

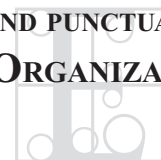
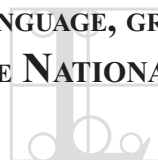
NATIONAL FFA ORGANIZATION

STYLE GUIDE

MARCH 2002

FFA

YOUR BLUEPRINT
TO THE STANDARDIZED USE OF
LANGUAGE, GRAMMAR AND PUNCTUATION
FOR THE NATIONAL FFA ORGANIZATION



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How and why to use this style guide

For the National FFA Organization, it is at once challenging and necessary to ensure that our communication – from published periodicals to brochures to the website – is consistent and professional. Our task is compounded by the fact that we use some terms that can be interpreted, especially by people without an agricultural background, several different ways. We can all point to examples in which a publication from one team capitalizes something that another publication does not. We are striving to eliminate those inconsistencies, and this style guide can be a valuable tool to help us reach that goal.

Don't be discouraged by the size of this manual. Built for use in different ways by different people, the FFA Style Guide is divided into sections that affect everyone who compiles information for distribution by FFA. To enable quick checking, these sections are set up like dictionaries, with entries arranged alphabetically. The entries represent a combination of basic English and specific FFA terminology.

Even if a document is not being “officially” published – such as a letter to a member or potential sponsor – the slightest grammatical error and misspelling can be embarrassing and connote carelessness. This reflects negatively on the organization, and is something we want to avoid. It's a good rule of thumb to play it safe and check your writing against the style guide, even when you are positive you're right.

The National FFA Organization uses the Associated Press (AP) stylebook as its source; however, the FFA Style Guide takes precedence over AP style on matters where the two guides differ. Additional standards may be determined as new words, phrases and acronyms are adopted by the organization. Remember to check this style guide first if in doubt, since dictionaries and other sources may vary on some rules or spelling. The FFA Style Guide always takes precedence over other sources.

Please contact the Marketing and Communication Services Team if you have any questions about style.

STYLE GUIDE A TO Z



acronyms: Similar to abbreviations, acronyms are a collection of capital letters standing for a full, proper name or title. When writing FFA acronyms for publication, remember that the letters may mean something different outside the context of FFA. For example, ALD can mean Affective Learning Disorder.

To avoid confusion, always use the full phrase or title on first reference and follow with the initials in parentheses. On second reference and every use thereafter, only the acronyms are needed. The exception to this is “FFA,” since we do not use “Future Farmers of America.” Do not use periods within acronyms or abbreviations: *MFE, not M.F.E.*

When using acronyms *after* the first reference, be consistent. If you’ve already defined your term once, use the acronym on every occasion thereafter within a single document.

a or an: Use *an* in place of *a* when it precedes a vowel *sound*, not just a vowel.

It’s an honor. I saw a UFO.

(Pronounced with a consonant sound: YOO)

academic degrees: In formal writing, it is preferable to use the full name of the degree on first reference. To abbreviate degrees, use all caps but no periods. After a name, use a comma before the degree and a comma after if used in the middle of a sentence.

Smith holds a master’s degree in business administration from Ball State. Jerry Marshall, BS, MBA, is the president of the committee.

accept/except: *Accept* means to receive. *Except* means to exclude.

I accept your invitation. Everyone can leave, except Joe.

FFA Acronyms

Advanced Leadership Development Conference	ALD
American Agricultural Editors’ Association	AAEA
American Association for Agricultural Education	AAAE
Agricultural Relations Council	ARC
Building Leaders and Strong Teams of Officers	BLAST Off
Career Development Event	CDE
Experiencing Discovery, Growth and Excellence	EDGE
International Leadership Seminar for State Officers	ILSSO
Local Program Success	LPS
Made For Excellence	MFE
National Agri-Marketing Association	NAMA
National Association of Agricultural Educators	NAAE
National Association of Agricultural Journalists	NAAJ
National Association of Farm Broadcasters	NAFB
National Association, Supervisors of Agricultural Education	NASAE
National Young Farmer Educational Association, Inc.	NYFEA
National Leadership Conference for State Officers	NLCSO
National Council for Agricultural Education	The Council
National Postsecondary Agricultural Student Organization	PAS
New Century Farmers	NCF
New Farmers of America	NFA
Partners in Active Learning Support	PALS
State Presidents’ Conference	SPC
Supervised Agricultural Experience Program	SAE
Washington Leadership Conference	WLC
World Experience in Agriculture	WEA

A.D. Use this abbreviation, with periods but no spaces, for *Anno Domini* (in the year of the Lord).

advisor: Always advisor, not adviser. The proper term for the agriculture instructor when he or she is performing FFA-related responsibilities.

affect/effect: Affect is a verb; effect is (usually) a noun. When you affect something, you have an effect on it. The exception to the rule is when you use effect as a verb meaning to bring about or accomplish, as in “To effect a change.”

The virus affects only Microsoft-based programs. The movie had an effect on me.

affiliate: Term used in reference to local alumni groups. It should be capitalized only when used as part of a proper noun.

The Denmark FFA Alumni Affiliate. Local FFA alumni affiliates should submit dues by Oct. 15.

afterward: Not afterwards.

agricultural/agriculture: When used as an adjective (describing something), the term “**agricultural**” is appropriate (it’s always **agricultural** education). When used as a noun, the term “**agriculture**” is correct. Note: always use **agriculture** teacher/instructor (remember that the teacher isn’t **agricultural**, she’s **human**! She *teaches* agriculture.)

The agricultural industry encompasses more than 300 careers.

There are more than 300 careers in agriculture.

agriculturalist: Someone who works in the agricultural industry. Agriculturalist is preferred to agriculturist.

Agricultural education: Term used in reference to the instructional program that includes FFA. Replaces the term “vocational agriculture” in most instances. Do not use “agriculture” education.

agriculture: In formal writing, do not abbreviate to the slang “ag.” The term “science, business and technology industry” is acceptable.

agriscience: *Agriscience* is the term for common use in reference to curriculum or career areas. Do not hyphenate. *Steve McCallion teaches bioengineering and genetics in his agriscience classes.*

Agriscience Teacher of the Year program: *Agriscience Teacher of the Year* program is the official name. It may be *agriscience program* or *agriscience winner* in second reference.

Linda Rist was named the Agriscience Teacher of the Year.

alumni: *See also National FFA Alumni Association.*

Alumnus, alumni, alumna, alumnae. *Alumni* can be used when referring to a group of men and women. Use *alumnus* (singular) to refer to a man who has attended a school or belonged to an organization. For women, the singular is *alumna*. Can be shortened to *alum*, but only for informal purposes.

An alumnus of Baylor University, Joe is a prominent attorney. She’s an alumna of Campfire Girls. It’s a pleasure to speak to the alumni gathered here tonight.

a.m. / p.m. Lowercase, with periods. *See also “Time.”*

artwork: One word in all uses.

assure: You assure a person by making him confident. You can only assure a person, not a thing. Never use as in “assure the wording is correct.” See also *ensure/insure*. *I assure you this will be corrected.*

audiocassette, audiotaping, audiovisual: One word, not hyphenated.

awards: Set titles for some of the many FFA awards include:

VIP Award

Distinguished Service Citation

Honorary American FFA Degree

American Star Farmer

American Star in Agribusiness

National Chapter Award



backward: Not backwards.

band, chorus and talent: Should be written as follows in first reference:

National FFA Band

National FFA Chorus

National FFA Talent

In second reference, use national band. (e.g., The National FFA Band is terrific. The national band members love music.)

B.C. Use this abbreviation, with periods, for *before Christ*.

board of directors: Never capitalize board of directors or board of trustees when they stand alone. (e.g., The national organization is headed by a board of directors.) Capitalize them when linked with the organization's name.

The National FFA Board of Directors met in January. The board passed a motion to...



cancel, canceled, canceling, cancellation: No double *l* in canceled and canceling.

capital, capitol: A *capital* is the city where a seat of government is located or (when referring to money) a type of expenditure, equipment or property. Do not capitalize unless part of a proper noun such as a business name. A *capitol* is the specific building of state or federal government. Capitalize when used in conjunction with U.S. or a state name, or when using the word as a proper noun. Don't capitalize when referring to more than one capitol. *Indianapolis is the capital of Indiana. He works at Capital City Ford.*

Students toured the Nevada State Capitol as part of their excursion. Live from the Capitol, I'm Lisa Myers. The officers visited 43 state capitol buildings during their year of service.

career development events: Capitalize when the letters "FFA" are present, as the event now becomes a proper noun; do not capitalize without "FFA." If you have already used the full name on first reference and indicated the acronym, then use the acronym thereafter.

... in the midst of the floriculture career development event. (FFA member) participated in the FFA Parliamentary Procedure Career Development Event. She placed in the National FFA Floriculture Career Development Event (CDE). As the floriculture CDE winner, she was interviewed by Tom Brand.

CD-ROM: Acronym for *Compact Disc – Read Only Memory*. Capitalize the acronym and use a hyphen as indicated.

Century: Lowercase unless part of a formal title. Use numerals in all instances.

21st century. Produced by 20th Century Fox.

chapter: Capitalize the word *chapter* only when used with the name of a specific FFA chapter. *The Salinas FFA Chapter is one of several FFA chapters participating in NLCSO.*

colors: Do not capitalize FFA colors. Colors should be written national blue and corn gold.

comprise: traditionally means comprehend or contain, not constitute. In other words, a zoo *comprises* animals – it's not comprised of them (though it is *composed of* them). Avoid the phrase "is comprised of."

Contact: When placing contact information in a document use the following format:

Contact: Bill Stagg, bstagg@ffa.org, 317-802-4243

continual vs. continuous: *Continual* means "happening over and over again"; *continuous* means "happening constantly without stopping." If you're *continually* on the Internet, it means you keep going on; if you're *continuously* on the Internet, it means you haven't gone off at all.

convention: Refer to the annual meeting of FFA as the 2002 National FFA Convention or the 75th National FFA Convention for first reference; the national FFA convention or the national convention on second reference. Do not capitalize *national convention* unless accompanied by the specific year or convention number.

Plan now to attend the 75th National FFA Convention.

Welcome to the 2002 National FFA Convention. At the national convention, I toured the career show.

courtesy titles: In general, use them only for salutation in a letter. In formal writing, do not use Miss., Mr., Mrs., or Ms. in first reference. Use first and last name in first reference and only the last name in second reference.

Jane Smith, from Keokuk, Iowa, won the \$100 prize. Smith, a senior, will use the cash for a vacation. Dear Mr. Jones:

An exception may be in feature writing for members, where we tend to refer to students by their first names and teachers by courtesy titles and last names.



dates: In formal writing, spell out months in their entirety. In more casual writing, abbreviation is acceptable for all months except May, June and July. When signifying a date with numerals only, please use forward slashes with the month first, day second and year last.

The convention will begin on October 31, 2002. Please respond by Jan. 15.

directions and regions: Lowercase when referring to a compass direction, capitalize when a region is being designated.

Michigan is north of here. My family is from the Midwest. The South lost the war.

But if a region is being identified that is not part of an official designation, use the lowercase.

We're from southern Alabama. He experienced the raw emotion so common in Northern Ireland.

If in doubt, opt for the lowercase.

Do not capitalize FFA regions. They are not necessarily geographic regions. Ohio is in the eastern region, but is

generally considered a state in the Midwest.

The central region had 258 American FFA Degree recipients this year.

Capitalize only when part of a title: *Central Region Vice President Doug Kueker.*

divisions: There are four divisions composed of the various teams. The divisions are Business Development, Information Services, Educational Programs and Development and Partnerships.

departments: FFA does not have departments, it has teams. Please see *Teams* entry.

dot-com: When referring to companies or locations on the Web, a dot-com company, use a hyphen. Plural form is "dot-coms."

He worked with a dot-com that ended up going bankrupt.



e-mail: Hyphenate as shown. Capitalize only at the beginning of a sentence or as part of a formal title.

each/every: *Each* is a singular noun that requires a singular verb. *Every* is a bit trickier, but it also requires a singular verb and singular pronouns. Examples make this easier to understand:

WRONG: *Each of them have a place.*

RIGHT: *Each of them **has** a place.*

WRONG: *Every one of the papers have been graded.*

RIGHT: *Every one of the papers **has** been graded.*

WRONG: *Every one must sign their name.*

RIGHT: *Every one must sign his or her name.*

ensure/insure: *Ensure* means to guarantee. Always use *ensure* except when you specifically mean insurance as in monetary value of property, life and limb.

We want to ensure the project is successful. We will make every effort to ensure your satisfaction. The pension fund was fully diversified, ensuring the relative safety of its assets.

He insured the contents of his home with riders to his original policy.



FFA: Always treat the name of our organization with respect. On first reference, the full name, National FFA Organization, should be used and capitalized accordingly. For informal references, the word national doesn't need to be capitalized with FFA, unless the full title is being used.

FFA'er: Refrain from using FFA'er when indicating an FFA member, and NEVER use *FFA'er* in headlines. *FFA member* is acceptable.

FFA's: Our brand is uncluttered and more powerful when the three letters *FFA* stand alone. Do not make the acronym possessive. In all writing, rework your phrase so that the FFA stands alone. Attempt to avoid this misuse when speaking as well as writing.

WRONG: *FFA's new programs*

RIGHT: *the new FFA programs.*

FFA degrees: The names of FFA degrees should be capitalized and include the letters "FFA" on first reference, meaning the degrees become proper nouns. Greenhand FFA Degree, Chapter FFA Degree, State FFA Degree, American FFA Degree, Honorary American FFA Degree. On second reference, they may be referenced more casually, only without *FFA*. The exception? Always capitalize *American*. *2,400 students received the organization's highest honor, the American FFA Degree. He received his greenhand degree last year. She holds the American degree.*

ffa.org: ffa.org is the official name for the national FFA website. *FFA website* on second reference.

FFA Week: Should be written as follows: FFA Week or National FFA Week
The 2002 FFA Week theme is "FFA Makes It Real."

farther/further: *Farther* refers to physical distance. *Further* refers to an extension of time or degree.
We walked farther into the woods. He explained his theory further using hands-on examples.

Food For America: Refers to the program to teach young people about Food For America. Do not abbreviate.

foundation: See *National FFA Foundation*.

fundraising: Whether used as a noun, adjective, adverb or verb, do not hyphenate.

Fundraising by the National FFA Foundation supports National FFA programs and activities.



handicapped, disabled, impaired: The preferred term is *disabled*, but use this to describe an individual only if it is pertinent to the story or material. In general terms, *disabled* indicates a condition that interferes with an individual's ability to do something independently. See Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

high school agriculture: Use "high school agriculture" only when referring to programs specifically for high school students (middle schools may feel left out). When referring to the instructional program, use the term "agricultural education." Because of the narrow images associated with the word "vocational," we only use it when talking specifically about U.S. Department of Education projects or people. Use lowercase and do not abbreviate. *high school agriculture, not high school ag Coleman Harris is a program specialist, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, USDE.*



inservice: The term inservice may be used as an adjective with a noun such as training, education, workshop, etc. It may not stand alone. Do not hyphenate inservice.

instructor: The individual in charge of an agricultural education program. He or she is **not** the "FFA teacher" (see *advisor*).

Internet terms:

download: Copying a document or file from the Internet to a personal computer.

e-mail: Electronic mail. Can be a noun or verb. Always use a hyphen.

homepage: A company or organization's domain on the Web.

HTML: Hypertext markup language – the computer language behind the web pages you see.

Internet: The global computer network. 'net for short, capital "I" to denote a proper noun.

online: On the Internet, on an electronic network. One word.

website: One word. Refers to the entire site, usually directed to the homepage.

World Wide Web: The commercial part of the Internet. Web for short, or www as part of a web address.

it's / its: Memorize this rule: *It's* with an apostrophe means "it is"; *its* without an apostrophe means "belonging to it." Don't go apostrophe crazy. If you can't use "it is" in place of the word in question, leave the apostrophe out.

The committee achieved its goals. The project reached its deadline.

It's my turn. I don't think it's going to happen.

It's not my fault the product didn't live up to its potential.



junior, senior: Abbreviate as *Jr.* and *Sr.* only with full names. Do not precede with a comma: *Joseph P. Kennedy Jr.* The notation *II* or *2nd* may be used if it is the individual's preference. Note, however, that *II* and *2nd* are not necessarily the equivalent of junior—they often are used by a grandson or nephew. If necessary to distinguish between father and son in second reference, use the *elder Smith* or the *younger Smith*.



money: \$6, not \$6.00



names: After first reference in all hard news stories or press releases, use only the subject's last name. In feature stories, it is acceptable to use the subject's first name.

national advisor: Larry D. Case is the national FFA advisor. On first reference it may be National FFA Advisor Larry D. Case. In educational context, it may be Larry D. Case, Ed.D., but it is not Dr. Case. In second reference it is national advisor or simply Case.

National FFA Center: Always capitalize when used as National FFA Center. Do not capitalize center when used alone.

They will meet at the center.

national FFA convention national FFA convention is not capitalized unless you are referring to a specific convention. 74th National FFA Convention or 2001 National FFA Convention

National FFA Foundation: In formal organizational writing, always mention the National FFA Foundation when referring to a sponsored project, activity or award.

The State Presidents' Conference is sponsored by CHEVY TRUCKS as a special project of the National FFA Foundation.

Use the phrase "sponsored as a special project of the National FFA Foundation" or an approved variation thereof. On first reference, use the following terms and capitalize accordingly:

National FFA Foundation; National FFA Foundation Sponsors' Board; National FFA Foundation Executive Council

On second reference, use these terms and do not capitalize unless using "FFA":

FFA Foundation or foundation; foundation sponsors' board; foundation executive council or executive council

National FFA Organization: Refer to the organization by the acronym *FFA*.

The National FFA Organization is located in Indianapolis. Express as the organization on second reference.

National FFA Officers: The correct name for the organization's national officers is the National FFA Officers. Capitalize whenever referring to this official group as a proper noun, but lowercase if referring casually to the group.

*We present the 2001-2001 National FFA Officers!
The national officers have been busy in their travels.*

In text, biographies and introductions, capitalize only when the national officer title immediately precedes the student's name. Lowercase officer titles when they stand alone. Do not hyphenate vice president. The year may be used if the story is about a former officer. (e.g., 1999-00 National FFA President Chris Vitelli)

Refer to the national FFA officers as follows:

Dane White, national president. National FFA President Dane White. The national president spoke at the banquet.

New Farmers of America: Former organization for African American males. The correct terminology for its relationship with FFA is that it was incorporated into FFA in 1965.

none: In general, use plural verbs and pronouns.
None have passed this way. He saw that none of them were ready.

nonmember: Not hyphenated unless a proper pronoun. (e.g., H.O. Sargent Non-Member Award)

numbers: In general, spell out single-digit numbers in text, but use numerals for 10 and above. Never begin a sentence with a numeral; either spell out the number or rewrite the sentence to move the number from the beginning. Very large round numbers should be spelled out (*one million* instead of 1,000,000) except when a dollar sign is present; then use a numeral and spell out *million* or *billion*. Dates should always get numerals (*October 31, 1966*). Available in sets of *six, eight or 12*. *He made \$3 million last year.*



officers: See *National FFA Officers*.

over: In general, use the word *over* to indicate spatial relationship only. It is grammatically incorrect to use it in reference to numbers. In almost all instances, replace with *more than*.

WRONG: Over 150,000 people have tried it.

RIGHT: More than 150,000 people have tried it.



phone numbers: Use dashes between area code, prefix and suffix. No parentheses.

317-817-5389, not (317) 817-5389

plurals: Use an apostrophe only to indicate ownership. Otherwise, just add an *s*. *NLCOS* means more than one NLCOS. *NLCOS's* identifies something at a specific conference.

Perry had been chosen as his NLCOS's conference speaker.

publications: FFA publications should be written as follows:

FFA Advisors Making a Difference

FFA New Horizons

UPDATE

FFA Today

Proceedings

FFA Chapter Catalog or Student Catalog

Official FFA Manual

Italicize publication titles in all references.

principal / principle: *Principal* is a noun and adjective meaning someone or something first in rank, authority, importance or degree. At FFA, we generally use *principal* to refer to a school principal, but it can also mean capital and monetary value. *Principle* is a noun that means a fundamental truth, doctrine or motivating force.
Joe Smith is the principal at Roncalli High School. His principal desire is to improve the school lunch program. He stands firm, deeply rooted in this principle.

proficiency awards: Proficiency awards should be written as follows: *National FFA Agricultural Communications Proficiency Award. national agricultural communications proficiency award*

program: When referring to the activities conducted by FFA members as part of their “SAE,” SAE is a **program** not project. “Projects” have a definite beginning and ending whereas “programs” have a definite beginning but are continuous and evolve throughout the time a student is enrolled in an agricultural education program.

Program of Activities: Activities specified by the three standing committees which are to be accomplished by the local chapter, district, region, or state association. It is **not** referred to as the “Program of Work.”



SAE: The acronym for “supervised agricultural experience program” and is defined as the individualized experience program designed in cooperation with the student, parents, agriculture instructor and, in some cases, employers to provide each student the opportunity to practice, in as near a real-life situation as possible, that which has been learned in the classroom. Correct use on first reference is: *supervised agricultural experience program (SAE)*. Once you have defined the acronym, use it consistently thereafter within the context of a single document.

SCANS: Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills. This is a Department of Labor report.

School-to-Career: A national education initiative stressing connections between school and careers. In “school-to-career language” FFA key components are: school-based or contextual learning—classroom/laboratory instruction; work-based learning—SAE; a connecting activity—FFA.

spaces: Use one space between sentences for: letters, memos, internal documents, printed materials, newsletters, brochures, manuals and posting on the website. Use two spaces after a colon but do not capitalize the word following the colon unless it begins a complete sentence.

Star awards: Stars are named, not awarded. Chapter Star Farmer, State Star Farmer, etc. The four highest awards the organization can bestow are the American Star Farmer, American Star in Agribusiness, American Star in Agriscience and American Star in Agricultural Placement. Always use the full, formal title in formal writing. At FFA, we generally refer to the Star awards as a proper noun, and therefore, they are almost always capitalized. *Steven Friess was named American Star Farmer.*



teams: The National FFA Organization is composed of seven teams: Student Services Team, Teacher Services Team, Ventures Marketing Team, Customer Service and Distribution Team, Administrative Services Team, Information Technology Team and Marketing and Communication Services Team. These are not to be called “departments.”

When referring to a specific activity area within a team, use a long dash, then the title of the area. *Student Services Team—Global*

telephone numbers: see *phone numbers*.

that / which: In general, you don’t need a comma when using *that* in a sentence, but you do need a comma when you use *which*. Both are relative pronouns. When at all possible, use *that* and avoid “lapsing into a comma.” *She used a new brand of coffee that didn’t keep her awake. She read the memo, which mentioned the appointment.*

throughout: one word, no hyphen.

time: 6 p.m., not 6:00 p.m.



video titles: Video titles, like other composition titles, should be in italics.

Make it Happen is a video about recruitment.

vocational: Because of the narrow images associated with the term “vocational,” we only use it when talking specifically about U.S. Department of Education projects or people.

Coleman Harris is a program specialist, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, USDE.



website: Use as one word.



Young Farmer: Always capitalize “Young Farmer” when referring to members of the National Young Farmer Educational Association (lowercase when referring to farmers under twelve years of age).

Your/you’re: The word *your* is a pronoun that denotes ownership, and is used whenever referring to an object or trait that belongs to a person. The contraction *you’re* combines the words *you are*, and should only be used where *you are* could be substituted.

You dropped your wallet. I was reviewing your strengths and weaknesses.

You’re a real asset to this team. Please let me know what you’re doing.



ZIP codes: Use two spaces between state and ZIP code. Use zip + four whenever possible.

Indianapolis, IN 46268-0960

GRAMMAR

Adjectives and adverbs

An adjective is a word that modifies a noun or pronoun. It answers *which one, how many* or *what kind*. *The big one. Seven books. A devoted student.*

Adverbs, on the other hand, usually modify verbs, and answer *in what manner, to what degree, when, how, how many times* and so forth.

*He ran **quickly**. I'll do it **soon**. We went **twice**.*

Sometimes adverbs modify adjectives or other adverbs. *She finished **very** quickly.* (Very modifies the adverb, quickly, which in turn modifies the verb finished.) *The work was **clearly** inadequate.* (Clearly modifies the adjective inadequate, which in turn modifies work.)

The best rule for spotting adverbs is to look for *-ly*. Of course, for confusion's sake, not all adverbs end in *-ly* and not all *-ly* words are adverbs: *soon, twice* and *never* are **adverbs**; *friendly, ugly* and *northerly* are **adjectives**.

Go easy on the adjectives and adverbs. While modifiers are necessary in any sort of writing, make sure your nouns and verbs are clear and are doing most of the work. There is no substitute for using the right noun in the first place.

Agreement

One of the fundamental rules of grammar is that the parts of a sentence should agree with each other. It's easier to demonstrate than to define agreement.

Agreement is usually instinctive in native English speakers. In "I has a minute," the verb *has* doesn't agree with the subject *I*. We would say "I have." In "John got their briefcase," assuming John got his own briefcase, *their* should be *his*. It's obvious.

Only rarely does it get tricky. A plural noun right in front of the singular verb can confuse you. Consider "Any one of the articles *are* available": the verb *are* shouldn't agree with *articles*, but with the subject, *one*. The sentence should read, "Any one of the articles *is* available."

A preposition or a verb that governs two pronouns can also cause problems. In "He wanted you and *I* for the team," the word *I* should be **me**; he wanted *you* and he wanted **me**, so he wanted you and **me**. Pay special attention to phrases such as *you and I, you and she*.

Capitalization

It's customary to capitalize

- The first word of a sentence
- The first word in a line of poetry
- The major words in the title of a work
- Proper nouns (names), including most adjectives derived from proper nouns (Spanish from Spain, Freudian from Freud)
- Personal titles when they come before a name (Mr. Smith, Ms. Jones)
- All (or most) letters in an abbreviation or acronym (NASA, MRI)

Capitalize formal titles only when the title appears before a name. Lowercase job titles standing alone or set off by commas after a name. Do not capitalize formal titles after names. *National FFA Advisor Larry Case; Larry Case, national FFA advisor. The national FFA advisor was president.*

Avoid unnecessary capitalization by using the following rules: Capitalize only proper names of a specific person, place or thing. Capitalize titles, programs, awards, etc., only if they include the organization's name or acronym (FFA). *National FFA Band, national band. 2000 National FFA Convention, national convention. Owasso FFA Chapter, local chapters*

At FFA, the first word of an independent clause after a colon gets a cap.

It leads us to one conclusion: Not enough rock bands use horn sections.

For more detailed information on specific cases, look under the item's individual entry.

Conjunctions

Conjunctions are little words that connect various elements in a sentence, such as *if, and, but*. Coordinating conjunc-

tions connect two things of the same kind – two nouns (cats *and* dogs), two verbs (kicking *and* screaming), two adjectives (short *and* stout) or even two independent clauses (Bob sings louder, *but* Sheila has the better voice).

Subordinating conjunctions are a little trickier. A subordinating conjunction joins entire clauses, but one is principal, the other subordinate (“subordinate” means something like “secondary” or “under the control of”). A subordinating conjunction joins an independent clause to a dependent one, and it’s the conjunction that makes the dependent clause dependent. Take two independent clauses: “I went to the doctor: and “I feel rotten.” A subordinating conjunction shows their relation: “I went to the doctor because I feel rotten.”

Subordinating conjunctions include *after, although, as if, because, before* (but *before* can also be an adverb or a preposition), *if, notwithstanding, since, so* (as in “with the result that), *that* (as in “I’m surprised that you’re here”), *until, whenever, whereas, and why.*

Dangling modifiers/dangling participles

Avoid modifiers that do not refer clearly and logically to some word in the sentence. A present participle is a verb ending in *-ing*, and is called dangling when the subject of the *-ing* verb and the subject of the sentence do not agree. Example: *Taking our seats, the play started.* Who was taking the seats? The play didn’t take the seats, so this is an incorrect usage.

Correct: *Taking our seats, we settled in to watch the play.*
We were taking our seats.

A good way to tell whether the participle or modifier is dangling is to put the modifier right after the subject of the sentence. Example: *We, taking our seats, settled in to watch the play.* If the sentence makes sense, you know it’s correct.

Rushing from the office, Bob’s printer broke. Bob’s printer, rushing from the office, broke. Doesn’t make sense.

Dependent vs. independent clauses

A clause is a group of words with a subject and a verb, a part of a sentence. Some clauses can get by on their own

without any help; these are called independent. Others can’t stand alone; either they don’t have their own subject and verb, or they’re subordinated to another part of the sentence. These are dependent. Dependent clauses often begin with words like *if, whether, since* and so on. Knowing the difference can help you figure out when to use commas.

For example, consider the sentence “Since we’ve fallen a week behind, we’ll skip the second paper.” The first part, “since we’ve fallen a week behind,” is dependent, because it can’t be a sentence on its own. The second part, “we’ll skip the second paper,” does just fine on its own; it’s an independent clause. The independent clause can be a sentence without any help from the dependent clause.

Paragraph

A paragraph is a group of sentences that contains only one developed idea. A paragraph often begins with a topic sentence that sets the tone of the paragraph; the rest amplifies, clarifies or explores the topic sentence.

There’s no hard and fast rule for the length of a paragraph; it can be as short as a single sentence or as long as it has to be. Consider breaking a long paragraph for the ease and comfort of your readers. Paragraphs and the white spaces (indents or line breaks) that accompany them assist readers in keeping track of their place in long stretches of text.

Pronoun

A pronoun takes the place of a noun; it stands for the noun in a sentence. Pronouns include *he, it, her, me* and so forth. Instead of saying “Bob gave Terri a memo Bob wrote, and Terri read the memo,” we’d use the nouns *Bob, Terri* and *memo* only once, and let pronouns do the rest: “Bob gave Terri a memo *he* wrote, and *she* read it.”

Split infinitive

An infinitive is the form of a verb that comes after *to*, as in *to support* or *to write*. A split infinitive occurs when another word comes between the *to* and the verb. At FFA, we prefer to keep the *to* next to the verb at all times; it’s probably better to avoid split infinitives whenever possible.

WRONG: *Matt seems to always do it that way.*

RIGHT: *Matt always seems to do it that way.*

PUNCTUATION

Apostrophe ’

The most common way to form a possessive in English is with apostrophe and s: “a hard day’s night.” After a plural noun ending in s, put just an apostrophe: “two hours’ work” (i.e., “the work of two hours). If a plural doesn’t end in s – children, men, people – plain old apostrophe-s: “children’s, “men’s,” “people’s.” It’s never mens or child-rens.

There’s also the opposite case: when a singular noun ends in s. That’s a little trickier. At FFA, we use a single apostrophe after the s. James’ house. Note that the possessives of pronouns never get apostrophes: theirs, not their’s; hers, not her’s, its, not it’s (See It’s versus Its).

Don’t use apostrophes to make abbreviations or acronyms plural. They took their SATs, not They took their SAT’s. It’s much the same with decades. Don’t use an apostrophe before the s. Refer to the 1960s, not the 1960’s.

Use apostrophes to set off quotations within a quotation. Jack said, “That man just said ‘doop doop’ to me. Do you know what ‘doop doop’ means?”

Colon :

A colon marks a pause for explanation, expansion, enumeration or elaboration. Use a colon to introduce a list: thing one, thing two and thing three. Use it to pause and explain: this sentence makes the point. Use it to give an example: this, for instance.

There are other uses. Americans use it after the salutation in a formal letter. It can also introduce a block quotation or a list of bullet points. See also Semicolon (don’t confuse them!) and the end of Capitalization.

Dash — and hyphen -

When using a dash, place a space on either side. (The award was given — and surely earned — by a deserving team.)

An endash (regular hyphen) should be used for hyphenated words and to indicate ranges. (e.g., January 2-8; 6-8 grades; self-esteem)

If the dash is used as punctuation in a sentence to offset a phrase, use an emdash. (e.g., type straight through—don’t leave a space) Also use the emdash as part of a company’s name. (e.g., Monsanto—Crop Protection Business)

Ellipsis . . .

The ellipsis (plural *ellipses*) is the mark that indicates the omission of quoted material. An ellipsis consists of three periods with a space in between each. It can appear next to other punctuation, including an end-of-sentence period (resulting in four periods).

He spoke eloquently and with great spirit for three hours about the dangers of long-windedness.

He spoke . . . about the dangers of long-windedness.

Period .

Periods end all sentences except questions. A period can also be used to form an ellipsis, and to designate the “dots” in web addresses and file extensions. At FFA, we don’t use periods in telephone numbers.

Question mark ?

A question mark punctuates a question. If you’re phrasing a sentence as a question, please use a question mark.

Quotation marks “ ”

Quotation marks surround direct quotations within a sentence to let the reader know the writer is referencing material from someone else. At FFA, we prefer “curly quotes,” which face forward at the beginning of a quotation and backward at the end.

In America, commas and periods go inside quotation marks, while semicolons and colons go outside, regardless of the punctuation in the original quotation. Question marks and exclamation points depend on whether the question or exclamation is part of the quotation or part of the sentence containing the quotation.

Semicolon ;

The semicolon has only two common uses:

1) to separate the items in a list if one or more items contain a comma.

2) to separate two independent clauses in one sentence.

The first is obvious enough: *We packed our pillows; cough syrup; strips of rough, orange cardboard; bottled water and dry socks.* (Remember, we don't use a comma or a semicolon to separate the last item in a series when we use *and*.)

For the second, use this simple test: If you can use a period and a new sentence, you should use a semicolon. In this second use, the semicolon can always be replaced by a period and a new sentence.

Simon's speech is monotonous. He bores me to tears.

Simon's speech is monotonous; he bores me to tears.

The two separate sentences can stand by themselves or be joined by a semicolon. The semicolon juxtaposes the two ideas, making their shared meaning more apparent.

Spaces

At FFA, we use single spaces after sentence-ending periods and colons. In fact, the only time we use double spaces is within an address to separate the ZIP code from the state.

WRITING TIPS

Audience

The key to all good writing is understanding your audience. Every time you use language, your attention should always be on the effect it will have on your audience. Think of grammar and style as you would table manners. Just like dining with a slob, a poorly written document can be a bad experience for the reader.

Your job as a writer is to have certain effects on your readers. Your readers are continuously judging you, consciously or unconsciously. To have the greatest effect, therefore, you'll have to adjust your style to suit the audience.

Action Verbs

Action verbs, as the name reveals, express actions; contrast them with verbs of being. Think of the difference between "I study" (action verb) and "I am a student" (verb of being). It's often wise to replace passive verbs of being with action verbs; that will make your writing "punchier."

Clichés

Avoid clichés. It's such common advice that it's almost a cliché itself, but no worse for that. It's stated clearly by Pinney: Cliches offer prefabricated phrasing that may be used without effort on your part. They are thus used at the expense of both individuality and precision, since you can't say just what you mean in the mechanical response of a cliché. In other words, if you're depending on a stock phrase, you're letting someone else do half your thinking for you.

If you must resort to clichés, though, be especially careful not to muddle them. Remember, for example, that the more widely accepted phrase is "I couldn't care less," not could. Pay attention to every word.

Concrete language

Use specific, concrete words instead of vague, general ones wherever possible: instead of "apparent significant financial gains," use "a lot of money" or "large profits." Instead of "Job suffers a series of unfavorable experiences," use "Job's family is killed and his possessions are destroyed." Be precise.

Jargon

Jargon is the use of technical and organization-specific terms with such frequency and so little explanation that it becomes confusing for all but absolute experts. At FFA, a little jargon is sometimes necessary, but try not to let it rule your writing. Remember to state the full titles of programs first before jumping right in and using an acronym. If you're using terms specific to an activity or competition, assume your reader is starting from scratch. At the very least, explain your terms before you weave them through your writing.

Run-on sentences

Just as there's nothing inherently wrong with a long word, there's nothing inherently wrong with a long sentence. It can be long, but it has to be grammatical. A run-on sentence is ungrammatical, not just long, and usually involved misplaced or unused commas or semicolons. At FFA, we try to pay special attention to the needs of our readers. If you get tired writing the sentence, it's a good chance your reader will find it confusing. When in doubt, try to break up a long sentence into two shorter ones, especially in columnar text. When text is presented in columns, such as in *Making a Difference*, long sentences occupy lots of vertical space. It can be difficult to keep your place without a break now and then.

