

Oak Meadow

English Manual for Middle School

Oak Meadow, Inc.
Post Office Box 1346
Brattleboro, Vermont 05302-1346
oakmeadow.com

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Adjective	2
Adverb	3
Analogy, Metaphor, and Simile	5
Articles	8
Capitalization	9
Citing Your Source	12
Concise Writing	18
Confusing Word Pairs	21
Conjunctions	26
Dangling and Misplaced Modifiers	29
Direct and Indirect Objects	32
Direct and Indirect Quotations	34
Frequently Misspelled Words	36
Homonyms and Homophones	39

Independent and Dependent Clauses 42

Interjections 44

Negatives and Double Negatives 45

Note-Taking Skills 47

Nouns 50

Outlining 52

Paragraph Forms 55

Parallel Construction 59

Parts of Speech 61

Plagiarism 62

Possessive Nouns 64

Possessives and Contractions 66

Prefixes 68

Prepositions and Prepositional Phrases 70

Prewriting Techniques 74

Pronouns 76

Punctuation 79

Sentence Construction 81

Shifts in Tense and Person 89

Spelling Rules 92

Spelling Tips 96

Subject Variations 99

Subject/verb Agreement 102

Subjects and Predicates 105

Suffixes 108

Synonyms and Antonyms 110

Topic Sentences and Thesis Statements . . . 111

Verb Tenses and Auxiliary Verbs 113

Verbs 119

Writing a Business Letter 121

Writing a Report 123

Writing a Short Story 126

Writing an Essay 131

Writing Process 136

Writing Styles 139



Adjectives

Adjectives describe nouns and make sentences more interesting. They are descriptive words that give us more information about people and things.

For instance, consider this sentence:

The cat walked down the lane.

That is a complete sentence, but it doesn't paint a very complete or interesting picture. See what happens when we add some descriptive **adjectives**:

*The **yellow striped** cat walked down the **winding, shady** lane.*

The adjectives help to give a much clearer picture of what is going on in the sentence.

In addition to making sentences more interesting, adjectives can provide essential information. Perhaps you are told, "You are supposed to meet a man at the station." This sentence doesn't give much information. Adjectives can make all the difference: "You are supposed to meet a tall old man who walks with a cane at the new bus station downtown." Now you have the information you need!



Adverbs

Adverbs tell how, when, or where something is done. They are similar to adjectives in that they make a sentence much more interesting and informative; adjectives describe the noun and adverbs describe the verb. For instance, consider this sentence:

The cat walked down the lane.

Now, let's see how that sentence can be enhanced by using an **adverb**:

*The cat walked **jauntily** down the lane.*

There are different types of adverbs. Here are some examples of each:

HOW (adverbs of manner, degree, or frequency)	WHEN (adverbs of time)	WHERE (adverbs of place)
quickly	afterwards	above
slowly	now	here
softly	soon	outside
almost	then	downstairs

HOW (adverbs of manner, degree, or frequency)	WHEN (adverbs of time)	WHERE (adverbs of place)
very	yesterday	below
usually	immediately	there



Analogies, Metaphors, and Similes

Analogies, metaphors, and similes are writing techniques that writers use to compare things that are different. These comparisons point out similarities that help emphasize certain qualities. Many writers have trouble understanding the difference between these three techniques, so don't worry if you do, too. The more you work with them, the easier it will be to differentiate between them.

A **simile** points to how two unlike things are like each other. The words *like* or *as* are used in a simile to make the comparison obvious. Here are some examples of similes:

A quiet mind is like a calm lake.

The students were as busy as bees.

A **metaphor** makes the comparison by describing one thing as another very different thing. To say someone is “wet behind the ears” is an old metaphor meaning the person is young and inexperienced; it doesn't literally mean the person has wet ears. Here are some examples of metaphors:

The kindergarten classroom was a merry-go-round of color.

After the party, the house was a train wreck.

An **analogy** takes the comparison one step further by elaborating on it, usually by referring to something familiar to help clarify something more complex or less familiar. Analogies can use metaphors or similes (or both).

The smog darkened the sky, burying the town under layers of moldy, suffocating blankets.

The playful mood spread until the three dogs became like clowns on the center stage, performing a comedy routine as they grinned at the crowd.

All three literary techniques make comparisons between different things. The subtle differences between similes, metaphors, and analogies are sometimes easier to grasp when the techniques are seen side by side.

Simile: My dreams are like delicate birds

Metaphor: My dreams are delicate birds.

Analogy: My dreams are delicate birds, frantically beating against the cage of my life.

These writing techniques can make your writing more vivid and expressive. However, it's easy to go overboard, especially with analogies. A poor analogy uses language that doesn't match the intended result.

Bad analogy: *The dancer lifted her arms delicately and turned her head to the side, like she was sniffing her armpit and wondering whether she remembered to wear deodorant.*

Why it is bad: “sniffing her armpit” does not contribute to the overall impression of the graceful dancer.

Better: *The dancer lifted her arms delicately and turned her head to the side, like a gazelle gazing into the distance, ready to leap across the field.*



Articles

Articles are a special kind of an adjective (some people consider them a separate part of speech). They give us information about a noun. There are only three articles: *a*, *an*, *the*.

A and *an* are **indefinite articles**, and *the* is a **definite article**. This means that *the* is used to refer to a specific noun, while *a* and *an* simply identify general classes of things. *She stole the briefcase* indicates that a particular, individual briefcase was stolen, whereas *She stole a briefcase* means that some briefcase somewhere was stolen, but doesn't tell which one.

While you are probably quite clear about using *a* before a word that begins with a consonant and *an* before a word that begins with a vowel, there are some tricky words. They all begin with the letter H. This is because the letter H can have a hard sound (*hat*, *hurry*, *history*) or be unpronounced (*hour*, *honor*, *honest*, *heir*). Checking the pronunciation will clue you in to the correct indefinite article: *an hour*, *an honor*, *a hat*, *a historical event*.



Capitalization

There are many different instances in which you would capitalize a word. In general, the first word of every sentence must be capitalized and every proper noun (or name) needs to be capitalized. Here are some capitalization rules to remember:

- Always write the word *I* as a capital letter, no matter where you use it.
 - Example: Today is the day I get to go to the library!
- Capitalize words that refer to relatives when using them as a name, but don't capitalize words that refer to relatives if you use a possessive pronoun (like *my* or *your*) in front of them.
 - Example: Today Uncle Peter and Dad went to the concert. My uncle and my dad both love music.
- Use a capital letter to begin the name of a pet, but do not capitalize animal species unless they contain a proper noun (grizzly bear, Bengal tiger, border collie, Labrador retriever, etc.)
 - Example: I have a German shepherd named Petey.

- Capitalize a title such as mister, doctor, general, or president when it is attached to a specific person’s name.
 - Examples: Mr. White, Dr. Jones, General Westmoreland, President Carter
- Use a capital letter to begin each important word in the name of a place.
 - Example: I am going to visit the Smithsonian Museum and the Washington Monument.
- Use a capital letter to begin the name of a country, the name of a nationality, or a word made from the name of a country or a nationality.
 - Examples: France, French, Europe, African, Indian
- Capitalize days, months, and holidays (Monday, Tuesday, January, February, Christmas, Passover, Halloween). Do not capitalize the seasons: spring, summer, fall or autumn, and winter.
- Capitalize the first word of a direct quotation.
 - Example: Mother said, “When are you going to the store?”
- Capitalize the first word and every important word in the title of a book, a story, a poem, or a song.
 - Examples: “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” or *Charlotte’s Web*.
- Capitalize Earth and other planets (Venus, Mars, etc.), but do not capitalize *sun* and *moon*.

- Capitalize names of deities and sacred documents.
 - Examples: God, the Bible, the Torah, Allah, the Koran, Krishna, Buddha

There are many words that get capitalized sometimes but not always, depending on how the word is used. If a noun is used in a general way, you will usually use lowercase letters. If a noun is used to reference a specific place or person, you will usually use capital letters. Here are some examples:

- I love going to the **ocean**. We visited the Indian **Ocean**.
- My **dad** makes the best bread. I told **Dad** I like his bread more than any other.
- We always love it when **Uncle** Raymond visits. We have fun when my **uncle** visits.
- I live on Elm **Street**, all the way at the end of the **street**.



Citing Your Sources

When writing a research report, you should use at least three sources. Of course, you are welcome to use more! Sometimes you will use books, magazines, encyclopedias, newspapers, or the internet to find information. Even though doing research on the internet gives you quick access to a wide variety of sources, it's important to use print sources as well since the information in print is likely to be very carefully checked before publication while information on the internet can be posted without fact-checking.

Finding reputable sources

Whether you use print or online resources when you conduct research, it is important that you use *reputable* (trustworthy or reliable) sources. Reputable sources undergo extensive review to ensure that the information they provide is accurate. Nonfiction books, encyclopedias, news magazines, professional journals, and newspapers are generally considered reputable. Reputable websites include sites that are connected to reputable print and media sources, such as *newyorktimes.com*, *nationalgeographic.com*, or *cnn.com*. In general, websites that end in *.org*, *.edu*, or *.gov* are considered reputable.

Wikipedia.com is not considered a reputable source by academic standards because anyone can go into Wikipedia and change the entries without having to prove that the information is correct. Wikipedia is a good website for getting a general overview of your topic, and Wikipedia writers often provide a list of the sources they use to write their articles. However, you should never quote directly from Wikipedia, and you should always double check anything you learn on Wikipedia with a reputable source.

Creating a works cited page

Even if you don't quote directly from a source, it's important to keep a list of your sources so that you (or your readers) can go back to them later to check your facts or gain more information. These sources are listed on a works cited page that goes at the end of your paper.

Oak Meadow uses MLA (Modern Language Association) guidelines for citing sources, which are described in full below. Please notice the punctuation in your citations; correct punctuation is part of an accurate citation. If you are writing by hand, wherever you see italics, underline the words instead.

List everything in alphabetical order on your works cited page (alphabetized by the first word listed in each entry, with the exception of entries beginning with *The*, which are alphabetized according to the second word).

These rules may seem really complicated at first, but it's a good idea to get in the habit of using complete citations

now since you'll probably have to use them in high school and college as well.

To cite print sources in MLA format:

Author last name, first name. *Title*. Publishing company, year.

Using this format, here is how *Treasure Island* would be cited:

Stevenson, Robert Louis. *Treasure Island*. Dover, 1993.

You will usually find all of the information you need to cite a print source in the first few pages of a book or magazine.

When citing online sources, use this format:

Author last name, first name (if known). "Title of article." *Website*. Organization, publication date.
url

Sometimes it can be hard to figure out the difference between the website name and the organization, and often they are both the same. Just do your best. Usually the website name is found at the top of the page, along with the title of the webpage or article. Usually the organization name is found at the very bottom of the page, often with a copyright symbol and the date.

Here is an example:

Bradbury, Lorna. "25 Classic Novels for Teenagers."
Telegraph.co.uk. The Telegraph, 5 April 2012. www

.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/bookreviews
/9189047/25-classic-novels-for-teenagers.html

To cite an online video clip (such as YouTube):

Author last name, first name (if known). “Title of article.” *Website*. Organization, publication date.

Here is an example of what that looks like:

Schlickemeyer, Max. “The Most Astounding Fact—Neil deGrasse Tyson.” *YouTube*. YouTube, 2 March 2012. www.youtube.com/watch?v=9D05ej8u-gU

To cite a film:

Film Title. Dir. First name Last name. Perf. First name Last name. Distributor. Year of Release.

Note: *Dir.* stands for director, and *Perf.* stands for performers.

Here’s an example:

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone. Dir. Chris Columbus. Perf. Daniel Radcliffe, Emma Watson, Rupert Grint, Alan Rickman, Robbie Coltraine and Tom Felton. Warner Brothers. 2001.

Remember, all your sources, regardless of type, go on one page of citations, and are put in alphabetical order.

In-text citations

When you quote directly from a source or refer to it in a specific way, you will need to include an in-text citation as well as a full citation at the end of your paper. An

in-text citation goes right into the text where the citation appears, usually at the end of the sentence or passage.

When you quote a piece of text word for word, you will put it into quotation marks to show that it is not your own writing. You will also include the author's name and the page number where the quotation was found. Using the rules of punctuation for direct quotations, here's one example of an in-text citation:

In E. B. White's *Stuart Little*, Stuart was so happy to be sailing that he "let go of the wheel for a second and did a little dance on the sloping deck" (35).

The number in parentheses shows where in the book the quote came from. If you don't name the author of the book in your sentence, that information about the source goes into the parentheses with the page number:

It was clear that Stuart was happy to be sailing because he "let go of the wheel for a second and did a little dance on the sloping deck" (White 35).

Here's another example, showing a specific idea that came from a source, this time from a website. Even though a direct quotation is not used, the source is cited as a way to provide evidence or "support" your writing:

A new spikey-headed dinosaur has been found in Canada, which is similar to another recent find that had 15 horns and spikes on its head (*news.nationalgeographic.com*).

This time the website name is in the parentheses, but there is no page number because websites don't have page numbers.

Notice how the parentheses are *inside* the final punctuation mark for in-text citations—this is so there is no confusion about what the page number, book title, or website name refers to.



Concise Writing

Good writing is concise. Professional writers spend a good deal of time revising their writing to eliminate unnecessary words. Overstuffed phrases and pointless repetitions continually creep into our writing. The only remedy is ruthless pruning as you revise and edit. On occasion, you may wish to use extra words to make a point. This can be very effective, but only if used very sparingly. Below is a list of some of the more common culprits in the war against wordiness.

An **empty modifier** is an adjective or adverb that repeats what is already stated in the word being modified. Here are just a few examples:

- end result
- final outcome
- unexpected surprise
- desired goal

Since the result always comes at the end, the outcome is always final, a surprise is always unexpected, and a goal is always desired, you can trim these unnecessary modifiers.

The result will be a more succinct and polished piece of writing.

A **surplus intensifier** is a word or phrase that is paired with another word or phrase but adds nothing to the meaning of the first one.

surrounded on all sides

at this point in time

consensus of opinion

quite unique

Like the empty modifier, the surplus intensifier can be eliminated without changing the meaning of the sentence. Your prose will be more clean and concise.

Clichés

A cliché is an expression that has been used so often it is no longer effective. When a particular phrase has been used by everyone for years, it's time to find something else. Here are some examples of clichés:

fit as a fiddle

right as rain

across the board

fresh as a daisy

sick as a dog

off the top of my head

Clichés often appear in early drafts of writing, but should be deleted during the revision process. Look for more original ways to express your ideas.

There are times when clichés can be used to good effect, but you have to be very careful to use them intentionally (rather than having them sneak into your writing without you realizing it). Since many people use clichés when they speak, particularly people who talk in a folksy, informal style, writers may choose to use clichés in dialogue between certain characters. However, you have to make sure the cliché fits the person speaking and the setting. Use clichés sparingly or they will lose their effectiveness and your character may come across as uninteresting or annoying.

Another writing technique is to twist a cliché around to make it more interesting and original. Saying someone is “as healthy as a horse” is an old, tired cliché, but saying someone is “as healthy as a sick horse” makes it funny and entertaining.



Confusing Word Pairs

Learning to use the English language with skill and expressiveness takes many years. Here are some common word pairs that are frequently confused and misused, and tips that can help you when deciding which word to use.

May vs. Can

Quick tip: You *may* jump over the fence, but whether or not you *can* is another question.

May: used when asking or giving permission.

Example: *May we go to the park today?*

Can: used in expressing ability to do something.

Example: *She can play the piano.*

Bring vs. Take

Quick tip: You *bring* toward or *take* away.

Bring: describes an action moving towards something.

Example: *I will bring my dog to the beach.*

Take: indicates an action moving away from something.

Example: *I will take my books with me when I leave.*

Affect vs. Effect

Quick tip: *Affect* is (almost always) a verb and *effect* is (almost always) a noun.

Affect: verb meaning to influence.

Example: *I wonder how the weather will affect our picnic.*

Effect: noun indicating a result.

Example: *The quiet music had a calming effect.*

Among vs. Between

Quick tip: The M in *among* is for many; the T in *between* is for two.

Among: used when referring to a group or many.

Example: *Among the Native American tribes, there are many different customs.*

Between: used when referring to two groups, people, or things.

Example: *Between the boy and the gate stood a big, red bull.*

I vs. Me

Quick tip: Restate the sentence to see which word fits in.

I: use when you are the subject (that which is taking action).

Example: *James and I are building a guitar together.*
 (James is building it and I am building it. You would not say “me is building it.”)

Me: use when you are the object (that which is being acted upon).

Example: *A master woodcarver is helping James and me.* (He’s helping James and he’s helping me. You would not say “he is helping I.”)

Here is a list of pairs of words commonly mistaken for each other. These words often have very close (identical) pronunciations, which makes them especially tricky.

Confusing word pairs	Meaning
accept except	allow not including
access excess	entry to too much
adverse averse	harmful, unfavorable opposed to
advice advise	recommendation to give counsel
allude elude	to refer to to avoid or evade

Confusing word pairs	Meaning
allusion	a reference
illusion	a false impression
anecdote	a story or example
antidote	a cure
conscience	internal moral guide
conscious	aware of
desert	abandon; hot dry region
dessert	sweet treat served after a meal
device	a thing made for a certain purpose
devise	to invent or make
elicit	to prompt or provoke
illicit	illegal
eminent	famous
imminent	about to occur
loose	not fastened
lose	to misplace
medal	a medallion or award
metal	a solid material like iron
moral	virtuous
morale	spirit, feeling

Confusing word pairs	Meaning
personal	private
personnel	people in a work force
pedal	what you do on a bike
petal	a part of a flower
shudder	to shake
shutter	window covering
than	compared with
then	at that time
whether	in any case
weather	climate