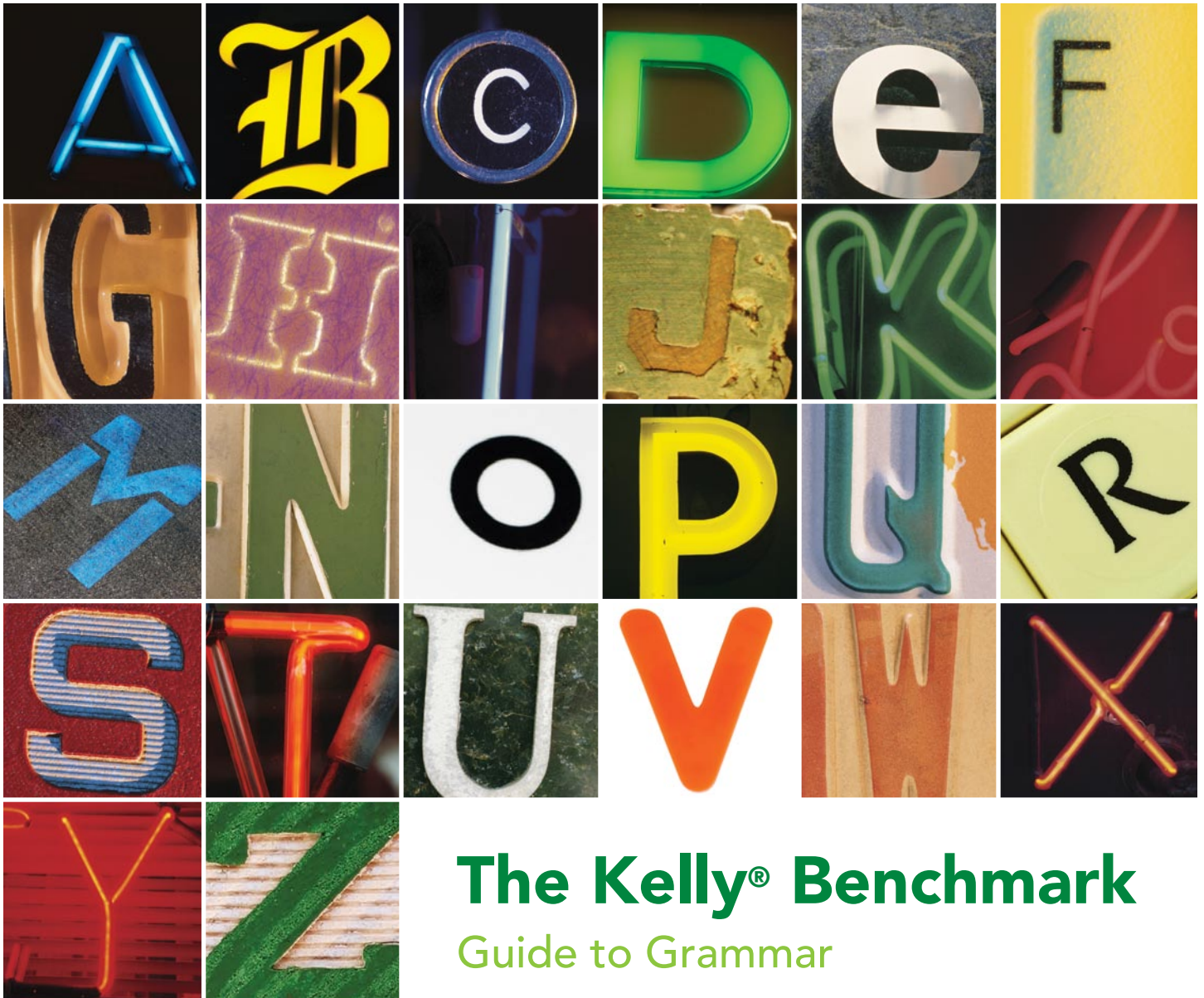


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Talent at work



The Kelly[®] Benchmark

Guide to Grammar

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Brush up your grammar and land that job

First impressions count, and never more so than when you are presenting yourself to a prospective employer. Writing a grammatically correct résumé and an accomplished cover letter can be just what you need to set you apart from the crowd, and win an all-important interview. Far too often, excellent candidates get overlooked because their English and grammar are just not very impressive. Make sure you're not one of them.

While we don't all need to be Shakespeare, we do need to be precise, efficient, and buttoned down with written English. Not your strong point? Don't despair, the *Kelly Benchmark Guide to Grammar* should help you to brush up your skills and write a résumé and letter that will get you noticed—for all the right reasons. Soon you'll be meeting the Kelly Benchmark—the perfect candidate for the ideal job.

Topics covered in this guide:

Kelly Benchmark Grammar Tip 1 – How to use apostrophes

Kelly Benchmark Grammar Tip 2 – When to use *I* or *Me*

Kelly Benchmark Grammar Tip 3 – Passive vs. active voice

Kelly Benchmark Grammar Tip 4 – Commonly misused words

Kelly Benchmark Grammar Tips Answer Key

Kelly Benchmark Grammar Tip 1

How to use apostrophes

There are two main reasons to use an apostrophe:

- For contractions
- To indicate that something belongs to a person, object, or organization

When to use it

Contractions – To contract and combine two words, an apostrophe is used in place of a specific letter.

- *Wasn't* instead of *was not*
- *Isn't* instead of *is not*
- *Doesn't* instead of *does not*
- *You're* instead of *you are* (this is commonly mistaken for *your*, which is a possessive)

Singular Possessive – To denote something belonging to a single person or object.

How to use – Add an apostrophe and an s ('s) to the end of the subject.

- Charlotte borrowed Nikki's butter from the fridge.
- Yvette's mood had not improved since Tuesday.
- Eleanor's yearning for nice shoes rivaled Ali's.
- It was the installer's responsibility to check the wiring, not our client's.
- The fish's water needed changing.

Exception – What if your singular name or word already ends in s? Then just add the apostrophe to the end of the name without adding another s.

- I went to St. James' Palace.
- Roger Federer is tennis' finest ambassador.
- He was the class' most outspoken member.
- Sherlock Holmes' partner was Watson.

Plural Possessive – To denote something belonging to more than one person or object.

How to use – Add an apostrophe.

- The trees' leaves had all been blown away.
- The Browns' house was condemned and knocked down.
- The curtains' colors were stunning.

Exception – Some nouns (e.g., mice, men, children) are already plural without ending with an s. Therefore, you can treat these like single nouns and add 's.

- The men's shoes were all muddy.
- The children's day was ruined.
- The mice's days were numbered.

Kelly Benchmark Grammar Tip 1

How to use apostrophes

Its vs. It's – The word *its* is used to denote something belonging to an object. It works just like *your, his, her, our, or their* in that it can only ever be used to denote possession.

- The dog ate its bone.
- Everything is in its place.

The word *it's* is a contraction for *it is* or *it has* and **not interchangeable** with *its*. Just remember that the apostrophe is meant to replace an omitted letter, so spelling out *it's* (*it is* or *it has*) will allow you to remember if you need to use *it's* or *its*.

- It's (it is) a shame summer is so short.
- It's (it has) been a pleasure working with you.

Test yourself

Which is right?

1.
 - a) The Jones' house is an unused windmill, and they are delighted with it.
 - b) The Jones's house is an unused windmill, and they are delighted with it.
 - d) The Jone's house is an unused windmill, and they are delighted with it.
2.
 - a) Mikes' car is in the shop again.
 - b) Mike's car is in the shop again.
3.
 - a) Its not as bad as it seems.
 - b) It's not as bad as it seems.
4.
 - a) I've given the cat its dinner.
 - b) I've given the cat it's dinner.
5.
 - a) The children's fair is starting today.
 - b) The childrens' fair is starting today.

Kelly Benchmark Grammar Tip 2

When to use *I* or *Me*

The rules on *I* and *me* are actually very simple.

If you are the subject (active person) in the sentence, use *I*.

If you are the object (following the action of the verb) of the sentence, use *me*.

Examples of *I* as subject:

- I drove the car.
- I went to visit my grandmother.
- I decorated the spare room.

Most people don't have a problem with this, but they get confused when another person is added in. But it's easy! Just add them in.

- Peter and I drove the car.
- My cousin Sue and I went to visit our grandmother.
- Dad and I decorated the spare room.

If you are the object of a sentence (if something is being done for or to you), you will likely use *me*.

- The waitress brought me a coffee.
- Thank you for giving me your pen yesterday.
- The whole thing seemed wrong to me.

If you add another person, and you are both still the object of a sentence, *me* is still the correct word to use.

- The waitress brought Peter and me our coffee.
- Thank you for giving Simon and me your pen yesterday.
- The whole thing seemed wrong to Jane and me.

It's easy to test for this. Think of a sentence inside your head, such as "Uncle Jim gave Steve and I five dollars." If you wouldn't say "Uncle Jim gave I five dollars" then you've got the wrong one! You would say "Uncle Jim gave me five dollars," so the correct version is "Uncle Jim gave Steve and me five dollars."

Kelly Benchmark Grammar Tip 2

When to use *I* or *Me*—test yourself

Test yourself

Which is correct?

1.
 - a) John and me were both very grateful for the present.
 - b) John and I were both very grateful for the present.

2.
 - a) They gave Sue and I a typing test at the interview.
 - b) They gave Sue and me a typing test at the interview.

3.
 - a) Chris and me were puzzled at the outcome of the research.
 - b) Chris and I were puzzled at the outcome of the research.

4.
 - a) The second thing he gave Sally and me was a map.
 - b) The second thing he gave Sally and I was a map.

Kelly Benchmark Grammar Tip 3

Active vs. passive voice

In cover letters or any kind of professional writing, it's critical to know the difference between an active voice and a passive voice.

When a sentence is written in the **active** voice, the subject performs the action.

- The Kelly employee wrote a great cover letter.

When a sentence is written in the **passive** voice, the subject is acted upon.

- The great cover letter was written by the Kelly employee.

Can you see the difference? And can you see how much stronger and more dynamic the active voice sounds? Therein lies the importance of using the active voice in any professional writing. Writing in the active voice is more direct, and quickly and easily identifies who performed what action. This is especially critical when writing about your accomplishments (e.g., tasks you performed for an employer).

Consider these examples:

Active: I frequently help my boss with time-sensitive, important projects.

Passive: My boss is helped with time-sensitive, important projects by me.

Active: The department head presented his new strategy to the board members.

Passive: The new strategy was presented to the board members by the department head.

Active: The manager made the hiring decision.

Passive: The hiring decision was made by the manager.

Not only is the passive voice wordier and clumsier, it also diminishes the strength of one's actions. A passive voice can muddle a sentence's meaning, and confuse the reader as to who did what.

As with everything, there are exceptions. Sometimes, a passive voice is the right way to go.

When the person performing the action is unknown: This town was founded in 1849.

When the person performing the action is unimportant: Your package was shipped yesterday.

When the person performing the action is better left unsaid: The wrong package was sent to you.

Kelly Benchmark Grammar Tip 3

Active vs. passive voice

Test Yourself

Which sentence works better?

1.
 - a) The stellar résumé was written by me.
 - b) I wrote the stellar résumé.

2.
 - a) The Kelly employees performed a series of critical tasks that impressed the customer.
 - b) A series of critical tasks that impressed the customer were performed by the Kelly employees.

3.
 - a) The wrong package was sent to you.
 - b) Joe Smith, one of our packagers, sent you the wrong package.

4.
 - a) Jane Smith, Joe's sister, will review your order and correct the mistake.
 - b) Your order will be reviewed and the mistake will be corrected.

Kelly Benchmark Grammar Tip 4

Commonly misused words

Below are some of the most commonly misused words in the English language. When drafting your résumé and cover letter, make sure you're using the correct words. Few things ruin your chances for an interview faster than a badly misused word in the opening paragraph of your cover letter.

Ensure vs. Insure

The words **ensure** (to make sure of) and **insure** (to provide insurance on) are often used interchangeably, even though they mean completely different things.

A very common misuse is to say, for example, "He'll insure that you receive the best service." This is wrong. **The only time you should ever use the word insure is when talking about insurance (e.g., auto, home).** Unless you're talking about an insurance policy, leave the word **insure** alone. In almost every instance outside of insurance, you'll be using ensure. You'll **ensure** (make sure) that you come across more professionally if you use these words correctly.

Compliment vs. Complement

A **compliment** is an **expression of esteem or praise** ("Lisa, you're the best boss anywhere").

A **complement** is something that **accompanies or completes something else** ("Jelly is the perfect complement to a peanut butter sandwich"). The two words are not interchangeable.

- An easy way to remember the difference: a **complement completes** something.

Stationary vs. Stationery

Stationary is a lazy word. It just sits around and never moves. Probably because the word itself means **immobile and unchanging**.

Stationery refers to office supplies (pens, papers, envelopes). Therein lies the easiest way to remember the difference between these two words: stationery (office supplies) is spelled with an **e**. And what other office supply-related word begins with an **e**? Envelopes!

There vs. Their vs. They're

There pertains to location or a state (e.g., "There goes the neighborhood"), or functions to introduce a sentence or a clause (e.g., "In the future, there will be robots").

- The easiest way to remember this? The clue is in the word itself. **There**, as in "from here to there." Since "here" can only ever be used to describe a location or state, and it's built into "there," that should make it easy for you to remember it.

Their is the possessive for a group of "them" (e.g., "Their work day is hectic."). **That's all it ever is.**

- The easiest way to remember this is to remember their heir (as in, "Their heir will rule the republic one day"). **Their**. Their heir. Get it?

They're is the abbreviated version of "they are," plain and simple. Remember that the apostrophe is replacing an omitted letter. So, anytime you're not sure if **they're** is the right word to use in a situation (e.g., "They're coffee is among the best in the industry," "They're are the projects I promised you last week"), simply spell out the apostrophe, and see if it makes sense.

Kelly Benchmark Grammar Tip 4

Commonly misused words

Effect vs. Affect

An **effect** (noun) is an end-result, an intent, a fulfillment, something that follows an antecedent.

- The incident had a powerful effect on the crowd.
- The short-term effect of the lowered price was a big boost in sales.

These are the more typical usages for **effect** as noun. However, **effect** can also be a transitive verb. To **effect** (verb) is to cause a state to come into being, to bring about a change or accomplishment.

- The citizens were able to effect a change in government policy.
- The candidate promised to effect strong changes.

The bad news is that **affect** can also be a verb and a noun. The good news is that **affect** (noun) is “the conscious subjective aspect of an emotion considered apart from bodily changes.” In other words, unless you’re writing a psychology paper, you will never use **affect** as a noun. **Affect** is almost always a verb.

To **affect** (verb) is to produce an effect (this is probably why the two words are so commonly interchanged), alteration, or result upon.

- Our competition affects the way we do business.
- These guidelines will positively affect the way you write cover letters.

A lesser-known (and very literary) verb usage for affect is to put on a display or pretense of. Don’t worry, you probably will never use this in a cover letter.

- The English professor affected great knowledge of every literary work every written.

An easy way to remember the difference between **affect** and **effect** is to think of **affect** as an **action** (you’re affecting something). **Affect. Action.** Both begin with As. A similar reminder exists for **effect** (noun). Remember that an **effect** is an **end-result. Effect. End-result.**

Kelly Benchmark Grammar Tip 4

Commonly misused words

Test yourself

Which sentence is correct?

1.

- a) With our comprehensive package, we can insure you receive the best service anywhere.
- b) With our comprehensive package, we can ensure you receive the best service anywhere.

2.

- a) This policy will insure you for the full amount of your vehicle.
- b) This policy will ensure you for the full amount of your vehicle.

3.

- a) Their all over there.
- b) They're all over there.
- c) There all over their.
- d) They're all over their.

4.

- a) There picnic was ruined by the rain.
- b) Their picnic was ruined by the rain.

5.

- a) Over they're is where their picnic will be held tomorrow.
- b) Over there is where they're picnic will be held tomorrow.
- c) Over there is where their picnic will be held tomorrow.
- d) Over their is where there picnic will be held tomorrow.

6.

- a) I compliment you on your fine choice of stationery and office supplies.
- b) I complement you on your fine choice of stationary and office supplies.
- c) I compliment you on your fine choice of stationary and office supplies.
- d) I complement you on your fine choice of stationery and office supplies.

7.

- a) The overall affect of the blown home run call was dismay among the fans.
- b) The blown home run call negatively affected the mood of the fans.

8.

- a) To effect a change, you must first find a way to affect how people perceive you.
- b) To affect a change, you must first find a way to effect how people perceive you.

Kelly Benchmark Grammar Tips

Answer Key

How to use apostrophes

1. a) The Jones' house is an unused windmill, and they are delighted with it.
2. b) Mike's car is in the shop again.
3. b) It's not as bad as it seems.
4. a) I've given the cat its dinner.
5. a) The children's fair is starting today.

When to use I or Me

1. b) John and I were both very grateful for the present.
2. b) They gave Sue and me a typing test at the interview.
3. b) Chris and I were puzzled at the outcome of the research.
4. a) The second thing he gave Sally and me was a map.

Active vs. passive voice

1. b) I wrote the stellar résumé.
2. a) The Kelly employees performed a series of critical tasks that impressed the customer.
3. a) The wrong package was sent to you. (Unless you want to get Joe Smith in trouble, in which case you'd go with a!)
4. b) Your order will be reviewed and the mistake will be corrected. (Unless you think the customer would care that someone named Jane Smith would be dealing with the issue!)

Commonly misused words

1. b) With our comprehensive package, we can ensure you receive the best service anywhere.
2. a) This policy will insure you for the full amount of your vehicle.
3. b) They're all over there.
4. b) Their picnic was ruined by the rain.
5. c) Over there is where their picnic will be held tomorrow.
6. a) I compliment you on your fine choice of stationery and office supplies.
7. b) The blown home run call negatively affected the mood of the fans.
8. a) To effect a change, you must first find a way to affect how people perceive you.