

The envelope enveloping the letter.

The envelope enveloping the letter was covered with pink hearts and red lipstick kisses.

The item is a sentence fragment. What *about* the envelope enveloping the letter?

Try having students complete the sentence in at least two more ways—adding something before the fragment (*Barb cautiously opened the envelope enveloping the letter*) and after the fragment (*The envelope enveloping the letter was covered with pink hearts and red lipstick kisses*).

For more practice, and some fun, challenge students to complete the fragment with other requirements as well—such as using the word “fear,” including both a boy and a girl in the sentence, or adding a dog. Possibilities are endless.

“Letter” has two *t*’s.

The neighbors supposedly had a pet dodo bird that escaped but I no that dodo birds are extinct.

The neighbors supposedly had a pet dodo bird that escaped, but I know that dodo birds are extinct.

“Neighbors” is one of those aggravating words that does *not* follow the “*i* before *e* except after *c*” rule.

Despite how some people pronounce the word, there is no *b* in “supposedly.” Similarly, there is no *x* in “escaped.”

“Know” is the word needed, not “no.”

The sentence is a compound sentence (two complete sentences connected with “and,” “but,” “or,” “for,” “nor,” and sometimes “yet” and “so.”) Therefore, it needs a comma.

The star athlete turned out to be an alien. From the newly discovered planet gezbarkawda.

The star athlete turned out to be an alien from the newly discovered planet Gezarkawda.

Students often create sentence fragments by putting in a period too soon. The two fragments above are easily fixed by simply removing the period.

“A” is used before words beginning with a consonant sound. “An” is used before words beginning with a vowel sound. (For some reason, the use of “a” instead of “an” seems to be increasing. It might be interesting to speculate with students as to *why*.)

Because “Gezarkawda” is the name of a specific planet, it should be capitalized—even if it is fictional.

fragments, word choice,
capitalization

8

A Sentence a Day

My brother, Sundar, he puts catsup and maple syrup on everything.

My brother Sundar puts catsup and maple syrup on everything.

People often use double subjects, especially when they are talking informally.

Examples: *My mother, she won't let me go camping with my boyfriend for three weeks in Alaska. My boyfriend, he thinks she's being unreasonable. My dad, he won't even let me talk to him about it.* However, these double subjects are completely unnecessary and actually kind of silly. *My mother won't let me go camping* is simpler and just as clear as *My mother, she won't let me go camping*.

Appositives interrupt a sentence to give more information about a noun in the sentence. Usually they are set off with commas. However, a one-word appositive such as “Sundar” doesn't really need commas.

A Sentence a Day

9

double subjects,
commas

It is supposedly difficult to pat your head rub your stomach and chew gum at the same time.

It is supposedly difficult to pat your head, rub your stomach(,) and chew gum at the same time.

Although many people pronounce the word "supposebly" (with a *b*), the word is really "supposedly" (with a *d*).

Words in a series should be separated by commas. However, the final comma (the serial comma) is really optional, unless its elimination creates confusion in meaning. Interestingly, magazine and newspaper publishers tend to leave it out, following the *Associated Press Stylebook*. Book publishers are more likely to rely on the *Chicago Manual of Style*, which recommends leaving it in. Students are often amazed to find out that authorities can differ on punctuation rules.

Who's idea was it to allow students to ride skateboards in the hall.

Whose idea was it to allow students to ride skateboards in the hall?

Any sentence that asks a question should have a question mark at the end.

"Who's" is a contraction of "who is." A test: try substituting "who is" in the sentence to see if it makes sense. If it does, use "who's." If it doesn't, use "whose."

A even-toed ungulate which is better known as a camel keeps the sand out of it's eyes with 3 eyelids.

An even-toed ungulate, which is better known as a camel, keeps the sand out of its eyes with three eyelids.

"An" is used before words beginning with a vowel sound.

"Which is better known as a camel" is an appositive. It interrupts the flow of the sentence to give more information about "ungulate" and should be set off with commas.

"Its" is a pronoun used to show ownership or possession. There is no apostrophe in it.

Numbers smaller than ten are generally spelled out, not written as numerals. Therefore, "3" should be written as "three."

word choice, commas
miscellaneous

12

A Sentence a Day

After Lee took a break to walk his Iguana and pet his Python he went back to work on his marshmellow sculpture.

After Lee took a break to walk his iguana and pet his python, he went back to work on his marshmallow sculpture.

"After Lee took a break to walk his iguana and pet his python" is an introductory element (a clause). Therefore, it should be followed by a comma.

"Iguana" is a kind of lizard, just as "python" is a kind of snake. However, they aren't the names of *specific* iguanas or pythons. If the iguana's name is "Ethel," "Ethel" is what should be capitalized, not "iguana."

"Marshmallow" is the correct spelling.

A Sentence a Day

13

commas, capitalization,
spelling

The mall closed its doors lifted into the air and flew off into space with a large and handsome truck stop.

The mall closed its doors, lifted into the air(,) and flew off into space with a large and handsome truck stop.

Never mind that the mall in this sentence is behaving in a decidedly peculiar fashion. It is doing three things, and those three things should be separated by commas. The final comma in a series is considered optional.

"It's" is a contraction of "it is." A test: substitute "it is" in the sentence to see if "it's" is what is needed. If it doesn't sound right, "its" should be used.



commas,
word choice

14

A Sentence a Day

Please do not sneeze, or wheeze near there cheeze.

Please do not sneeze or wheeze near their cheese.

Annoying as it may be that all these words with an "eez" sound aren't spelled alike at the end, they are not.

Should it be "there," "they're," or "their"? "Their" is the word used to show possession. It is "their" cheese someone should not be sneezing or wheezing near.



spelling,
word choice

15

A Sentence a Day

As Lionel was finally doing his laundry after letting it sit, in a heap for two weeks. He watched in horror as a mustard splotch on one of his shirts, unstuck itself and crawled out of the laundry basket, and down the hall.

As Lionel was finally doing his laundry after letting it sit in a heap for two weeks, he watched in horror as a mustard splotch on one of his shirts unstuck itself and crawled out of the laundry basket and down the hall.

Students commonly create sentence fragments simply by inserting a period too soon. Read aloud the first "sentence" so that students hear how it is left hanging and needs to be completed.

All the commas in the incorrect version are unnecessary. (An argument can be made for including one before "in a heap" for emphasis. In that case, a comma is necessary after "heap" as well.)

Some grammarians would point out that splitting the verb "was doing" with the word "finally" is not a good idea. They might leave out the word "finally" altogether or write, "As Lionel was doing his laundry, finally, he..." Others would leave the "finally" where it is.

"I looked over the close in my closet and decided I'm going to wear to scarfs around my neck and one on my head, to," said Tiffany. "Is that *all* your going to where?" gasped her mother.

"I looked over the clothes in my closet and decided I'm going to wear two scarves around my neck and one on my head, too," said Tiffany.

"Is that *all* you're going to wear?" gasped her mother.

The corrected sentences use "to, two, and too" correctly.

"Clothes" refers to what you wear. "Close" is what you do to a door.

"Wear" is what you do with clothes. "Where" is used to refer to a place.

In dialogue, a new paragraph begins with each change of speakers.

The eye-catching float adorned with silver and yellow balloons. Carried a gigantic ice sculpture of an earthworm, the high schools mascot.

The eye-catching float adorned with silver and yellow balloons carried a gigantic ice sculpture of an earthworm, the high school's mascot.

The two sentence fragments above can be turned into a complete sentence simply by removing the period.

Since "earthworm" begins with a vowel sound, the phrase should be "an earthworm."

The mascot "belongs" to the high school. Therefore, an apostrophe is needed before the s.

A skunk wandered through the neighbor hood and caused quit a scene when it ambled over to the busstop and crawled up on the bench.

A skunk wandered through the neighborhood and caused quite a scene when it ambled over to the bus stop and crawled up on the bench.

"Neighborhood" is one word.

"Bus stop" is two words.

"Quite" is the word needed above, not "quit," which means to give up.

Iris ate icecream on the ice berg while the yak yakked about frozen Yogurt.

Iris ate ice cream on the iceberg while the yak yakked about frozen yogurt.

"Ice cream" is two words.

"Iceberg" is one word.

There is no need to capitalize "yogurt."



spelling,
capitalization

20

A Sentence a Day

The scarred moose vamoosed disappearing behind the caboose.

The scared moose vamoosed, disappearing behind the caboose.

Some students may insist that the moose really was *scarred* in an accident, not *scared*. They could be right, though it is more likely that the moose is disappearing because it is scared, not because it is scarred. However, allow their argument. It's good for them to see that small things like an *r* can completely change the meaning of a sentence.

"Disappearing," however, definitely does need two *p*'s.

"Disappearing behind the caboose" is an ending element (a phrase) that interrupts the flow of the sentence. It should be preceded by a comma.



spelling,
commas

21

A Sentence a Day

“Before you buy shoes for your pet millipede”, he said. “Consider the cost.”

“Before you buy shoes for your pet millipede,” he said, “consider the cost.”

Commas go *inside* (before) closing quotation marks.

If a quotation is interrupted with a dialogue tag (“he said,” “she said,” etc.), the next part of the quotation should not be capitalized unless it starts a new sentence. “Before you buy shoes for your pet millipede, consider the cost” is a complete sentence interrupted with “he said.” Therefore, “consider” is not capitalized.

Quotation marks always come in pairs. One set is always followed by another.

Bram had a hard time remembering things, he always came to school with a sticky note list stuck in the middle of his forehead.

Bram had a hard time remembering things. He always came to school with a sticky note list stuck in the middle of his forehead.

The important thing to note in the incorrect item above is that it is a run-on sentence (or comma splice). A comma alone cannot separate two sentences. An interesting exercise is to have students see how many ways they can fix the run-on. A few ways:

- Because Bram had a hard time remembering things, he always came to school with a sticky note list stuck in the middle of his forehead.
- Bram had a hard time remembering things. That’s why he always came to school with a sticky note list stuck in the middle of his forehead.
- Bram always came to school with a sticky note list stuck in the middle of his forehead because he had a hard time remembering things.

“Forehead” is the correct spelling.

Aisha asked the telemarketer, "if she could call him back tomorrow around dinnertime at his home phone number."

Aisha asked the telemarketer if she could call him back tomorrow around dinnertime at his home phone number.

Quotation marks can be compared to a "bubble" in a cartoon strip. The bubble shows the words coming out of the cartoon character's mouth. Similarly, quotation marks surround only the words a character actually says. The incorrect item above is an indirect quote. It tells what Aisha asked, but without using her exact words. The sentence could also be corrected this way: Aisha asked the telemarketer, "May I call you back tomorrow around dinnertime at your home phone number?"

"Tomorrow" has two *r*'s.

Incidentally, Aisha's technique for dealing with telemarketers can be very satisfying.

Oliver was upset this morning, because his little brother fed his homework to squeezey there pet Boa Constrictor.

Oliver was upset this morning because his little brother fed his homework to Squeezy, their pet boa constrictor.

"Because" is a conjunction that is not generally preceded by a comma. (The conjunctions that *are* generally preceded by a comma when they separate two sentences are "and," "but," "or," "for," "nor," and sometimes "yet" and "so.")

"Squeezy" is the name of a specific boa constrictor. Therefore, it is a proper noun that should be capitalized. "Boa constrictor" is the name of a type of snake, but it is not the name of a specific, individual snake. Therefore, it is *not* capitalized.

"Their" is used to show possession. It was "their" boa constrictor; it belonged to them.

Irregardless of what I thought of the movie I definitely enjoyed the gigantic bucket of buttered popcorn that me and my friend shared.

Regardless of what I thought of the movie, I definitely enjoyed the gigantic bucket of buttered popcorn that my friend and I shared.

Some would say that "irregardless" is not really a word, just as "ain't" is not. However, both clearly *are* words, since people use them all the time. However, they are considered "nonstandard." They should not be used in most writing or speaking.

"Me and my friend" is increasingly showing up everywhere. "My friend and I" is the correct form. An interesting point of discussion is *why* "me and my friend" is becoming so common. Some say it might have to do with a growing self-centeredness in our society. That "me first" attitude seeps into language as well as behavior. It's something to think about, in any case, and could lead to an interesting discussion. (The item is not written as a direct quotation. If it had been, "me and my friend" could remain in order to record the person's words accurately.)



word choice,
pronouns

26

A Sentence a Day

Dont slam the door, you will wake up the penguins.

Don't slam the door because you will wake up the penguins.

"Don't" needs an apostrophe. As in all contractions, the apostrophe takes the place of the letter or letters left out in the contraction. (In this case, it stands for the *o* in "not.")

The item is a run-on sentence. A comma, alone, cannot separate two sentences.



A Sentence a Day

27

apostrophes,
run-ons

Adriana knew something was wrong when she seen a giraffe poke its head out of her chimney.

Adriana knew something was wrong when she saw a giraffe poke its head out of her chimney.

“Seen” always needs a helping verb before it—she *has* seen, she *will have* seen, she *was* seen, she *will be* seen, etc. Unfortunately, “she seen” is so common that it sounds right to some students.

“It’s” is a contraction of “it is.” “Its” (without the apostrophe) is always used to show possession of some kind (its fur, its wheels, its stomach, its head, etc.).

verb form,
word choice

28

A Sentence a Day

In the alley behind the restraurant Margo was cornered by a gang of fried chickens who demanded that she put down her coleslaw and mashed potatos and come out with her hands up.

In the alley behind the restaurant, Margo was cornered by a gang of fried chickens who demanded that she put down her coleslaw and mashed potatoes and come out with her hands up.

The introductory prepositional phrases (“in the alley behind the restaurant”) should be followed by a comma. They precede the main part of the sentence: “Margo was cornered by a gang of fried chickens.”

The word “potato” does not end in an *e*. An *e* is added, however, when the word is made plural. (Students may be interested to hear the story about former Vice President Dan Quayle’s famous gaffe regarding the word. When visiting a school, he corrected a student who had spelled potato correctly, without an *e*. Quayle told him that “potato” had an *e* on it—and was the butt of jokes for a very long time.)

commas,
spelling

29

A Sentence a Day

Instead of ringing the phone made a sound like boots squishing thru mud.

Instead of ringing, the phone made a sound like boots squishing through mud.

"Instead of ringing" is an introductory phrase. (It comes before the main part of the sentence: "the phone made a sound like boots squishing through mud.") Therefore, it should be followed by a comma.

You might want to talk about the increasing use of "thru" in advertising, instant messages, text messages, and many e-mail messages. The proper spelling is still "through," but it is very likely that one day "thru" will be accepted as normal. Students need to know that language rules *do* change. For example, "skyscraper" used to be considered a slang word. Now it is actually the proper name for very tall buildings.

commas,
spelling

30

A Sentence a Day

To get alot of attention put on a carrot costume and walk around on a pair of expecially high stilts.

To get a lot of attention, put on a carrot costume and walk around on a pair of especially high stilts.

"A lot" is two words, not one. No one writes "alittle." Why write "alot"? It doesn't make sense.

"To get a lot of attention" is an introductory element (a phrase) that should be followed by a comma.

People often mispronounce "especially" as "expecially"—which leads them to spell the word incorrectly as well. There is no x in "especially."

spelling,
commas

31

A Sentence a Day

Elizabeth didn't ever take all the attention she got from James and Sam and Delmar for granite, and she kept all the boy's hundreds of letters in a special file cabinet in her closet.

Elizabeth didn't ever take all the attention she got from James and Sam and Delmar for granted, and she kept all the boys' hundreds of letters in a special file cabinet in her closet.

"Granted" is the word needed, not "granite," which is a kind of rock.

In most cases, the apostrophe goes after the *s* if the possessive refers to more than one person. In this case it does. (An example of when it would not: Jodie shopped in the women's department.) If it referred to only one boy's letters, the apostrophe would go before the *s*.



The banana split that I ate last night at humongo ice cream shoppe, sat in my stomache like a ball of hardened clay.

The banana split that I ate last night at Humongo Ice Cream Shoppe sat in my stomach like a ball of hardened clay.

There is no need for the comma before "sat."

Humongo Ice Cream Shoppe is the name of a store, so it should be capitalized.

"Shoppe" is part of the store's name, so the spelling should remain. Many retail establishments use the spelling "shoppe" to give their stores an old-fashioned flavor. (Whether their technique is effective or not is another question.)

