



**Grammar**

# Top 20 Grammar Gaffes

*Dianna Booher*



BOOHER RESEARCH INSTITUTE

## —TWENTY—

**Missing “ly” on adverbs:** “The market rose quick.” Adverbs tell more about verbs (and sometimes other adverbs and adjectives). Adjectives describe nouns and pronouns.

**Correct:** “The market rose **quickly**. The manager speaks **harshly**. Kim’s tone is **harsh**. He invests money **cautiously**, because he’s a **cautious** person.”

## —NINETEEN—

**That vs which:** “People don’t buy products **which** are overpriced.” *That* adds essential information to the sentence. *Which* adds nonessential information. Remove the *that* or *which* clause and see if the central idea of the sentence changes. If so, then you need *that*. **Correct:** People don’t buy products **that** are overpriced.

## —EIGHTEEN—

**Subject-verb mismatch:** “The group of financial planners, brokers, and investors always hesitate to make a commitment during the session.” Subjects and verbs must agree in number. **Correct:** “The **group** of financial planners, brokers, and investors always **hesitates** to make a commitment during the session.”

## —SEVENTEEN—

**Unparallel structure:** “Students asked questions about laptop usage, available loans, what metrics will be used for grading team projects, and dorm policies.” Parallelism means that equivalent ideas should be structured in the same way—as nouns, or verbs, or adjectives, or clauses, or phrases. **Correct:** “Students asked questions about laptop usage, available loans, **metrics for grading team projects**, and dorm policies.”

## —SIXTEEN—

**Misplaced words/phrases:** “Bob told us in June the new offices would be ready for move-in.” Descriptive words need to be as close as possible to the noun or pronoun they describe. **Correct:** “**In June**, Bob told us the new offices would be ready for move-in.” Or: “Bob told us the new offices would be ready for move-in **in June**.”

## —FIFTEEN—

**Run-Ons:** “That deadline works for me I’ll see you after vacation.” Run-ons refer to two or more complete sentences jammed together without proper punctuation. **Correct:** “That deadline works for **me**; **I’ll** see you after vacation.”

## —FOURTEEN—

**Fragments:** “The Denver division, which scheduled a first-of-its kind driving test to educate consumers.” Fragments are incomplete sentences—usually because the main verb is missing. **Correct:** “The Denver division, which scheduled a first-of-its kind driving test to educate consumers, **is now charging entrance fees.**”

## —THIRTEEN—

**Its vs it’s:** “Turn the table on it’s side.” **Its** shows possession. **It’s** is a contraction meaning **it is**. **Correct:** “Turn the table on **its** side.” “**It’s** sad to hear about so many accidents this year.”

## —TWELVE—

**Less versus fewer:** “This line—10 items or **less.**” If you can count them, use fewer. If you can’t count them, use less. Fewer hours. Less time. **Correct:** “This line—10 items or **fewer.**”

## —ELEVEN—

**Well vs good:** “They played **real good.**” **Good** describes things, places, people, or ideas. **Well** tells more about verbs, the action words of a sentence. **Correct:** “They played **really well**; they did a **good** job.”

## —TEN—

**Affect vs Effect:** “This policy effects all our employees.” To affect means to influence or to involve. To effect means to cause. An effect (a noun) means a cause. **Correct:** “This policy **affects** all our employees.” Or: “This policy will have an **effect** on all our employees.”

## —NINE—

**Insure vs ensure vs assure:** All 3 mean to guarantee, but in a different sense. Use **insure** when referring to insurance or a monetary payment. Use **assure** when referring to a person offering a spoken or written guarantee. Use **ensure** in all other cases. **Correct:** “The agent **assured** me that the policy **insures** us against flooding. So that good news **ensures** that we’re making a logical decision in buying this home.”

## —EIGHT—

**Irregular verb go:** “They had **went** to the store.” **Gone** is one of many irregular verbs. Others: *written, spoken, done, seen, grown, driven, taught, chosen*. **Correct:** “They had **gone** to the store.”

## —SEVEN—

**Danglers:** “As a parent having a son in the military, their access to healthcare is deplorable.” Their access to healthcare is not a parent. The descriptive phrase doesn’t link to the word it describes. **Correct:** “As a parent having a son in the military, I think access to healthcare is deplorable.”

## —SIX—

**The pronoun myself:** “Send Jean or myself an email.” Leave out the other people in the sentence, and then trust your ear to select the right pronoun. *Myself* is never correct unless *I* or *me* is already stated in the sentence. **Correct:** “Send Jean or me an email.”

## —FIVE—

**Wrong subject pronouns:** “Me and Julie can cover the phones Tuesday.” The subject pronouns are *I*, *you*, *he*, *she*, *it*, *we*, *they*, *who*. **Correct:** “Julie and I can cover the phones Tuesday.”

## —FOUR—

**Pronouns after than:** “He’s taller than me.” Finish the sentence to hear the correct choice after *than* or *as*. **Correct:** “He’s taller than I [am tall].”

## —THREE—

**Incomplete comparisons:** “He always sends longer reports.” Longer than what? “She likes the Midwest better.” Better than what? To be correct, complete both halves of the comparison. **Correct:** “She likes the Midwest better than the Northeast.” **Correct:** “He always sends longer reports than Tom does.”

## —TWO—

**Subjunctive mood:** “If I was you...” If stating something that’s not true or contrary to fact—in this case, *I’m not you*—choose the opposite verb: *were*, not *was*. **Correct:** “If I were you, I’d resign.”

## —ONE—

**Objective pronouns:** “Just between you and I...” *You* and *me* are objects of the preposition *between*. *I* is always a subjective pronoun and can’t be an objective word. **Correct:** “Just between you and me...”

Excerpted from *Booher’s Rules of Business Grammar: 101 Fast and Easy Ways to Correct the Most Common Errors* by Dianna Booher.