



# Water New Zealand Presentation Guide

Supporting high quality  
conference presentations and papers

November 2021

## Version control

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This guide and related videos and other resources are downloadable from  
<https://www.waternz.org.nz/Presentationguide>

“Did you know that some people have a fear of long words?  
 It’s true, and there’s even a word for it: *hippopotomonstrosesquipedaliophobic*.  
 Can you see the irony?”

## Foreword

Thank you for offering a paper for a presentation at our next Water New Zealand conference: no presenters – no conference!

We have developed this presentation guide to give you some tips and ideas to help keep your audience engaged. As well as reminders about how to avoid common errors of spelling, punctuation and English usage, we have provided links to writing resources and helpful hints, and a section on te reo Māori.

If your organisation has a style guide, please also refer to it, and use it within Water New Zealand's conference paper template.

Thank you for your time and effort in helping ensure that our conferences continue to be relevant, informative and enjoyable.

## Acknowledgements

This Presentation Guide was collated by the Stormwater Education & Training Subgroup, the Conference Subgroup and the Stormwater Conference Committee with the help of Water New Zealand communications manager Debra Harrington. We gratefully acknowledge Troy Brockbank's contribution of our section on te reo Māori.

## Disclaimer

This Presentation Guide originally aimed to reduce the errors and inconsistencies commonly found in papers presented for review to members of the Stormwater Conference Committee. We are pleased to offer it to other Water New Zealand conference organisers. We don't claim it to be a comprehensive writing guide but include some key points and references to a small number of more detailed resources on good writing.

## Related resources

Alongside this Guide at <https://www.waternz.org.nz/Presentationguide> you can find:

- 'Want to Write Right, not Wrong?', a 1-page poster of common hopes and fears around conference papers;
- 'Words Walk into a Bar', a short and entertaining explanation of common errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation; and
- a series of short videos (10-15 minutes) on the following topics:
  - how to write a great abstract
  - how to write a great conference paper
  - how to deliver a great conference presentation.

Still worried? Never fear – from the call for abstracts to the arrangements on the day of your presentation, Water New Zealand and our conference organisers will send you then information you need when you need it, and of course, we'll be there on the day, with you.

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## Top tips

### Make it fun!

Writing should be an enjoyable process of consolidating, extending and communicating learning. So should reading!

George Orwell said that ‘Good writing is like a windowpane’ – the more transparent it is, the better you will convey your message to your audience.

Below are Orwell’s writing tips that are still used today. They come from his 1946 essay, *Politics and the English Language* and are equally applicable to technical and fictional writing.

1. Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
2. Never use a long word where a short one will do.
3. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
4. Never use the passive sense where you can use the active.
5. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent [*with exceptions for the te reo (which is one of Aotearoa New Zealand’s three official languages) and terms commonly used in our specialised industry*].
6. Break any of these rules sooner than saying anything outright barbarous.

### ‘Eats, shoots and leaves’, and other great tips on grammar and punctuation

Want to know why the sentence in the heading above does NOT apply to pandas?

If yes, check out the reference to the book of the same name and recommendations to other wonderful writing guides at <https://becomeawritertoday.com/best-grammar-books/>.

For more formal writing, a frequently-recommended Presentation Guide is the 2018 Economist Presentation Guide at [http://cdn.static-economist.com/sites/default/files/pdfs/style\\_guide\\_12.pdf](http://cdn.static-economist.com/sites/default/files/pdfs/style_guide_12.pdf).

And you’ll get a lot of laughs and a lot of learning from these pages:

- [https://www.grammar-monster.com/common\\_grammar\\_errors.htm](https://www.grammar-monster.com/common_grammar_errors.htm);
- [https://www.grammar-monster.com/easily\\_confused\\_words.htm](https://www.grammar-monster.com/easily_confused_words.htm); and
- [https://www.grammar-monster.com/punctuation\\_lessons.htm](https://www.grammar-monster.com/punctuation_lessons.htm).

To learn more, visit these pages:

- <https://capire.co.nz/writing-resources/>;
- <https://write.co.nz/resources/>; and
- <https://www.writingforcouncils.co.nz/resources/>

## Start with a laugh - A bunch of words walk into a bar

Here is a selection of howlers from wonderful list<sup>1</sup> of common errors in English usage.

Want to understand and avoid them?

They are decoded in the table at the very end of this Guide – and you can download all these excellent grammar bar jokes from the Water New Zealand Presentation Guide webpage as a standalone booklet.

A dangling participle walks into a bar. Enjoying a cocktail and chatting with the bartender, the evening passes pleasantly.

A bar was walked into by the passive voice.

Two quotation marks walk into a “bar.”

A non sequitur walks into a bar. In a strong wind, even turkeys can fly.

A mixed metaphor walks into a bar, seeing the handwriting on the wall but hoping to nip it in the bud.

A comma splice walks into a bar, it has a drink and then leaves.

At the end of the day, a cliché walks into a bar -- fresh as a daisy, cute as a button, and sharp as a tack.

A run-on sentence walks into a bar it starts flirting. With a cute little sentence fragment.

A misplaced modifier walks into a bar owned a man with a glass eye named Ralph.

A dyslexic walk into a bra.

## Te reo

### Whakamārama whānui / background

Te reo Māori (the Māori language) is Aotearoa New Zealand's language – a language for all New Zealanders.

Te reo Māori was first declared to be an official language of Aotearoa under the Māori Language Act 1987. Te Ture mō Te Reo Māori 2016 / The Māori Language Act 2016 was passed by parliament to replace the Māori Language Act 1987. This was the first Act in the history of Aotearoa to be written in Māori and English, with a provision that if there were any debate regarding interpretation, the Māori version would take precedence. The purpose of the Act is to affirm the status of the Māori language as the indigenous language of New Zealand, a taonga of iwi and Māori, a language valued by the nation and an official language of New Zealand, and in order to provide means to support and revitalise the Māori language.

Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori (the Māori Language Commission) was established under the 1987 Act. Its functions, adjusted under the 2016 Act, are to act as the Crown entity to give effect to the status of te reo Māori as an official language of New Zealand, and to promote the Māori language as both a living language and as an ordinary means of communication.

With the growing focus on Te Mana o Te Wai in the 2020 National Policy on Freshwater Management and the Water Services legislation, and the deepening understanding of the value of Te Ao Māori and mātauranga Māori, the water sector is becoming increasingly confident with use of te reo Māori. The sections below aim to guide our professional writing in this respect.

## Mita / dialect

Te reo Māori accommodates many regional mita / dialect variations throughout Aotearoa – adding to each Iwi/Hapū unique identity (see Figure 1). The greatest variations are in pronunciation and vocabulary; variations in grammar are relatively minor. A fluent speaker is able to determine, from the mita and kupu/words they use, where a person comes from. Mita is not considered a barrier to communication.

We encourage authors to write te reo Māori in the mita of their Iwi/Hapū (by whakapapa) or in the local mita of their surroundings. You may need some research and/or engagement with local Iwi/Hapū.

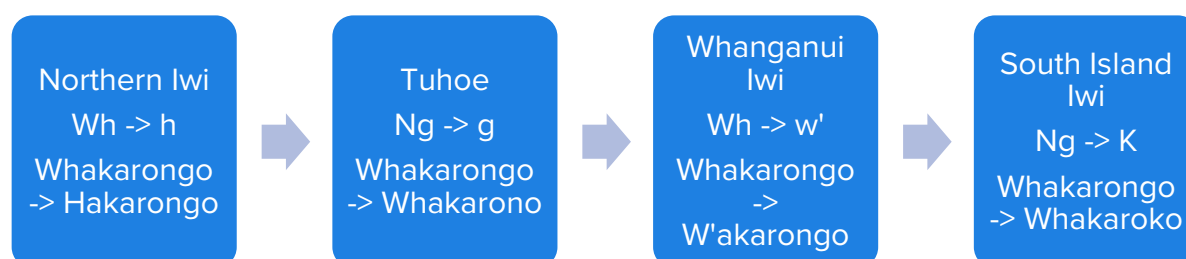


Figure 1: Examples of regional mita

## Tohutō / macron

A tohutō / macron, a line above a vowel, is typically used in the written form of te reo Māori to indicate if a vowel should be spoken with a long vowel sound, as opposed to a short sound. Writers in the Waikato rōhe/region use a double vowel instead of the tohutō.

Table 1: Vowel Sounds

Short Vowels	A as in “aloud”	E as in “entry”	I as in “eat”	O as in “order”	U as in “to”
Long Vowels (with tohutō)	Ā as in “car”	Ē as in “bed”	Ī as in “peep”	Ō as in “pork”	Ū as in “zoo”
Long Vowels (without tohutō)	Aa as in “car”	Ee as in “bed”	Ii as in “peep”	Oo as in “pork”	Uu as in “zoo”

Why is it important for the author to indicate the long vowel sound, either via tohutō or double vowels, in the written form of te reo Māori? Because they are vital to the meaning. Figure 2 shows an example of misspelling/mispronouncing kuou.

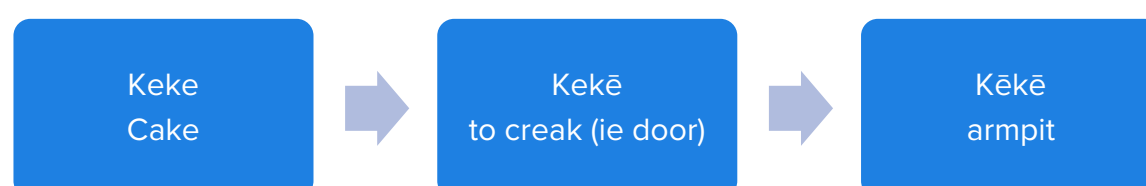


Figure 2: Examples of misspellings and mispronunciations

There is a guide to setting up macrons on your computer at <https://kupu.maori.nz/about/macrons-keyboard-setup> (accessed on 11th August 2021).

## Rauemi / Resources

Below are some of the resources on the website of **Waiora Aotearoa** Water New Zealand include (accessed on 10 August 2021):

- Information about the concept of Te mana o Te Wai: [https://www.waternz.org.nz/Article?Action=View&Article\\_id=2013](https://www.waternz.org.nz/Article?Action=View&Article_id=2013)
- Māori Language week 2021 poster: [https://www.waternz.org.nz/Article?Action=View&Article\\_id=2084](https://www.waternz.org.nz/Article?Action=View&Article_id=2084)
- a poster showing the different stages of water, and corresponding mauri (lifeforce) and hauora (health): [https://www.waternz.org.nz/Story?Action=View&Story\\_id=1357](https://www.waternz.org.nz/Story?Action=View&Story_id=1357)
- a poster showing Te Hurihanga Wai, the water cycle: [https://www.waternz.org.nz/Article?Action=View&Article\\_id=1862](https://www.waternz.org.nz/Article?Action=View&Article_id=1862)
- a poster showing key water types with a description of what they mean, including the importance of Ranginui (Sky Father) and Papatūānuku (Earth Mother) in providing us with precious waiora – life-sustaining water: [https://www.waternz.org.nz/Article?Action=View&Article\\_id=1861](https://www.waternz.org.nz/Article?Action=View&Article_id=1861)

The University of Canterbury has a great te reo Māori style guide. It's only eight pages long and on page 4 it also explains how to put a macron over a vowel.

Here's the reference:

University of Canterbury Te Whare Wananga o Waitaha. (No date) *UC Te Reo Māori Style Guide*. Downloadable from <https://www.canterbury.ac.nz/style-guide/uc-te-reo-maori-style-guide/> (accessed 10 August 2021).

There is more detail in the following guidelines, which are periodically updated:

Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori The Māori Language Commission. (2012) *Guidelines for Māori Orthography: Ngā Tikanga Tuhi a Te Taura Whiri i te reo Māori*. Downloadable from <https://www.tetaurawhiri.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/Corporate-docs/Orthographic-conventions/58e52e80e9/Guidelines-for-Maori-Language-Orthography.pdf> (accessed 10 August 2021).

## Numbers

### Words

- Numbers from one to ten are spelled out in words unless they:
  - are a title e.g. Chapter 4, Figure 4, Table 4
  - are dates, which should be written in the format 14 November 2021
  - are a range, e.g. 'cases 1-10 differed from cases 11-19'. An alternative form is to repeat the unit of measure and use 'to', e.g. '8cm to 10cm'
- Numbers from eleven up are in Arabic numerals unless they:
  - are part of a narrative, e.g. 'We reviewed thousands of cases.'
  - start a sentence starts with a number, e.g. 'Twenty of our sites now have updated'

### Symbols, measures and spaces

- 2½ years has no space between the whole number and the fraction
- when preceded by a numeral, use abbreviated forms for weights and measures at first mention, without spelling them out (cm, ha, g, kg, L, m, mg, mL, mm, km, m³/sec). There is no space between the amount and the abbreviated unit of measure



- there are no spaces between numbers and symbols, e.g. 50%; <30 cases; >30 cases.
- use of the symbol % is acceptable in technical writing such as for Water New Zealand conferences, although if you are re-writing your paper for Water magazine or another non-technical publication (print or online), the editors will prefer percentages to be spelled out, e.g. 50 per cent
- when preceded by a numeral, abbreviate metric forms for weights and measures at first mention, without spelling them out (cm, g, kg, kPA, L, m, mg, mL and mm). There is no space between the amount and the abbreviated unit of measure
- in narrative text, use full words for non-metric measurements such as inch, foot, yard, pound, ounce, quart, mile, minute, hour, second, day, week, month, year, or units of weight (pounds, ounces, etc.) Abbreviations are acceptable in tables.

## Words

### Capitals

- capitalisation is over-used in today's written English and interrupts the movement of the eye across text. Use capitals only for proper nouns (such as the names of people and places) and in the first letter of a sentence (sentence case)
- don't overuse capitals in job descriptions. For instance, chief executive is lower case, as is farmer or engineer or chief science advisor
- capitalise only the first letter in a sentence unless it contains a proper noun e.g. 'Stream profile changes in Wellington'
- a new system, product or service is only capitalised if the proprietor has trademarked, patented or branded it, thereby turning it into a proper noun like the name of a person, a city a company or a product like Coca Cola or Toyota
- directions (the points of the compass) are not capitalised e.g. north, south and south-east, unless the word forms part of a name, e.g. 'the West Coast region'
- the names of the seasons – spring, summer, autumn and winter – are not considered proper nouns, so they are not capitalised, even though days of the week and months of the year are capitalised – and yes, this is acknowledged to be counterintuitive!

### Acronyms

- always spell them out in full at first use, e.g. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)
- if there are a lot of them, include a master list in alphabetical order at the end of the paper
- If you are using an in-house or very specialised acronym that will be unfamiliar to your readers, consider spelling it out in full every time you use it. This can readily be done by creating an auto-correct that doesn't expand when you type the acronym for in-house or specialised audiences, e.g. 'u sda'

### New terms

When introducing a new or unusual term or concept, it is not necessary to put it in quotation marks (inverted commas) at first use. As with acronyms, always give a definition at first use, for example, 'Our innovative approach to interpreting environmental data involves using Bayesian analysis. Bayesian analysis means [definition here] and we use it because [reasons, benefits here].'

## Punctuation

### Apostrophes

#### Plurals vs possessives

- plurals have no apostrophe e.g.:
  - several NGOs came to the meeting
  - 1980s, not 1980's
- possessives have an apostrophe e.g.:
  - singular:
    - The sampler's drive was replaced (one sampler)
    - The storm's impact was... (one storm)
  - plural:
    - The samplers' drives were all replaced (two or more samplers)
    - The storms' impacts were... (two or more storms)

### Verbs

An apostrophe takes the place of a missing letter or letters when a verb is abbreviated. Such abbreviations are not appropriate in formal or technical writing such as conference papers.

Examples of usage in informal writing include:

- He'd left the team some years before (short for 'he had')
- She'd frequently inspect the site between formal sampling intervals (short for 'she would')
- It's a common error to assume that .... (short for 'it is')

### Exceptions

'It' is the exception to the rules just above:

- it's = it is, as for verbs above – as indicated above, it is better in formal writing like conference materials to say 'it is'
- its = a possessive, to distinguish it from the verb just above.

### Singular or plural?

The nouns 'data' and 'research' are common in technical writing and can be tricky<sup>2</sup>.

In Latin, the word *data* (like *media* or *spectra*) is a plural word, the singular being 'datum'. The word *data* commonly refers to many pieces of numerical information and should therefore be treated as a plural count noun, with a corresponding plural verb form, e.g.:

- the sample data **are** sorted in Table 1
- data **were** collected at 10-minute intervals during the storm

But *data* can sometimes be used in the singular as a mass noun, e.g.:

- our flood data **is stored** in our own servers and backed up in the cloud
- this flood data **yields** detailed maps of flood events

Unlike *data*, **research** should always be used as a mass noun with a singular verb. As a mass noun it can refer to a wide body of literature (e.g., 'current research in the field') or the work involved in a specific project (e.g., 'our research focused on ...'). If necessary, the term can be quantified, e.g., '28 studies were included in this research review.'

## One word or two?

The indicative collections below list some of the word commonly split, joined or hyphenated in error.

### Words that are one word not two

Groundwater	Stopbank	Wellbeing
Mudflats	Stormwater	Watercourse
Ongoing	Subcommittee	
Ratepayer	Wastewater	

### Words that are two words not one

Land owner	Long term	Water body
Land use	Sea bed	Under way

### Words that are sometimes one and sometimes two words

fresh water (noun) e.g. These species live in fresh water.	freshwater (adjective) e.g. These are freshwater fish.
on site (noun) e.g. The contractors worked hard on site.	onsite (adjective) e.g. The onsite contractors worked hard.
On board (noun) e.g. Everyone was on board with the idea.	onboard (adjective) e.g. Onboard equipment...

### Hyphenated or not hyphenated

Co-operate, co-operation	Coordinate, coordination
Pre-development (or before development)	Post-development (or after development)

## Commas

In a series, UK English usage is to use a serial comma to separate the elements with a comma after everyone except the one before the last item in the series; e.g.: The United Kingdom's flag is red, white and blue'.

By contrast, US English uses the serial comma after every item in the series; e.g. 'The flag of the United States of America is red, white, and blue.

### Quotation marks (aka inverted commas)

- single quotation marks are currently preferred practice in UK English, with double quote marks reserved for embedded quotes, e.g. The independent reviewer noted that 'One participant in our study said, "I would be happy to use this method," and encouraged others to support it.'
- quotation marks go on outside of a finished sentence, as shown just above.

American English does the reverse of UK English. E.g. The facilitator said, "Let us explore the meaning of the quote 'A carelessly-designed project takes three times longer to complete than expected; a carefully-planned project takes only twice as long,' which is known as Golub's Second Law."<sup>3</sup>

## Common errors

### Spelling

✓	✗
Focuses	Focusses
Organisation	Organization

In the UK and the US, words such as organization words have a 'z', but New Zealand usage is 's' – 'organisation'. Your employer may specify which usage you should follow.

### Frequently confused

Some of these misuses are becoming mainstream, but in our professional and technical writing we should avoid them.

#### Adverse vs averse

- adverse is a noun that means having a negative or harmful effect on something, e.g. 'adverse weather conditions made it difficult to access the site'
- averse is an adjective that means disliking or opposing, e.g. 'stakeholders were averse to the idea of ...' or 'stakeholders were risk-averse, so we opted for a lower-risk plan'

#### Advice vs advise

- advice is a noun, e.g. 'The consultant's advice was that we should....'
- advise is a verb, e.g. 'The consultant advised us to ....'

#### Affect vs effect

- affect is a verb, and it means to influence, impact or change. (Exception: psychologists and related professionals use 'affect', with emphasis on the first syllable, to refer to emotion.) Use of the verb: 'The storm's high intensity adversely affected the accuracy of flow monitoring equipment.'
- effect is a noun that refers to the result of a change, e.g.: 'The effect of this high-intensity storm was that monitoring data are not accurate over the peak flows.'
- so, A affects B and B experiences the effect of A's action. The storm affects the monitoring equipment. Inaccurate data is the effect of the impaired monitoring equipment.

#### Alternate vs alternative

- 'Jill is ambidextrous, so for most tasks she can alternate between using her left and right hands.' Alternate is a verb with the emphasis on the first and last syllables and it means to switch between things or use things in turn.
- 'SH1 is closed for maintenance. Please use SH99 as an alternative route.' Alternative is an adjective and means that if one option is not available, one or more other option or options are available. Emphasis is on the second syllable.

#### Dependent vs dependant

- dependent is an adjective that means depending upon, e.g. 'the project is dependent on community support'
- dependant is a noun meaning a person who relies on another, especially a family member, for support, e.g. 'families most affected by the proposal were those with dependants'

#### **Discrete vs Discreet**

- discreet is an adjective that means separate
- discreet is an adjective that means careful and prudent in one's speech or actions, especially in order to keep something confidential or to avoid embarrassment.

#### **Everyday vs every day**

- everyday is an adjective that means something that is normal, not out of the ordinary, often used or frequently occurring, e.g. 'in summer, convective thunderstorms are an everyday event'
- every day means literally every single day, e.g. 'the water quality monitoring equipment was checked every day'

#### **Gamut vs gambit**

- gamut means range, e.g. 'we experienced the full range of emotions from A to Z'
- gambit means an action that is calculated to gain an advantage, especially at the outset of a situation, e.g. 'his opening gambit is always to make a polarising remark'

#### **Incidences vs incidents**

- incidence means the rate or range of occurrence of something on a data set, especially something unwanted, e.g. 'the high incidence of equipment failures in poorly maintained samplers'
- incident refers to an occurrence or event, often a thing that is caused by something else. E.g. 'The incident was caused by failure of a worn valve,' or 'Our investigations indicated that these incidents and near misses stemmed from lack of hands-on training.'

#### **Partake vs participate**

- partake means to eat, e.g. 'we were invited to partake in refreshments'
- participate means to take part, e.g. 'we were invite to participate in the project'

#### **Practice vs practise**

- as with 'advice and advise', above, practice is a noun, e.g. 'Our standard practice is to ....'
- practise is a verb, e.g. 'Our field staff regularly practise their health and safety procedures'

#### **Principle vs principal**

- a principle is a fundamental proposition that serves as the foundation for a system of belief or operations or for a chain of reasoning, e.g. 'we based our engagement strategy on the principles of including, integrity... etc'
- a principal can refer to, depending on the context, a head teacher, a party to a contract, a main or major element and many more similar meanings, e.g. 'one of the principal reasons for our choice of Option B was...' The principles of plain English would advise use of a shorter word, saying, for example, 'our main reason was ...'

#### **Systematic vs systemic**

- systematic describes an orderly [system](#), method, or plan, e.g. ‘To correct the inaccurate data, we systematically reviewed every data source, as well as data entry methods...’ or ‘we undertook a systematic literature review, with the following steps:’
- systemic means system-wide; it describes a [system](#) in its entirety, e.g. ‘We discovered systemic flaws in the design and construction of the onsite devices’ or ‘We identified systemic inequality with respect to access to...’

## Layout

### Documents

- text: adjusted to both left and right margins
- figures and tables: centred on the page
- current usage is only one space between sentences

### Lists

#### In PowerPoints

Dot point lists make for easier reading. Unless otherwise specified in your in-house style guide, use this format for powerpoints:

- lower case initial letter (unless the first word is a proper noun)
- no commas or semi-colons or ‘and’ at the end
- no full stop at the end of the list

NOTE: Sometimes this style will not work, particularly if there is a sentence within the bullet points. In that case, you may need to use capital letters and full stops. Your choice should make it easy for the reader to quickly understand.

#### In documents

Lists of two items should run on in the text, e.g. Our two main findings related to temperature and salinity.

Lists of three items or more should be structured and punctuated as set out below.

Lists introduced by a **partial sentence** should:

- be preceded by a colon;
- start every entry with a lower case character;
- be punctuated by semi-colons; and
- finish with a full stop.

Lists introduced by a **full sentence** should be structured as follows.

- The list should be preceded by a full stop.
- Each entry should be a complete sentence.
- Each entry should start with a capital letter and end with a full stop.

Where a list is introduced by a **full sentence**, but the entries are simply categories or incomplete sentences, they should be structured as follows.

- Sentence case
- Short entries
- No punctuation

## Quotations

Quotations of up to 40 words should run on in text, enclosed by single quote marks and followed by the source in brackets (author, date, page number). Include the full reference in the reference list. Many quotes are wrongly attributed, so check the source with a site such as <https://quoteinvestigator.com/>.

Longer quotations (40+ words) should be in a new and indented paragraph. Omit the quote marks and cite the source of the quote on a separate line. Quotes within such longer quotes should be enclosed by single quote marks (see above).

Fair dealing is not clearly defined, but generally allows, for the purpose of criticism or review, the use of:

- a single prose extract of up to 400 words from a single source;
- a series of prose extracts of up to 800 words, each of which must be no longer than 300 words, from a single source
- such use should always be fully referenced.

More than this will need copyright permission from the copyright holder (or their representative, e.g. the publisher) before the manuscript is submitted.

## Citations

### Book

Smith, J. (2021) *Geomorphology*. 2nd edn. Penguin, New York.

### Book chapter

Smith, J. (with Brown, A., Jones, B. and Wong, C.) (2021) All about geomorphology. In A. Andrews, B. Bell and C. Charles (eds) *Geomorphology*. Penguin, New York, pp. 111– 115.

### Journal article

Smith, J. and Brown, A. (2021) Geomorphology. *Journal of Geomorphology*, 7(3), 165– 78.

### Paper in conference proceedings

Jones, B. (2021) Geomorphology. In: *Stormwater 2021*. Proceedings of Water New Zealand Stormwater Conference 2021. Tauranga, 12-14 May 2021.

### Internet article

Wong, C. (2021) Geomorphology. Available at [url]. Accessed [date].

## The grammar of bar jokes explained

The information here has been lightly edited from the source below.

[Linda K Sienkiewicz](http://lindak sienkiewicz.com/bar-jokes-and-grammar/), 14 May 2018. Downloaded from <http://lindak sienkiewicz.com/bar-jokes-and-grammar/> (accessed 10 August 2021)

What's better than bar jokes for English majors, grammar nerds and writers? Especially when they also serve as mini grammar lessons! These jokes are all over the internet, and unfortunately I couldn't find the author. But here they are for you, with my lessons.

**A dangling participle walks into a bar. Enjoying a cocktail and chatting with the bartender, the evening passes pleasantly.**

A dangling participle is one that was intended to modify a noun which is not actually present in the text. The second sentence reads as if the evening is enjoying the cocktail and chatting, which makes no sense.

**A bar was walked into by the passive voice.**

The passive voice is when the subject of the sentence is acted on by the verb. Good writers avoid using the passive voice, and instead use the active voice, writing, *A voice walked into the bar*. Passive voice is often used by people who are loath to say *they* made a mistake, and use the passive voice to say, 'Mistakes were made.' It leaves us to wonder who it was who made the mistake.

**An oxymoron walked into a bar, and the silence was deafening.**

Silence and deafening are self-contradicting words defined as an oxymoron. This is not necessarily a grammar error, however. If used well, oxymorons can be effective.

**Two quotation marks walk into a “bar.”**

Putting quotation marks around a word brings attention to it, and not always in a good way. [Unnecessary quotation marks](#) can cause a reader to question the validity of the quoted object. Was it really a bar, or was it pretending?

**A malapropism walks into a bar, looking for all intents and purposes like a wolf in cheap clothing, muttering epitaphs and casting dispersions on his magnificent other, who takes him for granite.**

Can you find the six malapropisms in this sentence? A malapropism is the mistaken and often amusing use of a word in place of a similar-sounding one. In this sentence;

1. 'intensive purposes' is mistakenly used for intents and purposes
2. 'cheap' clothing used for sheep
3. muttering 'epitaphs' instead of 'epigrams'
4. casting 'dispersions' mistakenly used for casting 'aspersions'
5. 'magnificent' other instead of 'significant' other
6. 'granite' instead of granted.

Find out more about Mrs Malaprop [here](#).

**Hyperbole totally rips into this insane bar and absolutely destroys everything.**

Hyperbole is exaggeration so insanely wild that it can't be taken seriously.

**A question mark walks into a bar?**

Say what?

**A non sequitur walks into a bar. In a strong wind, even turkeys can fly.**

A non sequitur is a conclusion or statement that does not logically follow from the previous argument or statement.

**Papyrus and Comic Sans walk into a bar. The bartender says, 'Get out — we don't serve your type here.'**

Papyrus and Comic Sans are typeface fonts.



**A mixed metaphor walks into a bar, seeing the handwriting on the wall but hoping to nip it in the bud.**

In this case, the two metaphors are not compatible. Compatible metaphors might be 'A metaphor walks into a bar, sees the handwriting on the wall and hopes to make a clean slate.' Of course, the sentence makes no sense, but that's beside the point.

**A comma splice walks into a bar, it has a drink and then leaves.**

A comma splice is when the comma doesn't connect the two parts of the sentences. Corrected, it would read, 'A comma walks into a bar, has a drink and then leaves.' The comma splice structure is annoyingly common. It can also be fixed by turning it into two separate sentences, e.g. 'A comma walks into a bar. It has a drink and then leaves.' (Except now there's no comma in the sentence.)

**A run-on sentence walks into a bar it starts flirting. With a cute little sentence fragment.**

Obviously. A bit like the comma splice above, this creates sentences that are just not grammatically correct.

**Three intransitive verbs walk into a bar. They sit. They converse. They depart.**

Do you know what's wrong with these sentences? Nothing! That's because intransitive verbs are action verbs that do not need to be followed by a direct object. Find out more about transitive verbs [here](#).

**A synonym strolls into a tavern.**

Synonyms are two words that have nearly the same meaning, like 'tavern' and 'bar'. I guess because people go on tavern strolls or bar strolls, 'strolls into a tavern' makes them synonyms, but personally I don't think it's a great example. Unless I'm missing something. Perhaps because this series is called 'words walk into a bar', use of the word 'tavern' illustrates the point...

**At the end of the day, a cliché walks into a bar — fresh as a daisy, cute as a button, and sharp as a tack.**

As George Orwell said, 'Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.' Linda finds these 'really unimaginative examples of clichés! At least they could have been drinking related, as in drunk as a skunk, three sheets to the wind, and fit to be tied,' she says.

**Falling slowly, softly falling, the chiasmus collapses to the bar floor.**

A chiasmus is a sentence structure in which words, grammatical constructions, or concepts are repeated in reverse order, in the same or a modified form, as in 'falling slowly, softly falling'.

**A figure of speech literally walks into a bar and ends up getting figuratively hammered.**

'Literally' means taken in the strictest sense. If someone literally walked into a bar, they would have walked into the wall of the building (as opposed to using the door to go inside.) Figuratively means with a more imaginative meaning or in a metaphorical sense. Here, the figure didn't get literally hit by a hammer, or figuratively 'hammered' as in 'drunk'; he was figuratively hammered by hitting the wall of the bar.

**An allusion walks into a bar, despite the fact that alcohol is its Achilles heel.**

An allusion an expression designed to call something to mind without mentioning it explicitly, or an indirect or passing reference. An Achilles heel is a shortcoming, weakness or failing. So alcohol is the shortcoming of this allusion.

**The subjunctive would have walked into a bar, had it only known one was there.**

A [subjunctive verb](#) denotes an action that did not occur for some reason and is therefore not a real action.

**A misplaced modifier walks into a bar owned by a man with a glass eye named Ralph.**

The modifier is the glass eye, and because it's misplaced in this sentence, it reads as if the eye is named Ralph. It should read, 'The modifier walks into a bar owned by a one-eyed man named Ralph.'

**The past, present, and future walked into a bar. The atmosphere was tense.**

Hopefully this needs no explanation!

**A dyslexic walks into a bra.**

If you're a person with dyslexia, this may not be funny.

**A verb walks into a bar, sees a beautiful noun, and suggests they conjugate. The noun declines.**

Linda says, 'I'll let you look up the definition of a [conjugated verb!](#)' This is one of the times I'm glad I took Latin at high school! (Ed.)

**An Oxford comma walks into a bar, where it spends the evening watching the television getting drunk and smoking cigars.**

The [Oxford](#) (or serial) comma is the final comma in a list of things, and it's missing in this list! It should read, '*An Oxford comma walks into a bar, where it spends the evening watching the television, getting drunk, and smoking cigars.*'

**A simile walks into a bar, as parched as a desert.**

A simile is a comparison of one thing with another thing of a different kind, and is used to make a description more emphatic or vivid.

**A gerund and an infinitive walk into a bar. The gerund suggested drinking to forget.**

A gerund, sometimes called a noun-verb, is a verb with 'ing' added, which turns it into a noun. An infinitive is a verb with 'to' preceding it e.g. 'walk' vs 'to walk'. More about gerunds [here](#).

**A hyphenated word and a non-hyphenated word walk into a bar and the bartender nearly chokes on the irony.**

The irony is there's no hyphen in hyphenated, and there is a hyphen in non-hyphenated!

## References cited

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- <sup>1</sup> Grammar walks into a bar. Sourced from <https://www.bar.com/bar-jokes/grammar-walks-into-a-bar/> (accessed 10 August 2021)
- <sup>2</sup> The information in this section is drawn from: Dr Brandon Jernigan (no date) *Singular and Plural Forms in Scientific Writing*. An article viewable at <https://www.aje.com/en/arc/editing-tip-singular-and-plural-forms-scientific-writing/> [accessed 24 September 2021]
- <sup>3</sup> We have not been able to find a primary source of Golub's Four Laws of Computerdom, but a list may be found at [ceir-miles.de/~eric/kabuff/texte/murphy2.html](http://ceir-miles.de/~eric/kabuff/texte/murphy2.html) [accessed 15 August 2019]