

# Pet Peeves & Punctual Punctuation: Part II

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Contributor

There are some common problems that creep into everyone's writing at some point or another. For some people, these are just mistakes made because they weren't paying attention. For others, these problems are chronic, and need to be looked at in every writing assignment. If a person understands how these certain words are used in their writing in the first place, then these problems can be eliminated. These words are: 'affect' and 'effect'; 'your' and 'you're'; 'there,' 'they're,' and 'their;'; and 'its' and 'it's.'

The differences between 'affect' and 'effect' are commonly confused. 'Affect' is a verb, while 'effect' is a noun. For example: *The university was not affected by the storm. The storm had no effect on the university.* If you can put 'a,' 'the' or an adjective in front of it, use 'effect,' and if you can put it in past tense, use 'affect.' However, 'effect' can also be used as a verb when you are talking about something that has been caused. For example: *The politician effected much change during his term.* And remember, the adjective is 'effective,' not 'affective.' For example: *The politician was effective at implementing his election platform.* 'Effect' is also used when any of the following words come before it: no, any, take, into. For example: *How long will it take for the aspirin to take effect?*

The differences between 'your' and 'you're' are very simple to remember. 'Your' is usually possessive. For example: *Your cat just scratched me.* 'You're' is a contraction for 'you are,' and nothing else. For example: *You're going to the store today?*

Because there are three differ-

ent forms, 'there,' 'their,' and 'they're,' this one can be more confusing. 'There' is used when referring to a place or to indicate existence of something. For example: *The china plates should be there in the cupboard,* or, *"Where there is smoke, there is fire."* 'Their' is used as a possessive when something belongs to a group of people. For example: *Yes, we just passed by their house in the last block.* Finally, 'they're' is a contraction for 'they are.' For example: *They're going to Disneyland for their honeymoon?*

Last, but certainly not least, is the biggest confusion of all: 'it's' and 'its.' 'It's' is a contraction for 'it is.' No exceptions. For example: *We're going on a picnic because it's a beautiful day.* 'Its' is used as a possessive. For example: *We can't set up the tent because its pegs are missing.*

You'll notice that a lot of these words contain a contraction, that is two words that have been shortened into one word for ease of speaking. Generally, contractions are not acceptable in academic writing. For 'they're,' 'you're,' and 'it's' and all other contractions, they should be written out fully within your essays or written assignments like 'they are,' 'you are,' and 'it is.' By writing out these words fully, you also avoid a lot of the confusion with which words are correct in the context. For example, if you use 'it's' in the tenting sentence above, it wouldn't make sense if you wrote the contraction out fully: *We can't set up the tent because it is pegs are missing.* This is because 'it's' is not the possessive form of the word.

I hope this helps. A lot of people are writing their essays right now, so keep these things in mind, and your writing is sure to improve grammatically.

## Letters to a Tutor...

Hi! I am a returning student, away from academic learning for some time. I am apprehensive about retraining my brain to learning and "retain" new material. I am hoping that you can help me with valuable advice on learning techniques to best prepare me. I will certainly appreciate any help you can give. Thank-you.

As a tutor, I found that low confidence levels in mature students is extremely common. However, it has also been my experience that mature students tend to do much better in the academic environment. Having gained experience in the "real" world, mature students have a unique outlook on the world around them, and it shows in their writing. There is a certain amount of cynicism that goes along with it that really seems to help your critical thinking skills.

That said, there are still some ways you can improve your academic performance. There are a lot of memory tricks that can help you, depending on the type of learner you are. If you are a visual learner, then making lots of diagrams, flow charts, and using colour in your notes is a good way to help you remember things. Some people learn best just by listening (although this is rare). Others learn best by being active at the same time as studying, by walking around their rooms and talking out loud about the things they're learning. But you need to figure out what works best for you. Most people learn best by a combination of these things.

Mnemonic (ne-mon'-ik) devices are commonly used, but they are only for memorization; they don't help you understand what you are trying to learn. One Mnemonic device is the use of acronyms. In elementary school, we remember the Great Lakes by using the acronym "HOMES," (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, and Superior). If you need to remember a series of letters, make up a sentence using the letters you want to remember. Another good way to remember things is to (if you're that creative) make up rhymes and songs. Why do you think you remember at the supermarket that one brand is better than the other? Because advertisers use rhymes and songs to get it into your memory. Making visual associations also help you remember. In my grade 10 science class, we were learning about the functions of the body, and I had to remember peristalsis (the movement of your esophagus that makes food go down). To remember, I thought of a toothpaste tube, and if I forgot to brush, I'd get periodontal disease. This visualization helped me remember the word, even 12 years later.

But for actual learning, there are no special techniques that you don't already know. At the beginning of every term, I schedule my life for the next 4 months. For half an hour after my classes, I look at my notes again. If there is something I missed, the lecture is still fresh in my mind, and I can write it down. If something doesn't make sense, I rewrite it or add more information. By doing this you are making your notes easier to read, and by looking them over, your quick review will also help you remember. At the end of the week, go over all your notes you've taken since the beginning of the term. This will help cut down on studying before the actual test, and you'll most likely be able to understand the material much better.

I hope this helps. The best way to learn, is to think about how you learn best. If your friend draws pictures all over the page, you may not know what it means. You may like to keep your notes much neater and organized. If you still feel that you are apprehensive, UPEI offers an excellent course as an introduction to university life called University 100. They give you study tips, show you how to write an essay with proper citations, and they tell you about the student services the school offers that may not be otherwise advertised.

--Rebecca

If you have questions you want to ask a qualified tutor regarding study techniques, time management, grammar, or anything at all that you may need help with, send your questions\* to Rebecca at: [questions\\_for\\_a\\_tutor@yahoo.ca](mailto:questions_for_a_tutor@yahoo.ca)

\*All emails will receive an answer.