: push-ups, squat thrusts, a jog, weight-lifting and forty lengths of the swimming pool.

Test Yourself

Have a go at eliminating comma splicing by completing the *Comma splicing* activity.
To access the activity you need to log in as a *Guest User* using the following login details:

Username: spag
Password: spagspag

http://english.ocr.org.uk/mod/quiz/view.php?id=10148

Dash and Hyphen

A **dash (-)** can be used as a substitute for a colon or a semi-colon: see Colon and Semi-colon, on [page 11](#).

A dash can also be used like two brackets (or two commas) to make a **parenthesis**.

A parenthesis is a phrase inserted into the main part of a sentence to give more information about the sentence. The sentence makes sense without it. You can mark a parenthesis with dashes, commas or brackets: there isn't a hard and fast rule to choose between them but changing between them helps to give your writing variety.

Parenthesis with dashes:

The Tyrannosaurus Rex – uniquely among the carnivorous dinosaurs – enjoyed cucumber sandwiches with its afternoon tea.

Parenthesis with commas:

The Tyrannosaurus Rex, uniquely among the carnivorous dinosaurs, enjoyed cucumber sandwiches with its afternoon tea.

Parenthesis with brackets:

The Tyrannosaurus Rex (uniquely among the carnivorous dinosaurs) enjoyed cucumber sandwiches with its afternoon tea.

A **dash** looks very much like a **hyphen**, except a hyphen is physically shorter:

Dash **–**

Hyphen **-**

A **hyphen** is used to join two words, or two parts of a word, together:

X-ray
Semi-colon
Half-baked
Twenty-three*
A quarter-past six

(*it is equally acceptable to drop the hyphen here: twenty three.)

A hyphen can also be used to indicate robotic or staccato delivery:

Miss Wright launched into one of her habitual "If-you-do-that-again-you-will-be-sent-to-the-headteacher" threats.

Surrender-or-you-will-be-exter-min-a-ted!

Different from

"Different" goes with "from" rather than "to" or "than".

So

A monkey is different from a squirrel

is correct, whereas

A monkey is different to a squirrel

A monkey is different than a squirrel

are both incorrect.

Effect

See **Affect and Effect**

E.g. and etc. and i.e.

See **Abbreviations**

Fewer

See **Less and Fewer**

God or god?

The convention is that the Jewish, Christian or Muslim God takes the capital letter G:

Moses received the Ten Commandments from God.
Jesus was God's son.

All other gods – Greek, Roman, Norse, fictional – take a small g for god:

Caligula hailed himself as a god.
Hera was a jealous god.
Xerox is the mighty god of photocopiers.

Hanging and Hung

Pictures are hung on a wall; people are hanged by the neck.

She hung the picture on the wall

is correct, but

Ruth Ellis was the last woman to be hung in England
The murderer should have been hung

are both grammatically incorrect, and should be:

Ruth Ellis was the last woman to be hanged in England.
The murderer should have been hanged.

He, she or they?

People sometimes become confused when using pronouns to write about people in general – he, she, they – rather than in particular: Billie, Freema, Noel. Which of the following three sentences is correct?

1. A candidate should not open his paper before the examiner tells him to do so.

2. A candidate should not open her paper before the examiner tells her to do so.

3. A candidate should not open their paper before the examiner tells them to do so.

1 and 2 are both grammatically correct because there is only one candidate. Number 3 is wrong because they, their, them are plural pronouns and there is only one candidate in the sentence.

However, people are increasingly using the plural form (as in number 3) as an attempt to avoid accusations of sexism in the use of **she** or **he**.

As women and men are equal, it is perfectly correct to use "she" instead of "he":

When the driver boards the bus, she should engage the ignition.

Or you could put the feminine pronoun first if you opt to use "She or he" or "he or she":

When the driver boards the bus, she or he should engage the ignition.

Some people object to "he or she" with "he" preceding "she" because it implies that the male is more important than the female, as the masculine pronoun comes first:

When the driver boards the bus, he or she should engage the ignition.

Some people try to get round the "he or she" issue by using a /

When the driver boards the bus, he/she should engage the ignition

which is ugly because it creates a jerky rhythm in the sentence and doesn't reproduce natural speech. Even worse is "s/he":

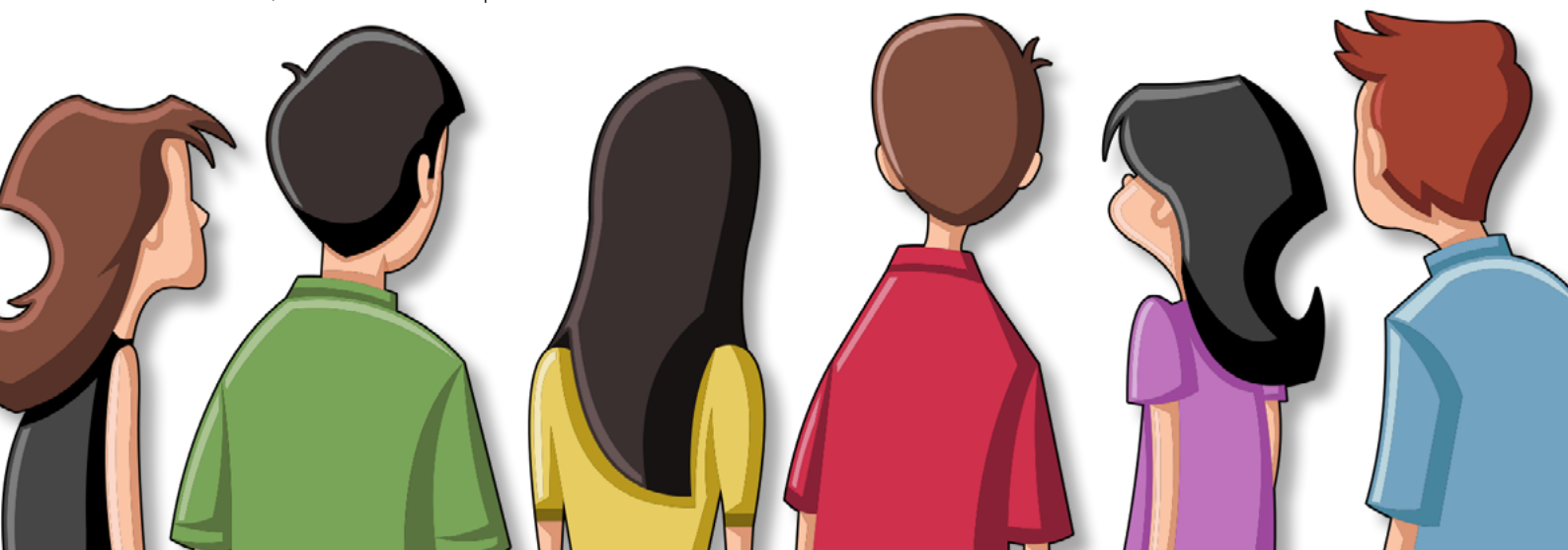When the driver boards the bus, s/he should engage the ignition.

How on earth is "s/he" to be pronounced?!

Writing can become clumsy when "she or he" is repeated too many times:

When the driver boards the bus, she or he should engage the ignition before she or he checks her or his mirror and drives her or his vehicle out of the bus station. Picking up passengers is at her or his discretion.

Rewriting the passage will solve the problem:

When the driver boards the bus, she or he should engage the ignition before checking the mirror and driving the vehicle out of the bus station. Picking up passengers is at the driver's discretion.

Homophones

There, their and they're
- **There** indicates a place: Put the cups over there.
- **Their** means, belongs to them: Those are their homes.
- **They're** is short for "they are".

People often confuse there/their/they're, perhaps because they sound the same (they are **homophones**). There and their are often wrongly substituted for each other.

A mnemonic:

T – h – e – r – e
is a **place** to go for tea.
T – h – e – i – r
is for **their** beer, **their** crisps, **their** bar.

I, me or myself?

I went to the shop

is grammatically correct.

So

Leela and I went to the shop

is also grammatically correct, whereas

Leela and me went to the shop

is grammatically wrong.

One way to remember when to use "I" or "me" is to say the sentence without the other person:

Me went to the shop.

Or try putting imaginary brackets around the other person when you are speaking or writing:

(Leela and) me went to the shop.

Does it sound right without the other person in the sentence? "Me went to the shop" is obviously wrong, so "Leela and me went to the shop" must also be wrong:

I went to the shop

is correct grammatically, so

Leela and I went to the shop

must also be grammatically correct.

Myself is used when it is preceded by for, of, by, to -

Speaking **for myself,** I prefer pistachio to vanilla.
Walt Whitman wrote "The Song of Myself".
I wandered through the castle **by myself.**
I was referring **to myself** when I said one of us here is a spy.

-or if it is preceded by a reflexive verb (a verb you do to yourself):

I wash myself
I feed myself
I spruce myself up
I dress myself, etc..

Myself should not be used as a substitute for "me" or "I" in such sentences as:

Jenny and myself will be in attendance.

Sitara and myself will be flying to Jordan tomorrow.

The team will be composed of Christopher, Elisabeth, David, Matt and myself.

Using "myself" here can sound pompous and egotistical, as though I think I am so important I deserve two syllables instead of one (me, I) when referring to myself.

The grammatically correct forms of the sentences above are:

Jenny and I will be in attendance.

Sitara and I will be flying to Jordan tomorrow.

The team will be composed of Christopher, Elisabeth, David, Matt and me.

Or even:

The team will be composed of Christopher, Elisabeth, David, Matt and I

which is slightly old usage but still correct.

Notice that other people go in front of "I" or "me" (as in "Sitara and I". This is a convention to suggest that I think other people are more important than I am: hence they go first because they come first.

I.e.

See *Abbreviations*

Infer and Imply

People often use "infer" to mean "imply", and vice versa.

To **imply** means to hint at or indicate a meaning. Implying is done by the speaker or writer.

When I said, "Your hair is extremely long for school", I was implying that you should get a haircut.

To **infer** is to deduce or perceive the meaning that the writer or speaker has implied. Inferring is done by the reader or listener.

I infer from your sarcastic comment that you are not a fan of *Coronation Street*.

Inverted commas

Inverted commas ("…") are used for:

- Magazine titles
- Television programme titles
- Film titles
- Book, play, poem, novel, short story titles.

(Inverted commas are sometimes called speech marks but aren't called so here because no-one is speaking.)

Thus:

- "Cosmopolitan"
- "Doctor Who"
- "Pitch Perfect"
- "To Kill a Mockingbird"
- "Macbeth"
- "Pride and Prejudice"
- "Lamb to the Slaughter".

(Notice that the less important words – the, a, to – tend not to be capitalised in such titles: Americans tend to capitalise all the words in titles.)

When you are typing, you can use italics instead but need to drop the inverted commas:

- *Cosmopolitan*
- *Doctor Who*
- *Pitch Perfect*
- *To Kill a Mockingbird*
- *Macbeth*
- *Pride and Prejudice.*

(Annoyingly, titles of poems, songs, episode titles and short stories should not be italicised and can only take inverted commas: *The Whitsun Weddings* as the title of Larkin's poetry collection but "The Whitsun Weddings" for the individual poem; *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* for the name of the album but "Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" for the individual song; *Doctor Who* as the name of the series but "Blink" as the title of an episode; *Girls At War* as the title of the short story collection but "Girls at War" as the original short story.)

Remember that "Macbeth" or *Macbeth* is the title of the play, but Macbeth (without inverted commas) is the name of the character.

- **Inverted commas can be used to indicate irony or sarcasm:**

The government has "rejuvenated" the British economy

suggests, the government has messed it up.

This point is sometimes lost on retailers who use inverted commas in an attempt to highlight words in their advertising boards:

Try our "hot" pies! (= they're cold)

"Fresh" fish today! (= it's gone off)

-ise or –ize? Publicise or publicize?

A safe rule of thumb for verbs ending in –ise or –ize is that

–**ise** is British and –**ize** is American.

A Brit would thus economise, but an American would economize.

(It is actually a bit more complicated than this, as –ize is acceptable as an ending for some such British English words but not others. **–ise is *always* acceptable in British English as an ending for –ise AND –ize words** (organise, civilise), but (some such) words with Greek roots could be spelt –ize in British English. At this point linguistic experts and lexicographers start to argue. Some words must always be spelt –ise even in American English, like: advertise, revise. Having looked at the matter in more detail, it seems sensible and much simpler to stick with the basic rule of thumb that –ise is British and –ize is American. (Phew.)

It's and its

It's with an apostrophe always means **it is** or **it has**.
Its without an apostrophe always means "belonging to it".

A good way to check that you're using the right word:

After you have written the word it's, read your sentence back to yourself and substitute the full form – it is, or it has – for it's. Does the sentence still make sense? If not, you are using the wrong word.

So, if we check
The panda ate **it's** lunch
replacing "it's" with "it is", we see that it actually says
The panda ate it is lunch
which is plainly absurd, so the sentence should read:
The panda ate its lunch.

Its without an apostrophe is a possessive pronoun, meaning "belonging to it". It is in the same group of words as:

My	Your
Her	Their
His	

It would be ridiculous to put apostrophes into these words:

M'y

He'r

Hi's

You'r

Thei'r

so we can't put an apostrophe into **its** (the possessive pronoun) either.

People think that **its** (as in, "The camel loved **its** humps") should take an apostrophe to show possession ("The camel loved **it's** humps"), as apostrophes are used to show that one thing belongs to something else. This is an understandable mistake but it is still incorrect because the rule is that possessive pronouns (my, her, his, its, your, their) don't take apostrophes.

If this is still confusing, then just remember the rule above – **A good way to check that you're using the right word** - and you won't go wrong.

Test Yourself

Have a go at correctly identifying whether to use it's or its in a sentence by completing the **Use of it's or its** activity.

To access the activity you need to log in as a *Guest User* using the following login details:

Username: spag

Password: spagspag

http://english.ocr.org.uk/mod/quiz/view.php?id=10149

Less and Fewer

Less refers to quantity: There is less than a teaspoonful of sugar in the glass.
Fewer refers to number: There are fewer people in the audience than before.

Less is used with a singular noun:

I want less soup than a litre, thank you.

Please cut off less hair than you did last month.

Fewer is used with a plural noun:

There are fewer than ten thousand maths teachers on Venus.

There are fewer than two hundred hedgehogs in my garden.

Test Yourself

Test yourself: Less or Fewer? Have a go at working out which to use by completing the **Use of Less or Fewer** activity.

To access the activity you need to log in as a *Guest User* using the following login details:

Username: spag

Password: spagspag

http://english.ocr.org.uk/mod/quiz/view.php?id=10150

License and Licence

See *Practise and Practice*

Like and as though

In British English, **like** is used to indicate a similarity or comparison between two things:

The rain storm was like a waterfall.

In British English, you cannot use "like" as a substitute for "as though" or "as if". It is perfectly correct to do so in American English, but not in British English.

So

It was like I had walked through the tunnel of ignorance into the light of understanding

is wrong grammatically in British English. The sentence should read:

It was **as though** I had walked through the tunnel of ignorance into the light of understanding

or

It was **as if** I had walked through the tunnel of ignorance into the light of understanding.

The confusion between "like" and "as though" here is, as is so often the case, a result of confusion between British and American English.

Lists

See *Colons and Semi-colons*

Lose and Loose

These two words are often confused: people often write "loose" when they mean "lose".

I had to **lose** the detective who was on my trail.

The referee **loses** his temper again.

But

All hell was let **loose** when she pressed the detonator.

The noose was **loose** around his neck.

It might help to remember the pronunciation:

"loose" rhymes with "moose"

"lose" rhymes with "moos" (as in cow).

Mr, Mrs, Ms and Miss

The usual (but increasingly out of favour) rule is that a full stop should be used after an abbreviation. Thus it is quite correct to write

Mrs. Peel

Mr. Steed

Ms. Gale

as Mrs. is short for Mistress, Mr. is short for Mister and Ms. is also short for Mistress. (Mistress and Mister were originally titles for men and women, but neither indicated marital status. Both titles are found in Shakespeare, for example, Mistress Quickly in *Henry IV*.)

However, it is also quite correct not to bother with the full stop to show an abbreviation. We used to write B.B.C. with full stops, showing that this was an abbreviation for British Broadcasting Corporation. We now tend not to bother and BBC is quite correct (and enforced by advertising and the BBC's ubiquitous logo).

Thus

Mrs Peel

Mr Steed

Ms Gale

are quite correct.

However,

Miss. Jovanka

with a full stop after "Miss" is quite wrong, because "Miss" is not an abbreviation of anything: "Miss" is the complete word.

Numbers

Should numbers be written as numerals -

There were 37 ducks on the pond and 3 swans

 - or words?

There were thirty seven ducks in the pond and three swans.

There is no hard and fast rule here, but it is often considered better to write numbers under 100 as words, and over 100 as numerals.

So:

Seven out of ninety-three people prefer daisies to daffodils.

More than 3000 people were questioned in the survey: 978 said they thought elephants were pink.

However:

If you start a sentence with a number, it should be written in words. (For example: Seventy-four people were dismayed to receive the wrong council tax bill.)

You should use numerals when it is more common to see numerals than words. For example, dates, house numbers, page numbers:

76 Totters Lane

not

Seventy-six Totters Lane

The year is 2035

not

The year is two thousand and thirty five.

Page 12

not

Page twelve.

Of or Have?

People can get confused between **of** and **have**. Sometimes, for example, people write:

I should of known better

when it is correct to write

I should have known better

or

I should've known better.

Of is a preposition

The danger of drowning

The return of the Martians

and can't be used as a substitute for have, which is a verb.

Confusion arises so often because of **homophones** (words which sound the same but are different):

Should have

sounds like

Should of

and the abbreviated form of "have" in

Should've

sounds even more like

Should of.

Hence the confusion.

Test Yourself

Test Yourself: Of or Have? Have a go at working out which to use by completing the **Use of Of or Have** activity.

To access the activity you need to log in as a *Guest User* using the following login details:

Username: spag

Password: spagspag

http://english.ocr.org.uk/mod/quiz/view.php?id=10151

Of and Off

Get your feet **off** the desk

but

Monday is the best day **of** the week.

Paragraphs

Start a new paragraph every time you start something new:

- A new idea
- A new topic
- A new stage in your argument
- A new event in your story
- A new person speaking in dialogue.

A good rule of thumb is…

One paragraph: one idea

Aim to vary the length of your paragraphs to create interesting writing. Readers love variety. Short paragraphs, long paragraphs, medium paragraphs, one page paragraphs, one word paragraphs. A paragraph can be one word long:

When her husband had left the house, she checked that all was quiet and let herself out of the front door. It was only a short walk down the drive to the garage and she ignored the hens clamouring at her feet as she strode along. The garage was cluttered with Clive's rubbish but she knew what she needed, the one thing that would end his troubles and hers.

Rope.

Parenthesis

See *Dash and Hyphen*

Plurals of words ending in –y

Daisy

Fairy

To make a plural, change the y into an i and add –es:

Daisies

Fairies

The exception is when there is a vowel (a, e, i, o, u) before the y:

So

Monkey

becomes

Monkeys

Practise and Practice

To practi**s**e (with an s) is the verb but

The practi**c**e (with a c) is the noun.

So
I must do my piano **practice**

but

I must **practise** the piano today.

(Americans sensibly use the c version – practice – for both noun and verb, but we can't.)

The rule is the same with:
To licen**s**e but the licen**c**e
To advi**s**e but the advi**c**e.

So

She paid her television licence

but

James Bond is licensed to kill

and

Off license: beer and wine at bargain prices

is incorrect because it should be "Off licence"

A mnemonic:

**We advise that you license this practice:
That the NOUN has a c but the VERB has an s.**

(This may be easiest to remember with advice and advise, where the noun and the verb are pronounced differently.)

Program and Programme

Program (US spelling) = computer program:

I have a new program on my laptop.

You need to reprogram the thermostat.

Programme (UK spelling) = television programme; theatre programme; programme of study; football programme; programme for the day.

So:

I will program the laptop to record my favourite programme, *Cash in the Attic*.

We use the American spelling of program for computer program because of American domination of the computer market (although the British actually invented the computer, which was, in the 1950s, sometimes spelt "computor").

Quote and Quotation

To quote is the verb
The quotation is the noun.

So
Let's quote Shakespeare

but
Let's use a quotation here.

The situation is muddied because it is becoming more acceptable to use "quote" as a noun. Plumbers will usually offer you "a quote" for work; even that eminent newspaper *The Times* has a column called "Quote of the Day".

However, in **formal writing** it is still advisable to use **quotation** rather than "quote" for the noun. Traditionalists will tell you that
In this quote, Shylock pleads for tolerance

is suspect and that

In this quotation, Shylock pleads for tolerance

is certainly preferable.

For examinations, sound advice is that you use quotation for the noun, and quote for the verb.

Quotations: punctuation of quotations

There are three basic ways to punctuate a quotation:

1. Introducing a long quotation.
2. Introducing a long quotation as part of your sentence.
3. Introducing a short quotation as part of your sentence.

1.   Introducing a long quotation

If you are introducing a long quotation, you need to indent it from the margin:

In *The Taming of the Shrew* by William Shakespeare, Petruchio explains that he loves Kate and does not believe in her faults:

> I find you passing gentle:
> 'Twas told me you were rough and coy and sullen,
> And now I find report a very liar,
> For thou art pleasant, gamesome, passing courteous.
> (Act 2, Scene 1)

Kate is completely bemused by his tactics.

1. Use a colon (:) to introduce the quotation.
2. Leave a line and indent the quotation from the margin.
3. You may indent the quotation with a full stop if the end of the quotation marks the end of your sentence. (Petruchio's speech actually ends with a comma after "courteous" in the text of *The Taming of the Shrew*.)

4. Give the reference for the quotation in brackets at the end of the quotation. The reference might be a page number, a chapter number, an act-scene reference (as in the example), a website address and so on.
5. Leave a line.
6. Return to the margin to continue your own writing.

When quoting poetry or verse (as in the example above), you must start a new line when the poet or author does. Otherwise you are suggesting to your reader that you don't know the difference between verse and prose.

Indenting the quotation indicates you are quoting, so you do not need also to include quotation marks unless the original text uses them: in dialogue, for example.

In *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, Elizabeth rejects Mr Collins's offer of marriage. Her father is delighted, as it gives him another opportunity to tease and confuse his wife:

> "Come here, child," cried her father as she appeared. "I have sent for you on an affair of importance. I understand that Mr Collins has made you an offer of marriage. Is it true?" Elizabeth replied that it was. "Very well - and this offer of marriage you have refused?"
> "I have, Sir."
> "Very well. We now come to the point. Your mother insists upon your accepting it. Is not it so, Mrs Bennet?"
> "Yes, or I will never see her again."
> "An unhappy alternative is before you, Elizabeth.

> From this hour you must be a stranger to one of your parents. – Your mother will never see you again if you do not marry Mr Collins, and I will never see you again if you do."
>
> (Volume 1, Chapter 20)

Mr Bennet's hope that Mr Collins would turn out to be ridiculous is fulfilled.

2. Introducing a long quotation as part of your sentence

For example:

> If Henry's men could only –
> Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood,
> Disguise fair nature with hard favour'd rage
>
> (Henry V, Act 3, Scene 1)

- then they might overcome the discouragement of their first defeat.

Dashes are used here to introduce the quotation and to signal a return to your own writing.

3. Introducing a short quotation as part of your sentence

If your quotation is no longer than about six or seven words, you do not need to indent it. It becomes embedded in your own writing and therefore requires inverted commas ("…"):

> Macbeth thinks at first that the witches'"supernatural soliciting/Cannot be ill" (Act 1, Scene 3) because the prophecy immediately comes true.

If your poetry quotation is embedded in your own writing but contains a line break, use a / to indicate where the line ends.

Finally:

If you need to change (or to insert) a word or words into the quotation, use **square brackets** around the word(s) you have changed or added:

> Miss Havisham asks Pip if he is "afraid of a woman who has not seen the sun since [he was] born?"

Split Infinitives

To boldly split infinitives that no one has split before.

The **infinitive** is the raw form of the verb, that is, the verb before anything has been done to it by adding a pronoun (he, she, they etc.):

- To run
- To eat
- To work.

In English, unlike French or German, the infinitive is two words.

It is usually considered incorrect or ungrammatical to put another word (usually an adverb – a word which describes a verb) **between the two words of the infinitive**. If you do so, you create a **split infinitive**:

- Sarah-Jane needed **to** quickly **run** from the monsters.
- Alfred had **to** carefully **eat** the peach.
- Priti had **to** slowly **work** through the maths problem.

These sentences are all incorrect because they contain a split infinitive. They should read:

- Sarah-Jane needed to run quickly from the monsters.
- Alfred had to eat the peach carefully.
- Priti had to work slowly through the maths problem.

(In American English, it is perfectly acceptable to split the infinitive: "To boldly go where no man has gone before." This is the opening narrative of the television programme *Star Trek* (1966-1969) and the grammar scandalised British viewers when the show arrived here in 1969. However, in spite of the influence of American on British English, it is still considered 'wrong' to split infinitives.)

Too and To

To is a preposition:

I go to work.

Could you direct me to the railway station?

(To is also the first word of the infinitive of the verb: to eat, to sleep, to bake.)

Too is used to show there is **too much** of something:

It's too hot today.

There are too many vehicles in our town.

A mnemonic:

There are too many o's in too.

If the side of a van reads

No job to small

it doesn't mean "However small the job is, we will do it" ("No job **too** small"). "No job to small" means

We won't deliver to anywhere called Small

or

If your name is Small, we won't give you a job.

(**Two** is the number 2. It has a silent w, but this silent letter, like all silent letters, would have been pronounced in the Middle Ages. If you had said back in those times, "two apples", the first word would have sounded like an owl hooting.)

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