

# Grammatics' Pictorial Guide TO common Errors in English usage (mini volume)

**10 concepts covered**

Comma in direct address

Let's eat, grandpa.



Let's eat grandpa.

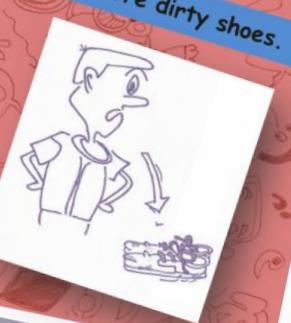


Your vs. You're

Your dirty shoes.



You're dirty shoes.



Lie vs. Lay

Lie down, Jack.



Lay down Jack.



# 1 Comma In Direct Address

Let's eat, grandpa.



Let's eat grandpa.



## In a nutshell

☞ Commas are used to set off names (or words used in place of names) when addressing people directly in a sentence. Follow these rules for applying commas in direct address.

☞ If the name comes first, it is followed by a comma.

*Grandpa, I want to eat a truck-load of ice.*

*Sam, I want to eat a truck-load of ice.*

☞ If the name comes at the end of the sentence, the comma precedes the name.

*I want to eat a truck-load of ice, grandpa.*

*I want to eat a truck-load of ice, Sam.*

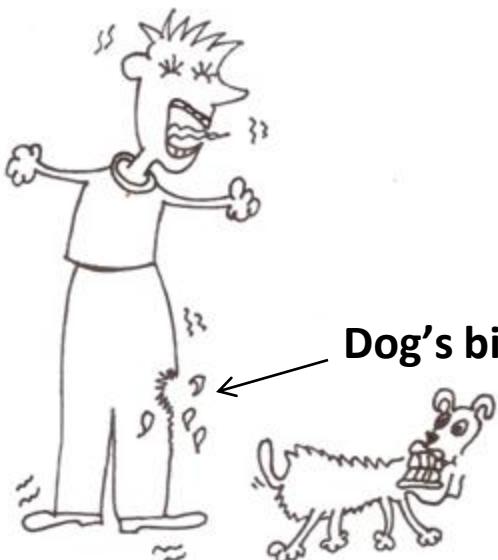
☞ If the name comes in the middle of the sentence, surround it with commas.

*What I said, grandpa, is that I want to eat a truck-load of ice.*

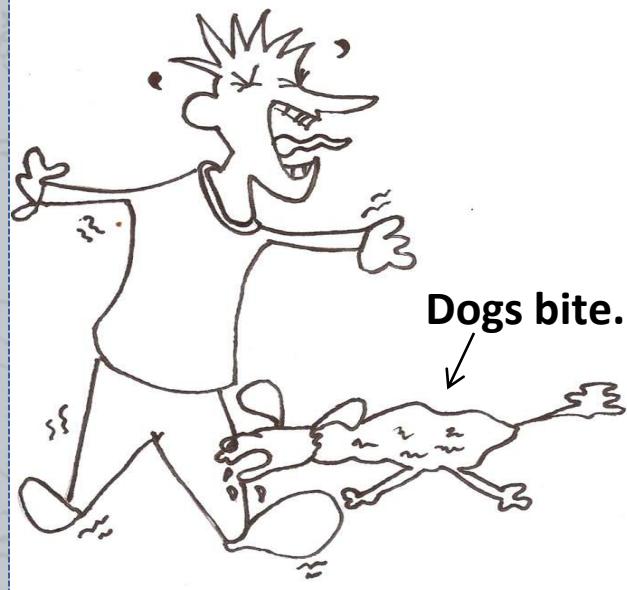
*What I said, Sam, is that I want to eat a truck-load of ice.*

## 2 Apostrophes To Show Possession

Dog's bite.



Dogs bite.



### In a nutshell

- >An apostrophe is used to show that a thing or person belongs or relates to someone or something.
- Instead of writing *the dog of Sam*, we write, *Sam's dog*, to show that the dog belongs to Sam.
- It is important to use the apostrophe to show possession, else it may be confused with the plural (as is the case in the two pictures shown above).

### 3 Joint vs. Separate Possession

John and Henry's dogs.



John's and Henry's dogs.



#### In a nutshell

- If you're trying to show possession and you have two subjects, you have to decide if the two subjects possess something together or separately.
- If the two subjects share the possession (joint possession), then you use only one 's at the end of the second subject. In the first sentence, 's is applied only after Henry, since John and Henry jointly possess the dogs.
- If the two subjects posses the item separately, then you use 's at the end of each subject. In the second sentence, 's is applied after Henry, as well as John, since the dogs are owned separately by each of them.

## 4 Misplaced Modifiers

Covered with hot melting cheese I ate the pizza.



I ate the pizza covered with hot melting cheese.



### In a nutshell

- To modify is to change or add to the meaning of another word. A modifier is a word or group of words that does this.
- Modifiers need to be used carefully, else they may cause unintended humor or confusion. Modifiers are like teenagers – they fall in love with whatever they are next to.
- The golden rule of placing modifiers: place the modifier as close as is possible to the word or phrase that it seeks to modify (this will solve the issue in most cases).
- In the above sentence, *covered with hot melting cheese* (the modifier) seeks to modify *pizza* and not the person eating it. Placing the modifier closer to the word *pizza* clarifies that the *pizza*, and not *I*, is covered with *hot melting cheese*.

When his son went to boarding school, he was already an old man.

?

?



### In a nutshell

➤ Vague pronoun references occurs when there is more than one word that the pronoun might refer to.

➤ In the above sentence, it is not clear whether the pronoun *he* refers to the father or the son.

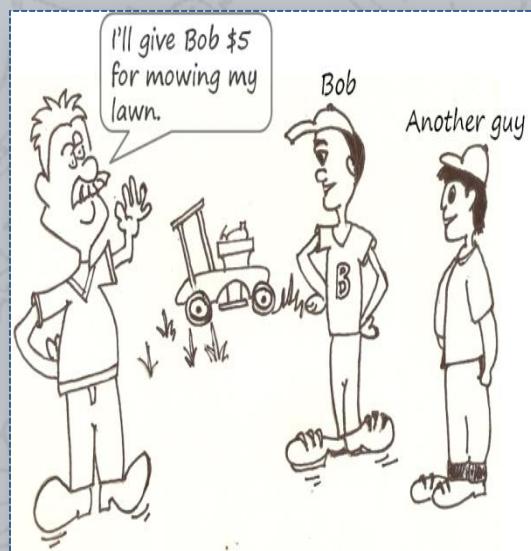
➤ To avoid ambiguity, you can rephrase the sentence.

*He was already an old man when his son went to boarding school.*

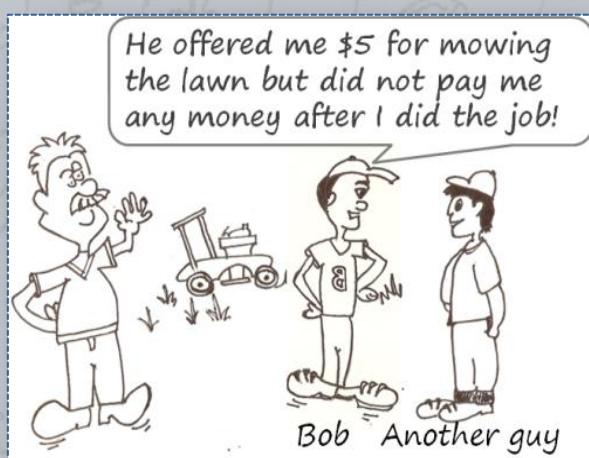
Mr. Welsh offered Bob only \$5 for mowing his lawn.



Mr. Welsh offered only Bob \$5 for mowing his lawn.



Mr. Welsh only offered Bob \$5 for mowing his lawn



### In a nutshell

- ↗ *Only* is a one-word modifier.
- ↗ *Only* can change the meaning of the sentence based on where it is placed in the sentence.
- ↗ The general rule: place *only* immediately before the word or phrase you want it to modify.

If someone writes:

Your dirty shoes...



If someone writes:

You're dirty shoes...



He means:

Dirty shoes that belong to you.

He means:

You are dirty shoes.

- ✓ Your pen [pen that belongs to you]
- ✗ You're pen [you are a pen]
- ✓ Your bag [bag that belongs to you]
- ✗ You're bag [you are a bag]

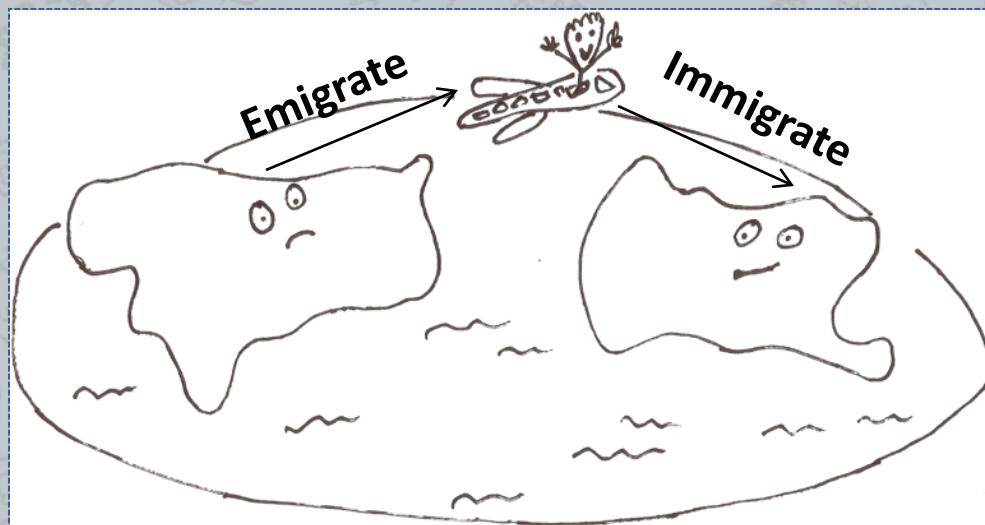
- ✓ You're smart [you are smart]
- ✗ Your smart [?]
- ✓ You're sitting [you are sitting]
- ✗ Your sitting [?]

### In a nutshell

- ✗ You're is a contraction of *you are*.
- ✗ Your shows possession. It means *belongs to you*.
- ✗ If you are confused on whether to use *your* or *you're*, check if *you are* fits into the sentence; if it does, use *you're*, else use *your*.

Emigrate

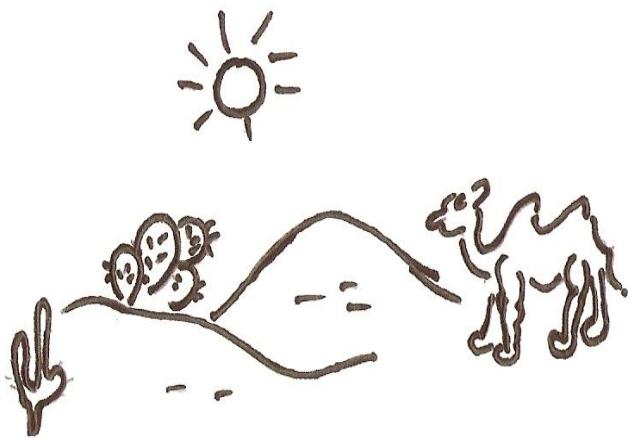
Immigrate



## In a nutshell

- To emigrate is to leave your country to reside in another country.
- To immigrate is to enter and reside in a new country.
- Mnemonic: people who emigrate exit a country, and both *emigrate* and *exit* start with e.

## Desert



## Dessert



## In a nutshell

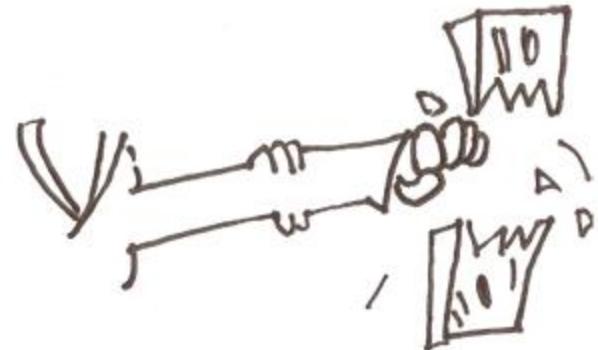
- Desert (with one s) is a dry, arid place.
- Dessert (with two s's) is a sweet dish that's had at the end of a meal.
- Mnemonic: The two s's in dessert stand for *sweet stuff*.

## 10 Brake vs. Break

Brake



Break



### In a nutshell

- ↗ *Brake* means *to slow down*. It can also refer to a device that causes something to slow down.
- ↗ *Break* means *to damage something*. It can also refer to the damage itself.

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