**Grammar Rules**

The following is a list of basic grammar rules which will often appear throughout writing. These are all rules that you will get a feel for as you write more and more. A great site to visit for more in-depth explanations of grammar rules is: [www.owl.purdue.edu](http://www.owl.purdue.edu).

**Comma:**

* There are many uses for the comma, far too many for me to include here. If you need help with this, look up comma rules on the internet, there are many sites that will help you.
  + <https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/punctuation/commas/index.html>

**Semicolon:**

* There are two major uses for a semicolon: as the replacement for a period in specific circumstances, and in a semicolon bridge.
* It can replace a period when two independent clauses are very closely linked or share the same subject.
  + **Example:** Anytime you can use a semicolon, you can use a period; periods are better.
* It can be used to link an independent clause with a proceeding clause if the proceeding clause is introduced with an introductory word (such as however, rather, although, etc.)
  + **Example:** Feeding people at a party is not necessary; rather, it is a courtesy.

**Paragraphing:**

* Writing paragraphs in creative writing is very different than writing paragraphs in analytical papers. Paragraphs in stories serve the primary purpose of breaking up the action into bits of related information. As a result, it is quite likely to have paragraphs that are one sentence long, or can be ten sentences long. As a general rule, it is best to avoid longer paragraphs, as it makes it easier for the reader to miss information.
* Paragraphing does tend to follow stylistic preferences, and you will come to develop your own feel for it as you write more.
  + **Example:** Look at your favorite book and see how the paragraphs are spaced out. Alternatively, look at the short story that I have given you.

**Dialogue:**

* Dialogue is probably the most complicated part of creative writing. One of the standard rules is that each line of dialogue is associated with one person. If one person is saying something and the next is about the other person’s reaction, that reaction gets its own spacing (as if it were a new paragraph).
* There are a few different ways to format and execute it.

1. **Standard:**
   1. **Examples:**
      1. “Why did you just eat my chocolate?” he whined.
      2. “I’m going to go home now,” she said.
         1. “I’m going to go home now,” she said, throwing her jacket on and storming out of the room.
   2. This method of dialogue is the most basic. The first part of the sentence is the line being spoken, followed by an identifier. In all cases (with the exception of question marks and exclamation points) the spoken part of the sentence is followed by a comma within the quotation marks (as seen in ii. above).
   3. Any information presented immediately after the quotes (as seen in 1. above) is occurring simultaneously with the dialogue.
   4. It is easy to overdo identifiers. Once you establish who is talking first and second (in a one-to-one conversation), you can avoid identifiers and just have lines of dialogue. Your reader will assume that the order the characters are speaking in will not change unless otherwise noted.
      1. That said, if you want characters to do things while they are talking, you will need to work that into the dialogue though identifiers. All dialogue without identifiers or external action will automatically be assumed to be occurring in a basic conversation where the characters are facing each other and paying attention, unless otherwise noted.
2. **Pre-description Dialogue:**
   1. **Examples:**
      1. “Get packing, we leave at dawn tomorrow.” He turned on his heel and strode back into the camp.
   2. This method of dialogue is often used to present information, pertinent to the speaker, that is happening immediately after they speak, but before anyone else can react. As a result, it is often the rarest form of dialogue.
3. **Post-description Dialogue:**
   1. **Examples:** 
      1. She blushed. “See! I hate that!”
      2. He rolled his eyes. “Of course, dummy.”
   2. This form of dialogue is often used to present information, pertinent to the speaker, that is happening immediately before they speak. It is more niche than standard dialogue, but it is more common than pre-description dialogue.
4. **Interrupted Dialogue:**
   1. **Examples:**
      1. “I think that they’re tastier than raisin cookies. Also,” she said with a sly smirk, “I wouldn’t bother checking the cookie jar. I ate all of the chocolate chip ones.”
      2. “You’re right,” he said, sitting up and wiping tears from his face, “it’s not funny. It’s hilarious.”
   2. This form of dialogue is used to present new information while people are talking. Thus, it is often used to denote action occurring during dialogue at a specific moment. That said, it needs to be formatted correctly, and can only be introduced where there would be a comma or other pause.

**Prose:**

* Remember that writing fancier is not the same as writing smarter. Complex or technical words can be used to describe something very specific, but are both easy to misuse and harder to understand. This doesn’t mean that you should not use high-level words, only that you should use them carefully.
* Avoid obvious and redundant statements and comments. This one is pretty obvious, and can easily be caught in an editing pass.
  + **Example:** Sally picks up the red ball. Michael points to the red ball that Sally just picked up. “Why did you pick up the ball Sally?”
    - **Could Instead Be Written As:** Salled picks up the red ball. “Why’d you pick up the ball Sally?” Michael asked, pointing to it.
* Writing is all about the delicate balance of details. You want enough details for the reader to be able to vividly imagine the story, but not too much that they can’t figure anything out. With an abundance of details, it is difficult for the readers to be able to accurately pinpoint and/or imagine the area they are supposed to be in.
* As a general rule, adverbs (or words that end in -ly) should be avoided when possible. There are other, more dynamic ways to describe the information conveyed by an adverb.
  + **Example:** He ran quickly down the hallway, briefly stopping to catch his breath before continuing decisively.
    - **Instead:** He sprinted down the hall, pausing only to catch his breath before continuing his run.
* Chekhov's Gun is a literary term which states that all information presented to the readers will be used. The term originates from a Russian literary theorist and playwright, who described it as follows: If you have a character hang a gun up on the wall for all to see, it is only logical that it be used to murder in the next scene. This is an important term, because it is important that the writer is conscious of the expectations certain things provide. While I do not fully agree with the rule, I think it is an important consideration. Even if the gun isn’t used for murder, it should be waved around angrily, or at least mentioned.