

# TIPS FOR POLISHED CONTENT

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## SEMICOLONS

Semicolons separate two complete sentence elements.

Toronto's population is over 3,000,000; it's the largest city in Canada.

Also use between items in a series that contain internal punctuation:

If it's a dog, it must be friendly; if it's a cat, it must be independent; and if it's a parrot, it must swear.

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## CAPITALS

In headings, titles, and subheadings, capitalize the first word and all nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. Do not capitalize articles, conjunctions and prepositions.

Capitalize the first letters in a hyphenated compound and spelled out numbers:

The Vegan Editor's Self-Publishing Guide

Twenty-One Days to a Stronger Core

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## APOSTROPHE

For decades, as in the eighties or nineties, the numeric form is without an apostrophe because it's plural: 80s or 90s.

The roaring 20s.

For a specific two-digit year, use an apostrophe to replace the missing digits:

Shawn Mendes was born in '98.

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## FANBOYS

If you can divide a sentence into two complete sentences and it is joined by a coordinating conjunction (FANBOYS= for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so), a comma is needed before the conjunction.

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## WHO & THAT

The woman **who** edited my book was referred to me by another author. The book **that** my sister wrote is inspiring.

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## SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

Singular subjects that take a singular verb: each, every, either, neither.

Indefinite pronouns beginning with any (anyone, anybody), no (no one, nobody, nothing), every (everyone, everything), and some (something, someone) are singular and take a singular verb.

Some indefinite pronouns can be either singular or plural (any, more, some, enough, all, most, who, half, none); the rest of the sentence will determine whether a plural or singular verb is needed.

None of the snow (singular) has melted.

None of the books (plural) are available.

Be aware of collective nouns that take a singular verb: team, group, couple, committee, crowd, herd, audience, pair, family, orchestra, jury and squad.

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## MODIFIERS

### Misplaced Modifiers

It's misplaced if it modifies the wrong part of the sentence, or if what is being modified is unclear.

**Incorrect:** I served lasagna to the guests on paper plates.

**Correct:** I served the guests lasagna on paper plates.

### Limiting Modifiers

Careful placement is needed since they modify what immediately follows them.

Limiting modifiers include: almost, even, exactly, hardly, just, merely, nearly, only, scarcely, and simply.

My sister just waved to me as I left.

My sister waved just to me as I left.

My sister waved to me just as I left.

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## INTRODUCTORY CLAUSES

When you write a sentence that begins with a dependent clause or phrase, follow it with a comma.

These phrases and clauses usually begin with one of these words:

After, Although, As,  
As if, Because, Before,  
Even though, If,  
In order that,  
Rather than, Since,  
So that, Though, Unless,  
Until, When, Where,  
Whether, While.

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## PARALLEL STRUCTURE

**Incorrect:** I like to read, to walk in nature, and playing with my cat.

**Correct:** I like to read, walk in nature, and play with my cat.

**Also Correct:** I like reading, walking in nature, and playing with my cat.

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## TEMPORARY COMPOUND MODIFIERS

Toronto- or Ottawa-bound passengers can be processed in a separate line.

Two- and three-year car loans seem to be a thing of the past.

BUT, not with an adverb ending in "ly":  
She is a highly respected editor.

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## ITS & IT'S

If you mean to say "it is" use the apostrophe in the contraction: **it's**. If you mean the possessive like hers or his, the correct word to use is **its**.

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## FINALIZING

Read aloud as the final step to catch awkward construction, missing, redundant and repetitive words. For short pieces, also read from last paragraph to first.