

GRAMMAR & SPELLING

INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses common questions of grammar and spelling for Board staff. Other chapters discuss typographical issues [[Typography, Chapter 13\(b\)](#)] and the content of Board documents and correspondence [[Content, Chapter 13\(a\)](#)]. This chapter specifically addresses:

- abbreviations (e.g., i.e., etc.);
- affect vs. effect;
- alternate vs. alternative;
- among vs. between;
- apostrophes;
- Canadian spellings;
- capitalization;
- colloquialisms;
- colons and semi-colons;
- commas;
- comprises vs. composed of;
- dashes, hyphens and compound words;
- dates;
- ellipses;
- however;
- its, it's and anthropomorphizing;
- legal terms;
- lists;
- numbers;
- parallel constructions;
- parentheses and parenthetical expressions;
- periods;
- plurals;
- quotation marks;
- subject-verb agreement;
- tense;
- that vs. which;
- that vs. who;
- who vs. whom; and
- whose vs. who's.

ABBREVIATIONS

Several abbreviations are commonly used in Board correspondence:

- **e.g.,** : This abbreviation means “for example”. There are periods after each letter and it is followed by a comma. It is often confused with *i.e.*, .
- **i.e.,** : This abbreviation means “that is” or “that is to say”. There are periods after each letter and it is followed by a comma. It is often confused with *e.g.*, .
- **etc.** : This abbreviation means “and others” or “and so forth” or “and similar things”. It is followed by a period. This abbreviation is never preceded by *and*. It is illogical to use *etc.* in a list that is introduced with *for example, such as* or *include/includes the following* because these phrases indicate that which follows are only some of the possibilities.

AFFECT vs. EFFECT

Affect means to influence (e.g., The mediator’s approach positively affected the prospect of settlement). *Effect* means the result (as a noun) or to bring about or accomplish (as a verb). For example, “The effect (noun) of the mediator’s conciliatory approach was to effect (verb) a settlement between the parties.”

ALTERNATE vs. ALTERNATIVE

Alternate means every other one in a series. *Alternative* means one of two possibilities. When used together with *alternative*, *alternate* may mean “a substitute”. For example, “The employer’s rejection of a voluntary recognition agreement left them no alternative; they took the alternate route of certification.”

AMONG vs. BETWEEN

Between is used when there are two individuals or organizations involved while *among* indicates a number greater than two. For example, “The province was divided between two trade unions” and “The province was divided among the three trade unions.”

APOSTROPHES

Apostrophes are used to signal possession, contractions and (occasionally) plurals.

Possession

If a word is singular, use *'s* to show possession (e.g., The director’s career is over). If the word already ends in an *s*, simply add an apostrophe at the end of the word. Adding an apostrophe where there is no possession is a common error. For example, use *voters list* not *voter’s list*. The list does not belong to the voters; rather it is a listing of the voters. Similarly, use *two weeks notice* not *two weeks’ notice* as the *two weeks* describes *notice* but does not possess it.

Contractions

When using contractions, an apostrophe indicates the missing letter(s). For example “I can’t stand the rock’n’roll music you’re listening to.”

Plurals

Do not normally use an apostrophe to create a plural. An exception is when you are discussing individual letters (e.g., p’s and q’s) or words being discussed as words (e.g., There are too many then’s in the paragraph). Do not use an apostrophe when pluralizing dates and acronyms. We write 1950s, RRSPs, etc. When truncating a decade, we write ’70s (the apostrophe indicating a contraction) not 70’s.

CANADIAN SPELLINGS

The Board usually prefers British spellings such as labour and colour but sometimes adopts American spellings such as unionize (instead of unionise). If in doubt, check the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*. The spellcheck function on Microsoft Word is not reliable in these matters.

CAPITALIZATION

The Board limits its use of ALL CAPS as this is difficult to read.

The Board capitalizes proper nouns (e.g., Labour Relations Board, the Board, the [Labour Relations Code](#), the Chair, the Vice-Chair). The Board inconsistently capitalizes *union* and *employer*. In Board decisions, they are capitalized when referring specifically to the parties. Otherwise and in other documents, they are not. The Board does not capitalize a general reference to an *officer* but does capitalize titles such as *Labour Relations Officer*, *Labour Relations Officer Jim Jung* or *Board Officer Nancy Tong*.

COLLOQUIALISMS

The daily language used at the Board is full of jargon and colour. Generally, colloquialisms and slang have no place in written correspondence. Some commonly used terms (e.g., salting, VRs, 40% support) are acceptable but it is important to consider if the audience will know (or be able to figure out from the context) what these terms mean. If in doubt, explain more fully what you mean.

COLONS AND SEMI-COLONS

Colons are used to signal that what follows further explains, defines, summarizes or comments on what came before. For example, “Our conclusions are strengthened by the employer’s actions: bargaining in bad faith, refusing to provide the union the names of bargaining unit members, and using covert surveillance technology.” Colons are frequently (but not exclusively) used when introducing lists (see *Lists* below).

Semi-colons link sentences and sentence fragments together. They are most commonly used in lists to separate items. When using semi-colons in a list, place an *and* at the end of the second-last item and a period after the final item. For example:

We considered several factors in our decision:

- the timeliness of the application;
- the evidence of employee support; and
- the appropriateness of the proposed bargaining unit.

It is also possible to link two sentences together with a semi-colon; this shows the ideas to be closely related. Stringing together sentences fragments; would be an inappropriate way to use a semi-colon; especially if the result is a run-on sentence.

COMMAS

Commas are used between the elements of a series but not before the final *and*, *or* or *nor* unless it is needed to avoid confusion. For example, “Our team comprises Jane, Kevin, Liam and Mary.”

Commas are also used to enclose parenthetical expressions (see below). Commas also appear before a conjunction (e.g., and, or, but) that introduces an independent clause. For example, “The situation is ambiguous, but the Code compels the Board to rule on the application.”

Introductory phrases are also set off by a comma. For example, “On December 7th, the Board issued a decision which will live in infamy.”

COMPRISES vs. COMPOSED OF

Comprise means “include” or “contain”. For example, “The union comprises three locals.” It would also be correct to say “The union is composed of three locals.” It is incorrect to marry *comprise* and *of* such as “The union is comprised of three locals.”

DASHES, HYPHENS AND COMPOUND WORDS

There are three types of dashes: hyphens, en dashes and em dashes.

Hyphens and Compounded Words

A hyphen is used to add clarity to a sentence in several ways:

- it separates two repeated vowels (e.g., re-educate);
- it separates three repeated consonants (e.g., doll-like);
- it avoids confusion between two words (e.g., re-creation vs. recreation); and
- it prevents misreading (e.g., co-worker, co-chair).

Hyphens also add clarity to fractions and the numbers 21 to 99 (e.g., one-third, twenty-one). Words having the prefix *self* always take a hyphen (e.g., self-employed, self-interest, self-flagellate).

The most common use of hyphens is in compound modifiers. We often add descriptive information that modifies nouns (via adjectives) or verbs (via adverbs). For example, we might have a horse that is red and hot. Depending on what we mean, we might refer to “the red, hot horse” (describing two attributes of the horse: colour and temperature) or to “the red-hot horse” (describing a horse glowing red because it is so hot). The latter construction is a compounding modifier (and one hell of a horse). That is, *hot* modifies *horse* and *red* modifies *hot*. Red hot, then, is a compound modifier and this is signalled by joining the words with a hyphen.

Compound modifiers are hyphenated only when the adjectives or adverbs precede the noun or verb. For example, compare “the part-time employees” with “the employees worked part time”. The hyphen in the first instance clarifies the relationship between *part*, *time*, and *employees*. This relationship is already clear in the latter instances because of the word placement.

Compound modifiers do not require hyphens when one ends in *ly*. For example, “the highly suspicious testimony” does not use a hyphen because the *ly* on *highly* already indicates it modifies *suspicious* and *suspicious* clearly modifies *testimony*. There is no confusion for the reader as to the relationship between the words therefore no hyphen is necessary. The Board makes a number of exceptions to compound modifiers for reasons of convention. For example, do not hyphenate labour relations and collective bargaining when they are compound modifiers.

En Dashes

An en dash (so named because it is the width of the letter n) is used primarily to indicate a range of numbers. For example “Refer to pages 13 – 16 of the decision.” In some constructions, the en dash takes the place of both *from* and *to*. For example, “I will be absent March 1 – 10.” A single space is required on either side of an en dash.

A double hyphen is not the same as an en dash. In Microsoft word, the program will automatically change a double hyphen into an en dash. Type a character, a space, two hyphens, another space and another character and the computer converts the hyphens into an en dash. If you omit the spaces, the computer turns the double hyphen into an em dash (see below).

Em Dashes

An em dash (so named because it is the width of the letter m) is used to set off a parenthetical comment (see below) when you need a more abrupt break than commas provide for. For example, “Many of the bargaining units are quite small—10 to 20 employees—and this means their viability is questionable.” You can also use an em dash to introduce a mid-sentence list punctuated by commas. For example, “All employees—full-time, part-time, casual—are included in the bargaining unit.” No spaces are required on either side of the em dash.

A double hyphen is not the same as an em dash. In Microsoft word, the program will automatically change a double hyphen into an em dash. Type a character, two hyphens and start another word and the computer converts the double hyphens into an em dash. If you add spaces on either side of the hyphens, the computer turns the double hyphen into an en dash (see above).

DATES

The Board writes dates as: Month Day, Year. For example: “September 13, 1970”. When a date is used as an introductory phrase, a comma follows the year. For example, “On September 13, 1970, the respondent incorporated the company.”

When a year is not necessary (as it has been previously specified), the Board uses a Month-Day formulation. For example, “July 15”. Some writers prefer “July 15th”.

When a Month-Year formulation is necessary, the Board writes “July 1987” or “July of 1987”.

ELLIPSES

When quoting passages, it is occasionally desirable to omit a portion of the passage to, for example, highlight only relevant materials. The punctuation mark to use is the ellipsis (...).

If a portion of a single sentence is omitted, place the ellipsis immediately following the last word before the omission and follow the ellipsis with a space. For example, “The panel... noted that it was not bound by the rules of evidence as a court would be.”

If the omission includes a portion of a sentence (and potentially other sentences), place the ellipsis immediately following the last word before the omission and follow the ellipsis with a space and a period. For example, “The remedy is not within the power of the panel to make... . For this reason, the applicant’s request is denied.”

When one or more intervening paragraphs are omitted, place an ellipsis on a line by itself between the two relevant paragraphs.

HOWEVER

The word *however* is usually taken to mean “nevertheless” and denotes an exception to a normal state of affairs. For example, we might say: “The sky is usually blue, however, at sunset it appears pink.” The meaning of *however* changes depending upon its position in a sentence. When a sentence starts with *however*, *however* means “in whatever way” or “to whatever extent”. These meanings are rarely conveyed using *however*.

In complex paragraphs (such as those in Board decisions), a writer may break up a long sentence and, consequently, *however* (meaning nevertheless) may appear at the beginning of a sentence. In these cases, it may be better to use *nevertheless* or rewrite the passage such that *however* appears mid-sentence.

ITS, IT'S AND ANTHROPOMORPHIZING, OH MY

It's is a contraction of *it is*. *Its* is the possessive. This question comes up most frequently when describing a decision of the Board. A decision of the Board is *its* decision, not *our decision*.

This identifies our tendency to anthropomorphize the Board (and unions). The Board is an *it* (that is, the Board is a thing), not a *we* (that is, the Board is not a group of people). When the Board directs something, *it directs*, not *we direct*. Transmogrifying the Board from a thing to a person is not done.

LEGAL TERMS

The Board (particularly in its decisions) uses a number of legal terms most often derived from Latin. These terms should be italicized. Some of the common terms include:

Term	Meaning
<i>bona fides</i>	honesty, good faith, sincerity
<i>certiorari</i>	a legal proceeding wherein a Board decision is reviewed by the courts for jurisdictional error, denial of a fair hearing, and in some cases, mistakes of law; has been largely replaced by judicial review process
<i>de jure</i>	as a matter of law, lawful
<i>de novo</i>	anew, afresh; often in the context of a rehearing of a matter
<i>ergo</i>	therefore
<i>et al.</i>	and others
<i>ex juris</i>	out of jurisdiction
<i>ex parte</i>	on the part of one side only; normally an application or proceeding occurring without notice to or the presence of the other(s)
<i>factum</i>	deed, act; a written argument of statement of fact or law submitted by counsel to the Board or Court
<i>functus officio</i>	having discharged one's duty; often used to describe the exhaustion of a tribunal's jurisdiction once a matter has been ruled upon
<i>inter alia</i>	among other things
<i>intra vires</i>	within its powers
<i>ipso facto</i>	by the fact itself
<i>mandamus</i>	legal proceedings brought in the courts to

	compel a public authority to perform some statutory duty; sometimes replaced by the judicial review process
<i>mens rea</i>	guilty mind; committed with requisite intent
<i>obiter dictum</i>	a passing or incidental statement; an opinion or decision contained in a judgment that is not essential for the disposition of the case and which, therefore, is not binding as precedent
<i>prima facie</i>	on the face of things
<i>prima facie case</i>	is a case that has been adequately supported in essential respects by sufficient evidence for it to be taken as proved in the absence of adequate evidence to the contrary
<i>prima facie evidence</i>	evidence which is of sufficient weight to require the opposite party to answer it and which, unless explained or contradicted, may be sufficient to establish the facts of an issue
<i>pro forma</i>	as a matter of form
<i>qua</i>	in the character or capacity of
<i>quid pro quo</i>	what for what
<i>res judicata</i>	things already decided
<i>sine die</i>	indefinitely
<i>ultra vires</i>	beyond the power or jurisdiction of a tribunal
<i>viva voce</i>	oral testimony under oath

LISTS

Two items do not make a list. A list should have at least three items. Sometimes a list of three items reads more smoothly if left as part of a sentence instead of pulled out and bulleted. Choose the construction that is clearer and easier to read.

When using a bulleted or number list, wherever possible, lead in with a complete sentence. Use numbered lists only if it serves a specific purpose. If you have a complete sentence, use a colon as the end punctuation. If each point is a complete sentence, begin the point with a capital letter and end it with a period. If each point is a word or a phrase, begin with a lower case letter and end each line with a semi colon. At the second last line, add an and/or/but after the semi-colon. On the final line, end with a period. Try to make each point parallel in construction (see Parallel Constructions below).

NUMBERS

Numbers below 10 (i.e., zero to nine) are written out unless they are a part of a date or other numeric construction (e.g., May 2, 2014, Chapter 1, Section 4(c), the combination is 18, 2, 24). Numbers above nine are represented by figures unless they form part of a quotation. All numbers are spelled out when they begin a sentence.

PARALLEL CONSTRUCTIONS

Elements in a series should be parallel (i.e., similar) in construction. Start with all action words (in the same tense), all nouns, or all articles such as *a* or *the*. Without parallelism, sentences can be awkward, confusing and they are more difficult to read. Such as the preceding sentence when it drifted away from the superior parallel construction of “awkward, confusing and difficult to read”.

PARENTHESES AND PARENTHETIC EXPRESSIONS

A parenthetical expression is one inserted in the text—often using commas, parentheses or em dashes—as an aside or an afterthought. It can be a word, phrase or list which is germane to the sentence. When the parenthetical expression is inserted with parentheses (as distinct from brackets), this usually means it is a factual aside of little import. A parenthetical expression inserted using em dashes—which occurs far too often—is much more important as it denotes an important and relevant break in thought. Parenthetical expressions encased in commas, the most common form of parenthetical expression, are often written incorrectly. At issue is that the second comma, the one that closes the parenthetical expression is often omitted. Like in the previous sentence.

PERIODS

Periods signify the end of a sentence. Periods can also signify abbreviations (e.g., I.B.E.W.). The Board normally omits periods in abbreviations (e.g., IBEW) because it reads better.

PLURALS

Most words can be made a plural by adding an *s*, *es* or *ies*. Plurals of dates, numbers, abbreviations do not take an apostrophe. It's 1950s, the '30s, the RRSPs. Some tricky plurals common to the Board include:

- Attorneys General (when referring to the federal and provincial AGs);
- Certificates No. (when referring to multiple certificates); and
- Files No. (when referring to multiple files).

QUOTATION MARKS

The Board prefers smart quotes (i.e., “”) to dumb quotes (i.e., "). Quotation marks are normally used to indicate a direct quotation when it forms part of the text. Longer quotations are often indented and therefore do not require quotation marks.

Quotations stretching over several paragraphs (such as occurs when reporting dialogue) require an opening quotation mark at the beginning of each paragraph but require a closing quotation mark only at the end of the last paragraph. This signifies that the same individual is speaking throughout.

“It’s hot here,” said John.

John opined, “But how do we define hot?”

“Is it a state of mind or an objective event?”

John was obviously billing by the hour.

Commas and periods normally go inside quotation marks; colons and semi-colons normally go outside. Question and exclamation marks can go inside or outside of the quotation marks, depending on whether they are a part of the quotation or a part of the surrounding text.

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT, MORE OR LESS

Sentences normally have subjects and verbs. The conjugation of verb must agree with the number of the subjects. Native speakers normally make the right choice reflexively. Some cases can, however, be tricky and the correct resolution may seem counter intuitive.

Incorrect	Correct	Why?
The bittersweet flavour of youth—its trials, its joys, its adventures, its challenges—are not soon forgotten.	The bittersweet flavour of youth—its trials, its joys, its adventures, its challenges—is not soon forgotten.	The subject is the bittersweet flavour of youth. It is a single thing therefore the verb must be single (is vs. are).
His speech as well as his manner are objectionable.	His speech as well as his manner is objectionable.	Connecting another noun with <i>as well as</i> does not change the subject (his speech) from the singular to the plural.

The key is to determine the number of the subject. This may depend upon the nature of the subject. The contents of a jar of jam is singular (as we can’t count the “jams”) whereas the contents of a jar of marbles is plural (as we can count each marble).

Similar issues may have to be resolved when deciding between *less* and *fewer*. *Less* refers to a quantity while *fewer* refers to a number. For example, Sally has less jam than Jim; Jim has fewer marbles than Sally. Interestingly, *more* works with both quantity and number.

TENSE

There are three main tenses: past, present and future plus myriad variation (e.g., past perfect, past imperfect, pluperfect). When writing, it is normal to remain in a single tense. For example, synopses are normally written in the past tense: the Board received an application, an officer investigated, the parties objected, the Board ordered a vote, etc. Jumping between tenses is disconcerted.

The follow database work is conducted in a specific tense:

Topic	Tense
resolution strategy	future
LRO comments	present tense
hearing summaries	present tense
synopses	past tense

THAT vs. WHICH

That defines, *which* describes. That is to say, when there are several subjects, using *that* allows us to specify which one. *Which* is normally used to add information about a single identifiable subject. Consider:

- The certification application that was filed by UA 496 has been sent to vote.
- The certification application, which was filed by UA 496, has been sent to vote.

The first example suggests there are many certification applications and the author is attempting to isolate the specific application by reference to the identity of the applicant. The second example suggests there is just one certification application in question and the author is adding some incidental information about the identity of the applicant.

A reasonable rule of thumb for native speakers is to say a sentence both ways. If it sounds okay with *that* as well as *which*, use *that*. I don't know why that rule of thumb works... errr... I don't know which rule of thumb works... but it does.

THAT vs. WHO

When identifying a subject, we use *that* to identify entities (e.g., a company, the Board, a union) and *who* to identify people (e.g., Betty Lou Stelling, a Chair). For example, "The Board panel that heard

the DFR complaint was mystified by employee's application" versus "The Chair who heard the DFR complaint was mystified by the employee's application."

WHO vs. WHOM

Use *who* when it stands for he, she or they. Use *whom* when it stands for him, her or them.

WHOSE vs. WHO'S

Whose is possessive (e.g., Whose file is this?). *Who's* is a contraction of *who is* (e.g., Who's responsible for this file?).