

Glossary of Usage A

a, an Use *a* before words that begin with a consonant sound. Use *an* before words that begin with a vowel sound.

EXAMPLES We saw **a** hawk circling overhead. [*Hawk* begins with a consonant sound.]
Cathy's mother gave her **an** amber bracelet. [*Amber* begins with a vowel sound.]
Keith performed **a** one-man show. [Even though *one-man* begins with a vowel, the first sound you hear is the consonant sound *w*.]

accept, except *Accept* is a verb that means “to receive.” *Except* may be used as a verb or as a preposition. *Except* used as a verb means “to leave out” or “to excuse.” *Except* used as a preposition means “other than” or “excluding.”

EXAMPLES Doug **accepted** the nomination for class president. [You can replace *accepted* with *received*.]
New students are **excepted** from the exam. [You can replace *excepted* with *excused*.]
I have visited everyone **except** Nicole. [You can replace *except* with *excluding*.]

ain't Do not use this nonstandard English word in formal speaking or writing.

NONSTANDARD There ain't any tickets left.
STANDARD There **aren't** any tickets left.

a lot *A lot* should always be written as two words. Never write *a lot* as one word.

EXAMPLE Rebecca spent **a lot** of time planning the celebration.

EXERCISE A In each of the following sentences, circle the word or word group in parentheses that is correct according to formal, standard English.

Example 1. Each country (accepted, *excepted*) the terms of the agreement. [You can replace *accepted* with *received*.]

1. Does Japan export (*a lot*, *alot*) of cars each year? [Is this one word or two words?]
2. The new computer program (*ain't*, *isn't*) available yet.
3. Can (*a*, *an*) helicopter land safely on the roof of the building?
4. Please move all of the crates (*accept*, *except*) that one.
5. Did (*a lot*, *alot*) of people attend the wedding?

at Do not use *at* after *where*.

NONSTANDARD Where is the telephone directory at?

STANDARD **Where** is the telephone directory?

between, among Use *between* when you are referring to two individuals or things at a time. Use *among* when you are referring to a group rather than to separate individuals or things.

EXAMPLES The art museum is located **between** the bank and city hall. [*Between the bank and city hall* refers to two buildings.]

The chores were divided **among** the family. [*Among the family* refers to a group.]

bring, take *Bring* means “to come carrying something.” *Take* means “to go carrying something.” Think of *bring* as related to “come to” and *take* as related to “go from.”

EXAMPLES Aunt Marie **brought** a suitcase with her when she came for the weekend.

Aunt Marie **will take** her suitcase with her when she goes home.

could of Use *have* with the helping verb *could*. Also, use *have* with *ought to*, *should*, *would*, *might*, and *must*.

EXAMPLE He **could have** attended the playoff game.

EXERCISE B In each of the following sentences, circle the word or word group that is correct according to formal, standard English.

Examples 1. I (*ought to of*, *ought to have*) sent a card to Susan. [*Have* is the word used with *ought*.]

2. Are you (*bringing*, *taking*) your pet with you when you go on vacation? [*Take* is the word used with *go*.]

6. Please (*bring, take*) the newspaper with you when you come back in the house. [Which word is used with *come*?]
7. Did the pencil fall (*between, among*) the desk and filing cabinet? [Is the sentence referring to individual things or a group of things?]
8. We (*could of, could have*) left earlier if we hadn't overslept.
9. Miranda usually (*brings, takes*) her lunch with her when she goes to school.
10. We circulated the fliers (*among, between*) the class members.
11. New Mexico is (*between, among*) Arizona and Texas.
12. (*Where, Where at*) is the extension cord?
13. There was a feeling of nervousness (*between, among*) the team before the game.
14. When you go to the store, will you (*bring, take*) me with you?
15. Brandon (*should of, should have*) called home this evening.

Glossary of Usage B

fewer, less *Fewer* is used with plural words. *Less* is used with singular words. *Fewer* tells “how many”; *less* tells “how much.”

EXAMPLES Do **fewer** storms form in the Atlantic Ocean than in the Pacific? [*Storms* is plural, so *fewer* is used.]

Does **less** snow fall in Louisiana than in Pennsylvania? [*Snow* is singular, so *less* is used.]

good, well *Good* is an adjective. Do not use *good* to modify a verb; use *well*. *Well* can be used as an adverb.

EXAMPLES The children had a **good** time at the birthday party. [*Good* is an adjective that tells “what kind” of time.]

Mrs. Flower’s class behaved **well** at the museum. [*Well* is an adverb that tells “how” the class behaved.]

NOTE *Feel well* and *feel good* have different meanings. *Feel well* means “to feel healthy.” *Feel good* means “to feel happy or pleased.”

EXAMPLES She felt **good** [happy] when she finished her chores.

Catalina didn’t feel **well** [healthy] after standing in the rain for an hour.

hissel, theihsel, theihsel These words are nonstandard English. Use *himself* and *themselves*.

NONSTANDARD Julio made hissel a sack lunch.

STANDARD Julio made himself a sack lunch.

EXERCISE A In each of the following sentences, circle the word or word group in parentheses that is correct according to formal, standard English.

Examples 1. Nick delivered his speech (well, good). [*Well* is an adverb that tells “how” Nick delivered his speech.]

2. They bought (theihsel, themselves) a new computer. [*Themselves* is standard English.]

1. Is she a (*good, well*) pianist? [Which word should be used to modify the noun *pianist*?]
2. At the moon’s surface, there is (*fewer, less*) gravitational pull than there is on the earth. [Is *gravitational pull* singular or plural?]
3. We found a (*good, well*) location for our family reunion.
4. They picked (*theihsel, themselves*) some strawberries.
5. Are there (*fewer, less*) tomato plants than cucumber plants in the garden?
6. Does John’s brother speak Spanish (*good, well*)?
7. They warmed (*theihsel, themselves*) beside the campfire.
8. I drink (*fewer, less*) carbonated beverages than my friends.

9. Are you still ill, or do you feel (*good, well*) today?
10. Chuck gave (*hissself, himself*) a haircut.

how come In informal situations, *how come* is often used instead of *why*. In formal speaking and writing, *why* is preferred.

INFORMAL How come you didn't bring your sister with you?

FORMAL **Why** didn't you bring your sister with you?

its, it's *Its* is the possessive form of *it*. *Its* means "belonging to it." *It's* is a contraction of *it is* or *it has*.

EXAMPLES Please put each instrument in **its** own case. [*Its* means "belonging to the instrument."]

It's the last day of the month. [*It's* is a contraction of *It is*.]

kind of, sort of In informal situations, *kind of* and *sort of* are often used to mean "somewhat" or "rather." In formal speaking and writing, *somewhat* or *rather* is preferred.

INFORMAL We were kind of worried about the condition of the roads.

FORMAL We were **rather** worried about the condition of the roads.

EXERCISE B In each of the following sentences, circle the word or word group in parentheses that is correct according to formal, standard English.

Examples 1. During the winter, (*its, it's*) usually dark outside before six o'clock. [*It's* is a contraction of *it is*.]

2. I was (*sort of, rather*) concerned about the traffic. [*Rather* is preferred in formal speaking and writing.]

11. Can you tell us (*how come, why*) you missed Spanish class yesterday? [Which form is preferred in formal speaking and writing?]
12. Has the committee made (*its, it's*) decision? [Which word shows possession?]
13. The weather is (*kind of, somewhat*) gloomy today.
14. The children were (*kind of, somewhat*) tired after the trip.
15. We were (*sort of, rather*) disappointed when our team lost.
16. (*Its, It's*) too late to register for basketball camp.
17. The scientist explained (*how come, why*) some animals become extinct.
18. Did Bruce feed the cat and refill (*its, it's*) water dish?
19. Jaclyn felt (*sort of, rather*) uneasy about flying on an airplane for the first time.
20. Please find out whether (*its, it's*) going to rain tomorrow.

Glossary of Usage C

than, then *Than* is a word used in making comparisons. *Then* is an adverb that tells *when*.

EXAMPLES Chickens are smaller **than** turkeys are. [*Than* is used to make a comparison between chickens and turkeys.]

Roberto studied for his science test, and **then** he worked on math. [*Then* tells when Roberto worked on math.]

their, there, they're *Their* is the possessive form of *they*; it means “belonging to them.” *There* is used to mean “at that place” or to begin a sentence. *They're* is a contraction of *they are*.

EXAMPLES The family parked **their** car in the garage. [*Their* means “belonging to the family.”]

We go **there** every year. [*There* means “at that place.”]

There is a pebble in my shoe. [*There* begins the sentence.]

They're leaving in an hour. [*They're* is a contraction of *they are*.]

them *Them* should not be used as an adjective. Use *those*.

NONSTANDARD Please put **them** books back on the shelf.

STANDARD Please put **those** books back on the shelf.

EXERCISE A In the following sentences, circle the word or word group in parentheses that is correct according to formal, standard English.

Examples 1. (*Their*, **There**) are many free samples left. [*There* begins the sentence.]

2. Lightning struck, and (*than*, **then**) the tree fell over. [*Then* tells *when*.]

- Some owls have better daytime vision (*than*, *then*) human beings have. [Which word is used to make comparisons?]
- Did she lend (*them*, *those*) magazines to Molly? [Which word is used as an adjective?]
- Did Jane and Leo meet (*there*, *their*) friends at the mall?
- The joggers stretched and (*than*, *then*) ran several laps around the track.
- Please put the newspapers over (*there*, *their*).
- Don't leave (*them*, *those*) dirty socks on the floor.
- (*There*, *They're*) staying at a hotel while their house is being painted.
- Are dolphins more intelligent (*than*, *then*) chimpanzees?
- They held (*their*, *they're*) weekly family meetings on Thursdays.
- (*They're*, *There*) are several huge oak trees in the park.

this here, that there The words *here* and *there* are not needed after *this* and *that*.

NONSTANDARD This here cantaloupe is the largest in the garden.

STANDARD **This** cantaloupe is the largest in the garden.

try and In informal situations, *try and* is often used for *try to*. In formal speaking and writing, *try to* should be used.

INFORMAL I will try and find some leaves for your collection.

FORMAL I will **try to** find some leaves for your collection.

whose, who's *Whose* is used as the possessive form of *who*; it means “belonging to whom.” *Whose* is also used as an interrogative pronoun—a pronoun that begins a question. *Who's* is a contraction of *who is* or *who has*.

EXAMPLES Does anyone know **whose** in-line skates these are? [*Whose* shows possession and means “belonging to whom.”]

Whose is that? [*Whose* is an interrogative pronoun. It begins a question.]

Who's at the door? [*Who's* is a contraction of *who is*.]

your, you're *Your* is the possessive form of *you*. It means “belonging to you.” *You're* is the contraction of *you are*.

EXAMPLES May I use **your** phone? [*Your* means “belonging to you.”]

You're the most talented artist I know. [*You're* is a contraction of *you are*.]

EXERCISE B In each of the following sentences, circle the word or word group in parentheses that is correct according to formal, standard English.

Examples 1. (Whose *Who's*) notebook is this? [*Whose* is used to begin a question.]

2. Please print (your *you're*) name at the top of the page. [*Your* shows possession. It means “belonging to you.”]

11. I will (*try and*, *try to*) find a map of the city. [Which word is used in formal situations?]

12. (*This here*, *This*) brooch belonged to my great-grandmother. [Is *here* needed after *This*?]

13. (*Whose*, *Who's*) glasses are these?

14. (*Try to*, *try and*) be on time for practice.

15. Is there anyone here (*whose*, *who's*) had CPR training?

16. (*Your*, *You're*) next in line.

17. (*Whose*, *Who's*) the manager of this store?

18. Is (*that there*, *that*) book the last in the series?

19. Fasten (*your*, *you're*) seat belt.

20. When (*your*, *you're*) in the library, you should speak softly.