

Top 10 Tips in 20 Minutes: Grammar & Word Usage

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We didn't survey English teachers or legal writing instructors to decide which ten tips we wanted to emphasize today. We've read enough and heard enough to pick our Top 10 Tips. Here are a few tips and good resources for you.

Grammar has become more relaxed over the years yet the basic rules remain the same. Ultimately, grammar is a structure for us to follow when writing, speaking and communicating.

Tip 1: Numbers and Quantities	
More than (do not use over when referring to numbers) although the AP Style accepts "over" as a synonym for "more than"	More than 500 people attended.
Spell the word when beginning a sentence or find another word to begin the sentence.	Three hundred people were arrested. or better The police arrested three hundred people.
Written numbers for numbers zero to ninety-nine, Bluebook Rule 6.2. Exceptions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. When using a mixture of numbers (greater than and less than ninety-nine) in a series, you are to write the numbersb. When referring to moneyc. When using a percent sign	Staff members processed forty-nine complaints from consumers. Exception: <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. The representative called upon people holding ticket numbers 7, 69, and 101.b. The filing fee is \$150.c. The investigator found 50% of the evidence in the garage.

Tip 2: Who and Whom	
Use Who when you can use he or she (subject)	The police charged the man who ran the red light.
Use Whom when you can use him or her (object)	The car belongs to the woman whom you identified in court. (Think of it this way, <i>you identified her.</i>)

Tip 3: I and Me	
Use You and I when you can replace the phrase with we	You and I went to the store.
Use Him and me when you can replace the phrase with us	The server gave the receipts to him and me.

Tip 4: Affect and Effect—Remember the RAVEN	
Affect is a Verb	The storm affected the power supply in the building.
Effect is a Noun, except when used to show that “to cause to come into being”	Drowsiness is a side effect of Benadryl. Exception: Defendant effected the transaction only after Plaintiff’s consent.

Tip 5: Although and While	
Although is to be used to show a counterargument or a causal relationship	Although Johnny did not have the right of way, he did not cause the car accident.
While is to be used for temporal circumstances	While Johnny was in the car, he turned on the radio.

Tip 6: Because and Since	
Because shows causation—it’s defined in the word!	I have to get my car fixed because I have a bad leak.
Since shows time—you just have to remember this!	People have stood in line at the DMV since 3:00 a.m.

Tip 7: Pronoun Agreement	
Pronouns must agree with the noun antecedent in number, gender and case.	Neither of the parties is willing to settle. (neither is singular and therefore it takes on a singular verb)

Tip 8: Nominalizations	
Try to avoid using verbs that have been turned into nouns. Your sentences become clunky and verbose. It’s best to use strong verbs.	Defense counsel objected to the prosecutor’s question. Objection, a noun, is the nominalization of the verb

Tip 9: Maintain Parallelism	
When using words joined by a conjunction, the word usage must be parallel.	The judge ruled based on the following: the attorneys’ briefs, oral arguments, and the sentencing guidelines.

Tip 10: Possessive Preceding a Gerund	
This is fancy schmancy and it’s a pet peeve of mine, my mom’s and Ms. Froneberger’s. Ms. Froneberger was my 10 th grade English teacher. Use a possessive noun before the gerund. A gerund is a verb that is transformed into a noun by adding <i>-ing</i> . The possessive is used before the gerund to complete the statement or phrase. You have to read carefully and decide whether the word ending in <i>-ing</i> is a verb acting as a noun (a gerund) or a verb acting as a verb. Test your writing by using other words to determine if what’s written makes sense and it should be treated as a gerund.	I appreciate <i>your</i> taking time to help me with my brief.

Select Resources for Grammar:

www.grammarphobia.com

<http://www.legalproductivity.com/practice-management/top-10-legal-writing-blogs/> (several hyperlinks on this page)

<http://www.wisbar.org/newspublications/insidetrack/pages/article.aspx?volume=5&issue=5&articleid=10614>

(from the State Bar of Wisconsin)