

chicago manual of style grammar examples

Chicago Manual of Style Grammar Examples: A Comprehensive Guide

chicago manual of style grammar examples are essential for writers seeking to achieve clarity, consistency, and professional polish in their work. This comprehensive guide delves into the intricacies of grammar as interpreted and presented by the Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS), offering practical illustrations to clarify complex rules. We will explore common grammatical challenges, from punctuation and capitalization to pronoun usage and verb agreement, providing clear examples that demonstrate best practices. Understanding these nuances can significantly elevate the quality of academic papers, professional reports, and any written communication aiming for precision. This article aims to demystify CMOS grammar guidelines, making them accessible and actionable for writers across disciplines.

Table of Contents

Understanding CMOS Punctuation Conventions
Capitalization Rules in CMOS
Pronoun Agreement and Case Examples
Verb Tense and Agreement Best Practices
Adjective and Adverb Usage Clarified
CMOS Guidance on Numbers and Symbols
Commonly Misused Words and Phrases

Understanding CMOS Punctuation Conventions

Punctuation is a cornerstone of clear writing, and the Chicago Manual of Style offers detailed guidance on its proper application. Mastery of CMOS punctuation rules ensures that sentences are not only grammatically correct but also effectively convey intended meaning and rhythm. From commas and semicolons to apostrophes and quotation marks, each mark plays a crucial role in structuring and clarifying text.

The Comma: Essential Uses and Pitfalls

Commas are perhaps the most frequently used punctuation mark, and their misuse can lead to ambiguity or awkward phrasing. CMOS provides clear guidelines for comma usage, particularly in series, with introductory elements, and to separate independent clauses joined by a conjunction. For instance, in a series of three or more items, the serial comma (the comma before the final "and" or "or") is generally recommended by CMOS to prevent misreading.

Examples:

- The attendees included students, professors, and administrators. (Serial comma used)
- The attendees included students professors and administrators. (Ambiguous without the serial comma)

Commas are also vital after introductory phrases or clauses. Consider these examples:

- After the lecture, attendees had a chance to ask questions.
- Because the data was incomplete, the study was postponed.

When joining two independent clauses with a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so), a comma is typically placed before the conjunction.

- The experiment yielded unexpected results, but the researchers were pleased.
- The team worked late into the night, and they finally completed the project.

Semicolons: Connecting Related Ideas

Semicolons serve to connect two closely related independent clauses that are not joined by a coordinating conjunction. They suggest a stronger separation than a comma but a closer relationship than a period. CMOS advocates for judicious use of semicolons to enhance sentence flow and sophistication.

- The experiment was successful; the data supported the hypothesis.
- She enjoys hiking in the mountains; her brother prefers the beach.

Semicolons are also used in complex lists where the list items themselves contain commas.

- The attendees came from various cities: Paris, France; London, England; and Rome, Italy.

Apostrophes: Possession and Contractions

Apostrophes are primarily used to indicate possession and to form contractions. CMOS guidelines are straightforward for possessives. For singular nouns, add an apostrophe and an "s." For plural nouns ending in "s," add only an apostrophe. For plural nouns not ending in "s," add an apostrophe and an "s."

- the student's paper
- the students' papers
- the children's toys

When it comes to contractions, CMOS recommends using them sparingly in formal writing, but when

used, the apostrophe correctly indicates omitted letters.

- it's (it is)
- they're (they are)
- who's (who is)

It's important to distinguish between "its" (possessive pronoun) and "it's" (contraction).

Capitalization Rules in CMOS

Correct capitalization is crucial for professional writing, guiding readers and adhering to established conventions. The Chicago Manual of Style provides detailed rules that cover a wide range of situations, from titles of works to proper nouns and headings. Understanding these principles ensures consistency and avoids common errors that can detract from the credibility of a piece.

Titles of Works and Major Headings

CMOS generally follows sentence case for titles of works (books, articles, chapters) and major headings, meaning only the first word of the title and subtitle, and any proper nouns or first letters of the first word, are capitalized.

- The analysis of ancient pottery shards
- A guide to effective communication strategies
- The impact of technology on society: An overview

However, for headings within the text of a document, CMOS offers more flexibility and outlines a system of levels, each with its own capitalization pattern, often using title case for higher levels. The specific style chosen depends on the document's overall design and requirements.

Proper Nouns and Specific Entities

Proper nouns, which refer to unique entities such as people, places, organizations, and specific historical periods or events, are capitalized. This includes names of countries, cities, continents, companies, and named monuments or institutions.

- Africa
- The University of Chicago
- World War II

- Google Inc.

Days of the week, months of the year, and holidays are also capitalized.

- Monday
- October
- Independence Day

Pronoun Agreement and Case Examples

Pronoun usage can be a subtle yet significant area where grammatical precision is tested. CMOS offers clear guidance on pronoun agreement in number and gender, as well as the correct case (subjective, objective, possessive) for pronouns to ensure clarity and avoid confusion.

Antecedent Agreement: Singular and Plural

A pronoun must agree in number with its antecedent (the noun or noun phrase it refers to). If the antecedent is singular, the pronoun must be singular; if the antecedent is plural, the pronoun must be plural.

- Each student should submit **his or her** assignment by the deadline. (CMOS often prefers this construction over "their" for singular antecedents when gender neutrality is desired, though "their" is increasingly accepted.)
- The students submitted **their** assignments on time.

When the antecedent is an indefinite pronoun (e.g., everyone, anybody, nobody), it is generally considered singular, requiring a singular pronoun.

- Everyone brought **his or her** own lunch.

Pronoun Case: Subjective, Objective, and Possessive

The case of a pronoun depends on its function in a sentence. The subjective case (I, you, he, she, it, we, they) is used when the pronoun is the subject of a verb. The objective case (me, you, him, her, it, us, them) is used when the pronoun is the object of a verb or preposition. The possessive case (my, your, his, her, its, our, their) indicates ownership.

- **She** and **I** presented the findings. (Subjective case)

- The professor spoke to **him** and **me** after the class. (Objective case)
- This is **her** book, and that is **my** pen. (Possessive case)

A common point of confusion arises with compound subjects or objects:

- **She** is the one who organized the event. (Correct: She is the subject)
- The award was given to **her**. (Correct: Her is the object of the preposition "to")
- The committee selected **her** and **me** for the award. (Correct: Her and me are objects of the verb "selected")

Verb Tense and Agreement Best Practices

The correct use of verb tenses and agreement with subjects is fundamental to constructing clear and coherent sentences. CMOS provides a consistent framework for these aspects of grammar, ensuring that verbs accurately reflect the time of an action or state of being and match their subjects in number.

Subject-Verb Agreement: The Basics

A verb must agree in number with its subject. This means a singular subject takes a singular verb, and a plural subject takes a plural verb. This rule can become complicated with intervening phrases or compound subjects.

- The dog **barks** loudly. (Singular subject, singular verb)
- The dogs **bark** loudly. (Plural subject, plural verb)
- The box of chocolates **is** on the table. (Subject is "box," which is singular, not "chocolates")
- Neither the students nor the professor **is** attending the meeting. (When "neither...nor" connects subjects of different numbers, the verb agrees with the subject closer to it.)

Consistency in Verb Tense

Maintaining a consistent verb tense throughout a narrative or descriptive passage is essential for clarity. While shifts in tense are sometimes necessary to indicate changes in time, they should be deliberate and logical.

- In the past, archaeologists **discovered** many artifacts. They **believe** these discoveries **will** shed light on ancient civilizations. (Shift from past to present and future is logical here.)

- The author **describes** the protagonist's journey in vivid detail. He **faced** many challenges and **overcame** them with courage. (Generally, stick to one tense unless a specific reason demands a shift.)

Adjective and Adverb Usage Clarified

Adjectives modify nouns and pronouns, while adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs. CMOS offers guidance to ensure these modifiers are used precisely and effectively to add detail and nuance to writing.

Distinguishing Adjectives and Adverbs

A common point of confusion is distinguishing between adjectives and adverbs, especially with words that can function as either. Pay attention to what the word is modifying.

- She is a **quick** runner. (Quick modifies the noun "runner" – it's an adjective.)
- She runs **quickly**. (Quickly modifies the verb "runs" – it's an adverb.)
- The proposal was remarkably **well** received. (Well modifies the adjective "received" – it's an adverb.)

Some words, like "good" and "well," are frequently misused. "Good" is an adjective, and "well" is typically an adverb. However, "well" can also be an adjective when referring to health.

- He is a **good** student. (Good modifies the noun "student.")
- He performs **well** in school. (Well modifies the verb "performs.")
- He is not feeling **well** today. (Well modifies "feeling," referring to his health – used as an adjective here.)

Comparative and Superlative Forms

CMOS also provides rules for the comparative and superlative forms of adjectives and adverbs. Comparative forms (e.g., faster, more beautiful) compare two things, while superlative forms (e.g., fastest, most beautiful) compare three or more.

- This car is **faster** than that one. (Comparative)
- Of the three models, this one is the **fastest**. (Superlative)
- The essay was **more** detailed than the previous draft. (Comparative)

- This is the **most** comprehensive analysis available. (Superlative)

CMOS Guidance on Numbers and Symbols

The way numbers and symbols are presented in text can significantly impact readability and adherence to style guides. The Chicago Manual of Style offers specific recommendations for when to spell out numbers and when to use numerals, as well as guidelines for various symbols.

Spelling Out Numbers vs. Using Numerals

A general rule in CMOS is to spell out numbers one through ten and use numerals for numbers 11 and higher. However, exceptions apply, particularly for consistency within a context. For instance, if a text frequently uses numbers above ten, it might be advisable to spell out all numbers up to one hundred for uniformity.

- The team scored **five** goals.
- The team scored **15** goals.
- There were **three** main arguments, and **twelve** supporting points. (Consistency with numbers of different magnitudes in the same sentence often favors numerals for larger numbers, but spelling out smaller ones can also be acceptable if the context dictates.)

Certain categories, such as statistics, measurements, percentages, and dates, generally use numerals:

- The temperature reached **98.6** degrees Fahrenheit.
- **25%** of the participants agreed.
- The event occurred on **July 4, 1776**.

Usage of Symbols and Abbreviations

CMOS provides specific guidance for the use of symbols like the ampersand (&), percent sign (%), and monetary symbols. Generally, in formal prose, these are spelled out.

- The company reported a profit of **ten percent**. (Rather than 10%)
- The agreement was between Smith **and** Jones. (Rather than Smith & Jones)
- The item costs **five dollars**. (Rather than \$5, unless in a table or where space is limited.)

Abbreviations of measurements (e.g., kg, cm, ml) are typically used with numerals, especially in scientific and technical contexts. However, in general prose, it is often preferred to spell them out or use standard English equivalents.

Commonly Misused Words and Phrases

Even experienced writers can fall prey to commonly confused words and phrases. The Chicago Manual of Style offers clarity on many of these, helping writers avoid errors that can undermine their credibility. A keen eye for these distinctions is vital for polished prose.

Homophones and Similar-Sounding Words

Homophones and words that sound alike but have different meanings are frequent sources of error. CMOS emphasizes precise word choice.

- **Affect** (verb) vs. **Effect** (noun or verb): The policy will **affect** (influence) all employees; the **effect** (result) of the policy was significant.
- **Than** vs. **Then**: She is taller **than** her brother. First, we will discuss the problem, **then** we will propose a solution.
- **There, their, they're**: They went **there** with **their** dog; **they're** going to the park.

Dangling and Misplaced Modifiers

Modifiers (words, phrases, or clauses that describe other words) should be placed as close as possible to the words they modify to avoid confusion. Dangling modifiers occur when the word a modifier is intended to describe is missing from the sentence.

- **Dangling Modifier Example:** After finishing the assignment, the television was turned on. (Implies the television finished the assignment.)
- **Corrected:** After finishing the assignment, **I** turned on the television.
- **Misplaced Modifier Example:** He saw a dog on the way to the office that was walking itself. (Implies the office was walking itself.)
- **Corrected:** On the way to the office, he saw a dog that was walking itself.

Understanding these common pitfalls and applying the principles outlined in the Chicago Manual of Style will significantly enhance the clarity, precision, and professionalism of your writing. By internalizing these grammar examples, writers can produce work that is both authoritative and easily understood by their intended audience.

FAQ: Chicago Manual of Style Grammar Examples

Q: What is the primary purpose of the Chicago Manual of Style regarding grammar?

A: The primary purpose of the Chicago Manual of Style regarding grammar is to provide a comprehensive and authoritative guide for clear, consistent, and accurate writing. It aims to standardize editorial practices, ensuring that prose is precise, readable, and adheres to established conventions, particularly in academic and scholarly publishing.

Q: How does CMOS handle the serial comma (Oxford comma)?

A: The Chicago Manual of Style strongly recommends the use of the serial comma (the comma placed before the final conjunction in a list of three or more items). CMOS considers its use to be a safeguard against ambiguity and a way to enhance clarity, as demonstrated in examples like "The attendees included students, professors, and administrators."

Q: What are the CMOS guidelines for capitalizing titles of works?

A: For titles of books, articles, and other creative works, CMOS generally employs sentence case, capitalizing only the first word of the title and subtitle, and any proper nouns or first letters of the first word. This means titles appear as "The impact of climate change" rather than "The Impact of Climate Change."

Q: How does CMOS address the use of "their" as a singular pronoun?

A: While traditionally singular antecedents were matched with singular pronouns like "his or her," the Chicago Manual of Style acknowledges and permits the use of "their" as a singular pronoun, especially when referring to a person whose gender is unknown or irrelevant, or when a writer wishes to avoid gender-specific language. However, it still recommends "his or her" in certain contexts for formal clarity when appropriate.

Q: What is the CMOS approach to using numerals versus spelling out numbers?

A: CMOS generally advises spelling out numbers one through ten and using numerals for numbers 11 and higher in prose. However, consistency is key, and exceptions apply for specific categories such as statistics, percentages, measurements, and dates, which typically use numerals regardless of their value.

Q: Can you provide an example of correct subject-verb agreement according to CMOS?

A: According to CMOS, a verb must agree in number with its subject. For example, "The committee **makes** important decisions" is correct because "committee" is treated as a singular noun. Conversely, "The students **are** studying for their exams" is correct because "students" is plural.

Q: What is the CMOS stance on contractions in formal writing?

A: While not strictly forbidden, the Chicago Manual of Style generally advises against the use of contractions (like "don't," "it's," "can't") in formal academic and professional writing. The preference is for the full forms (e.g., "do not," "it is," "cannot") to maintain a more formal tone.

Q: How does CMOS clarify the difference between "affect" and "effect"?

A: CMOS emphasizes precise word choice, and the distinction between "affect" and "effect" is a common example. "Affect" is typically used as a verb meaning to influence (e.g., "The weather will affect our plans"), while "effect" is usually a noun meaning a result (e.g., "The effect of the medicine was immediate"). "Effect" can also be used as a verb meaning to bring about (e.g., "to effect change").

[Chicago Manual Of Style Grammar Examples](#)

Chicago Manual Of Style Grammar Examples

Related Articles

- [chicago manual of style legal citation examples for footnotes](#)
- [chicago manual of style ip](#)
- [chicago manual of style front matter for dissertation manuscripts](#)

[Back to Home](#)