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# The **CANADIAN** Writer's Handbook

## Second Essentials Edition

**William E. Messenger**  
**Jan de Bruyn**  
**Judy Brown**  
**Ramona Montagnes**

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# How to Find What You Need

- **Consult the table of contents.** The table of contents will give you a comprehensive overview of the material this handbook covers.
- **Use the running heads and the virtual index.** The running heads at the top of each page and the colour-coded tabs of the virtual index will let you know at a glance what is covered on each page.
- **Check the index.** The detailed index, which appears on the final pages of this handbook, will direct you to the exact pages on which a topic is discussed.
- **Use the EAL icons.** EAL icons mark the sections that are particularly useful to learners of English as an additional language.

**EAL**

- **Refer to the list of marking symbols and abbreviations on the inside back cover.** This list will help you understand the symbols your instructors use to indicate writing problems on your papers.

25 Avoiding Common Errors in Punctuation

## 25 Avoiding Common Errors in Punctuation

### 25a Unwanted Comma Splice

Using only a comma between independent clauses not joined with a coordinating conjunction results in a **comma splice**:

*cx:* The actual prize is not important, it is the honour connected with it that matters.

*cx:* He desperately wanted to eat, nevertheless he was too weak to get out of bed.

The easiest way to fix a comma splice is to replace the comma with a semicolon (see #16a). See also #5b.

### 25b Unwanted Comma Between Subject and Verb

Generally, do not put a comma between a subject and its verb unless some intervening element calls for punctuation:

*no p:* His enthusiasm for the project and his desire to be of help, led him to add his name to the list of volunteers.

Don't be misled by the length of a compound subject. The comma after *help* in the last example is just as wrong as the comma in the following sentence:

*no p:* Kiera, addressed the class.

But if some intervening element, for example an appositive or a participial phrase, requires setting off, use a *pair* of marks:

His enthusiasm for the project and his desire to be of help, both strongly felt, led him to add his name to the list of volunteers.

Kiera —the exchange student—addressed the class.

25b

# The **CANADIAN** Writer's Handbook

# Important Topics for EAL Students

Several sections throughout this handbook provide information of particular importance to students who are studying English as an additional language (EAL). The following list is a quick and convenient guide to those sections. Whether you are relatively new to writing in English or are more experienced and looking to master the finer points of the written language, these sections of the text—in combination with a learner's dictionary—will help you improve your writing skills. Note that the entries in this list correspond to the EAL symbols found throughout the text: **EAL**.

5f	Mixed Constructions
6a	Inflection of Nouns: Number; Possessive Case
6c	Nouns and Articles: <i>a</i> , <i>an</i> , and <i>the</i>
7a.6	Indefinite Pronouns
7a.8	Reciprocal Pronouns
8b	Inflection of Verbs: Principal Parts
8c	Irregular Verbs
8c	Auxiliary Verbs
8e	Verb Tenses and Their Functions
8f	Tense Sequence
10c.2	Ordering of Adjectives
13b.2	Correlative Conjunctions
14e	Idiom
14g	Usage: A Checklist of Troublesome Words and Phrases

# Preface

The second essentials edition of *The Canadian Writer's Handbook* is designed to help you work on your writing skills. Improving written communication is an ongoing—even lifelong—project. Whether you are a long-time writer of English seeking to refine your abilities or a writer who is approaching English as an additional language, the suggestions, examples, and guidelines in this new edition will help you to write with greater confidence and communicate with greater clarity.

## Overview

Each of the six parts in this book addresses an essential aspect of the writing process. Part I provides practical guidance on planning and composing two larger units of communication, the essay and the paragraph. We start here because we have found that students who are beginning a written assignment usually want help with the broad strokes of composition before they move on to consider the narrower concerns of sentence structure or word choice. In Part II and Part III, we explore the essentials of grammar and style, first by examining how sentences work, then by looking at how the parts of speech come together to form meaning. In Part IV we discuss the importance of punctuation, and in Part V we address issues of mechanics and spelling. Part VI offers valuable information on conducting research and citing sources in an essay. Appendix A provides a checklist that will help you revise, edit, and proofread your work, while Appendix B offers a sample research paper in MLA style.

## How to Use This Handbook

We encourage you to use this handbook as a reference tool that you can consult on particular issues arising from everyday writing activities. We suggest that you begin by familiarizing yourself with it by seeing what each part

has to offer. Browse through the table of contents and the index. Look up some sections that arouse your interest. Flip through the pages, pausing now and then for a closer look.

You may want to start at the beginning of Part I and proceed carefully through each section in sequence. Note that some points in later sections might not be clear to you unless you understand the material in the early sections. Or, if you are struggling with a particular problem, you may want to skip to the relevant section and then consult other sections as your needs change.

The book is subdivided into sections and subsections that are numbered consecutively throughout. Note how the running heads and the coloured tabs on each page—together with the part index that follows the acknowledgements—can help you find things quickly.

PART III

Essentials of Grammar and Style: Parts of Speech; Diction

CONTENTS

- 6. Nouns
- 7. Pronouns
- 8. Verbs
- 9. Agreement Between Subject and Verb
- 10. Adjectives
- 11. Adverbs
- 12. Verbals
- 13. Connecting Words; Interjections
- 14. Diction

INTRODUCTION

Understanding English grammar is essential for your future success. Your professors, clients, employers, and co-workers expect clear, concise communication, and many will judge your dedication and professionalism based on your ability to express your ideas with clarity. Learning and following the rules of grammar will help you communicate your ideas effectively and make a good impression.

English words fall traditionally into eight categories called **parts of speech**. Five of these can be inflected (changed in the form) in one or more ways:

- noun
- adjective
- pronoun
- adverb
- verb

The other three are not inflected (that is, they do not change form):

- preposition
- interjection
- conjunction

61

PART III | Essentials of Grammar and Style: Parts of Speech; Diction

Note that the term *inflection* applies only to the change of a word's form within its part of speech. That is, when the noun *boy* is inflected to make it plural, the new form, *boys*, is still a noun; when the pronoun *they* is inflected to *them* or *theirs*, the new forms are still pronouns.

Many words can be changed so that they function as different parts of speech. For example, the noun *centre* can be made into the adjective *central*, or the noun *vacation* into the adjective *meaningful*, or the verb *vacate* into the noun *vacation*. Such changes are not inflections but **derivations**; a word can be derived from a word of a different part of speech, often by the addition of one or more suffixes: *trust*, *trustful*, *trustfully*, *trustfulness*. And many words, even without being changed, can serve as more than one part of speech; for example:

She is cool under pressure. (adjective)

Relations between the two leaders may cool after the meeting. (verb)

Keep your cool in a crisis. (noun)

Part III first discusses the eight parts of speech—their inflections (if any) and other grammatical properties; their subcategories; how they work with other words in sentences; and some of their important derivatives (verbals)—and calls attention to some of their potential trouble spots, such as **agreement** and a verb's **tenses**. Part III ends with a section on diction, which is the choice of words in the writing we all do.

6 Nouns

A **noun** is a word that names or stands for a person, place, thing, class, concept, quality, or action: *woman*, *character*, *city*, *country*, *citizen*, *ship*, *garden*, *machine*, *silence*, *vegetable*, *road*, *freedom*, *beauty*, *river*, *spring*. **Proper nouns** are names of specific persons, places, or things and begin with a capital letter: *Dorothy*, *Rumpelstiltskin*, *Saskatoon*, *Canada*, the *Titanic*. All other nouns, called **common nouns**, are capitalized only if they begin a sentence:

62

## Help with Polishing Your Work

When you finish a piece of writing, go through the checklist in Appendix A. If you find you're not sure about something, follow the cross-references to the sections that will give you the help you need.

## Help with Correcting and Revising Your Work

When you get a piece of writing back with marks and comments, look it over alongside the list of marking symbols and abbreviations on this handbook's inside back cover. The information there may be enough to help you make the appropriate changes. But if you need more than a reminder about a specific issue or pattern, look up the relevant topic and study the sections that discuss and illustrate those principles in greater detail. You should then be able to edit and revise your work with understanding and confidence.

## Key Terms

Throughout the text, you will find important terms set in boldface. Pay attention to these terms, for they make up the basic vocabulary necessary for the discussion of grammar, syntax, and style.

## For Readers and Writers of English as an Additional Language

Our experience as university instructors has given us the opportunity to work with a number of writers engaged in the challenging project of reading and writing in English as an additional language (EAL). At several points in this handbook, we offer information and direction of particular importance to those of you who are approaching English as a relatively new language, and we have designated those relevant sections with the symbol **EAL**.

integrity and indefatigable attention to public business”  
and “perpetually occupied by the affairs of his country”  
(Shelley 31).

Here the student writer has incorporated select words and phrases. The ellipsis indicates that material has been omitted in the interests of the student’s own sentence structure.

37 Documentation

To be effective, documentation must be complete, accurate, and clear. Completeness and accuracy depend on the full recording of necessary information as you do research and take notes. Clarity depends on the way you present that information to your reader. You will be successful only if your audience can follow your method of documentation. Before you begin any research project, investigate the method of documentation you need to use. This section presents three frequently used methods:

- 1. The *name–page* method currently recommended by the Modern Language Association (MLA), which has wide use in the humanities;
- 2. the *name–date* method recommended by the American Psychological Association (APA), which is used in some of the social and other sciences as well as in education studies; and
- 3. the *note* method recommended by *The Chicago Manual of Style*, which is used in various disciplines.

Which method you choose will depend on what discipline (field of study) you are writing in and on the wishes of your audience.

**Note:** Each example on the following pages has been colour coded to help you recognize the common elements among the in-text and reference citations, so that you can construct them more easily. The colour key is found at the bottom of each page.

37a The Name–Page Method (MLA Style)

The name–page method is detailed in the eighth edition of the *MLA Handbook* (2016). Using this method, you provide a short parenthetical reference in the text, and you list all sources in a list titled “Works Cited” at the end of your paper. The entries in the list of works cited contain full bibliographic information, and they are alphabetized by the surnames of authors, editors, or other creators (or title, when no author, editor, or other creator is named).

The pages that follow illustrate examples of the most common patterns of MLA documentation: each in-text parenthetical reference is accompanied by its works-cited entry. Note that parenthetical references are usually placed at the end of the sentence in which the citation occurs. Note also that in an actual paper, the examples that follow would be double-spaced.

**A note on number ranges:** When you give a number range (e.g., a range of page numbers) in MLA style, provide the first and second numbers in full for numbers up to 99 (e.g., 5–88, 97–99). For larger numbers, give the first number in full but only the last two digits of the second number, unless additional digits are required for clarity (e.g., 122–28 for a range from 122 to 128, but 385–460 for a range from 385 to 460).

A Book by One Author (or Editor)  
In-Text Reference

A survey revealed that many Canadian municipalities “did not provide pedestrian amenities at all, and only half, in any way, encouraged their citizens to reach their destinations by foot” (Friedman 136).

When you don’t mention the author by name in your sentence, the parenthetical reference includes the author’s surname and a page reference, with no intervening punctuation. If you can include the author’s name and credentials

Up-to-Date Documentation Guidelines

Part VI offers guidelines that cover the three most popular citation styles used in Canada today: MLA style (the name–page method), APA style (the name–date method), and Chicago style (the note method). To illustrate each method of documentation, we offer an array of examples modelled on the recommendations set out in the most recent edition of each style guide.

The components of each example are colour coded to help you identify and compare similar components across different examples. The colour key is found at the bottom of relevant pages.

## Acknowledgements

As with the previous editions of *The Canadian Writer's Handbook*, the second essentials edition owes much to the contributions of reviewers, colleagues, friends, fellow writers, and talented and committed editors.

For their determination to strengthen and polish their work and their commitment to grow and change as thinkers and writers, we thank our students. We are especially grateful for their generosity in allowing us to use their questions and insights about writing in this book.

We would also like to thank Rhiannon Don, Pam Farvolden, Teresa Flanagan, Stephen Guy, Dennis R. Nighswonger, Conrad van Dyk, and all of the other reviewers whose comments and suggestions have helped to shape all editions of *The Canadian Writer's Handbook* over the years.

We deeply appreciate the encouragement, advice, and support we have received from the talented and enthusiastic staff at Oxford University Press Canada—especially from Phyllis Wilson, Dave Ward, Leah-Ann Lymer, and Peter Chambers. Special appreciation goes out to Janice Evans, our meticulous editor whose input helped to shape the new edition.

To all of you, many thanks.

**PART I** Essentials of Composition

1

**PART II** Essentials of Grammar and  
Style: Sentences

27

**PART III** Essentials of Grammar and Style:  
Parts of Speech; Diction

61

**PART IV** Essentials of Punctuation

149

**PART V** Essentials of Mechanics  
and Spelling

181

**PART VI** Essentials of Research: Planning,  
Writing, and Documenting Sources

223

# Contents

Important Topics for EAL Students	xii
Preface	xiii
Acknowledgments	xvii
Part Index	xix

## **PART I | Essentials of Composition 1**

<b>1. The Writing Process: Planning, Writing, and Revising the Whole Essay</b>	<b>2</b>
1a Finding and Limiting a Subject	2
1b Considering Audience and Purpose	6
1c Gathering and Organizing Evidence	7
1d Crafting a Thesis Statement	9
1e Crafting an Outline	10
1f Writing a First Draft	12
1g Beginnings	12
1h Revising, Editing, and Proofreading	14
1i Preparing the Final Draft	16
<b>2. Paragraphs</b>	<b>16</b>
2a Unity	16
2b Organizational Coherence	17
2c Structural Coherence	21
2d Emphasis and Variety	24

## **PART II | Essentials of Grammar and Style: Sentences 27**

<b>3. Sentence Elements and Patterns</b>	<b>28</b>
3a Subject and Predicate, Noun and Verb	29
3b Modifiers	29
3c Structure Words	30
3d Phrases	30
3e Independent (Main) Clauses	33
3f Subordinate (Dependent) Clauses	34
3g Kinds of Sentences: Grammatical Types	35
<b>4. Working with Sentence Elements to Create Variety and Emphasis</b>	<b>38</b>
4a Basic Sentence Elements and Their Modifiers	38
4b Variety in Lengths	43
4c Variety in Kinds	45

4d	Variety in Structures	45
4e	Emphasizing a Whole Sentence	46
4f	Emphasis by Position and Word Order	46
4g	Emphasis by Repetition	48
4h	Emphasis by Contrast	48
4i	Emphasis by Syntax	48
<b>5.</b>	<b>Common Sentence Problems</b>	<b>49</b>
5a	Sentence Fragments	49
5b	Comma Splices	49
5c	Run-on (Fused) Sentences	50
5d	Misplaced Modifiers	50
5e	Dangling Modifiers	52
5f	Mixed Constructions	54
5g	Shifts in Perspective: Inconsistent Point of View	54
5h	Faulty Parallelism	56
<b>PART III  </b>	<b>Essentials of Grammar and Style: Parts of Speech; Diction</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>6.</b>	<b>Nouns</b>	<b>62</b>
6a	Inflection of Nouns: Number; Possessive Case	63
6b	Grammatical Functions of Nouns	64
6c	Nouns and Articles: <i>a</i> , <i>an</i> , and <i>the</i>	65
<b>7.</b>	<b>Pronouns</b>	<b>69</b>
7a	Pronoun Types	69
7b	Case	78
7c	Agreement of Pronouns with Their Antecedents	80
7d	Pronoun Reference	84
7e	Pronouns and Inclusive Language	87
<b>8.</b>	<b>Verbs</b>	<b>88</b>
8a	Transitive, Intransitive, and Linking Verbs	89
8b	Inflection of Verbs: Principal Parts	90
8c	Irregular Verbs	92
8d	Auxiliary Verbs	92
8e	Verb Tenses and Their Functions	94
8f	Tense Sequence	99
8g	Mood	100
8h	Voice	102
<b>9.</b>	<b>Agreement Between Subject and Verb</b>	<b>103</b>
9a	Words Intervening Between Subject and Verb	103
9b	Compound Subjects	104

9c	Agreement with Indefinite Pronouns	105
9d	Subject Following Verb	105
9e	Agreement with Relative Pronouns	106
<b>10.</b>	<b>Adjectives</b>	<b>106</b>
10a	Kinds of Adjectives	106
10b	Comparison of Descriptive Adjectives	108
10c	Placement and Ordering of Adjectives	110
<b>11.</b>	<b>Adverbs</b>	<b>111</b>
11a	Kinds and Functions of Adverbs	112
11b	Comparison of Adverbs	114
11c	Placement of Adverbs	115
<b>12.</b>	<b>Verbals</b>	<b>116</b>
12a	Infinitives	116
12b	Participles	117
12c	Gerunds	118
<b>13.</b>	<b>Connecting Words; Interjections</b>	<b>119</b>
13a	Prepositions	119
13b	Conjunctions: Coordinate, Correlative, Subordinate	121
13c	Interjections	127
<b>14.</b>	<b>Diction</b>	<b>127</b>
14a	Level	127
14b	Concrete and Abstract Diction	129
14c	Euphemisms	130
14d	Wrong Words	131
14e	Idiom	131
14f	Wordiness, Clichés, Jargon, and Associated Problems	133
14g	Usage: A Checklist of Troublesome Words and Phrases	139
<b>PART IV  </b>	<b>Essentials of Punctuation</b>	<b>149</b>
<b>15.</b>	<b>The Comma</b>	<b>150</b>
15a	The Comma with Coordinating Conjunctions	152
15b	The Comma with Items in a Series	153
15c	The Comma with an Introductory Word, Phrase, or Subordinate Clause	154
15d	The Comma with Nonrestrictive Elements	156
15e	The Comma with Sentence Interrupters	158

<b>16. The Semicolon</b>	<b>158</b>
16a The Semicolon with Independent Clauses	159
16b The Semicolon with Conjunctive Adverbs and Transitions	159
16c The Semicolon with Items in a Series	160
<b>17. The Colon</b>	<b>160</b>
17a The Colon with Items in a Series	161
17b The Colon Between a Title and a Subtitle	161
17c The Colon in the Salutation of a Business Letter	162
17d The Colon Introducing a Block Quotation	162
<b>18. The Dash</b>	<b>162</b>
18a The Dash with Items in a Series	163
18b The Dash with Sentence Interrupters	163
<b>19. Parentheses</b>	<b>164</b>
<b>20. Quotation Marks</b>	<b>165</b>
20a Quotation Marks with Direct Speech	165
20b Quotation Marks with Direct Quotation from a Source	166
20c Single Quotation Marks for a Quotation Within a Quotation	167
20d Quotation Marks Around Words Used in a Special Sense	167
20e Other Marks with Quotation Marks	168
20f Ellipses for Omissions	168
<b>21. Brackets</b>	<b>170</b>
<b>22. The Period</b>	<b>170</b>
<b>23. The Question Mark</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>24. The Exclamation Point</b>	<b>172</b>
<b>25. Avoiding Common Errors in Punctuation</b>	<b>173</b>
25a Unwanted Comma Splice	173
25b Unwanted Comma Between Subject and Verb	173
25c Unwanted Comma Between Verb and Object or Complement	174
25d Unwanted Comma After Last Adjective of a Series	174
25e Unwanted Comma Between Coordinated Words and Phrases	174

25f	Commas with Emphatic Repetition	175
25g	Unwanted Comma with Short Introductory or Parenthetical Element	175
25h	Unwanted Comma with Restrictive Appositive	176
25i	Unwanted Comma with Indirect Quotation	177
25j	Unwanted Question Mark After Indirect Question	177
25k	Unwanted Semicolon with Subordinate Element	178
25-l	Unwanted Colon After Incomplete Construction	178
25m	Unwanted Double Punctuation: Comma or Semicolon with a Dash	179
25n	Run-on (Fused) Sentences	179

## **PART V | Essentials of Mechanics and Spelling** **181**

### **26. Formatting an Essay** **182**

26a	Format	182
26b	Syllabication and Word Division	184

### **27. Abbreviations** **184**

27a	Titles Before Proper Names	184
27b	Titles and Degrees After Proper Names	185
27c	Standard Words Used with Dates and Numerals	185
27d	Agencies and Organizations Known by Their Initials	185
27e	Scientific and Technical Terms Known by Their Initials	186
27f	Latin Expressions Commonly Used in English	186
27g	Terms in Official Titles	186

### **28. Capitalization** **187**

28a	Names and Nicknames	187
28b	Professional and Honorific Titles	187
28c	Place Names	188
28d	Months, Days, and Holidays	188
28e	Religious Names	189
28f	Names of Nationalities and Organizations	189
28g	Names of Institutions and Sections of Government, Historical Events, and Buildings	189