



The Kelly Benchmark Guide to Grammar

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Talent at work

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 CV and an accomplished covering 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 use of the written word is 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 Services simple guidelines to effective grammar should help you to brush up your skills and write a CV and letter to 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 tips 1 – how to use apostrophes

Kelly Benchmark grammar tips 2 – when to use 'I' or 'Me'

Kelly Benchmark grammar tips 3 – 'imply' vs 'infer'

Kelly Benchmark grammar tips 4 – 'effect' vs 'affect'

Kelly Benchmark grammar tips – 1

How to use apostrophes

There are two main reasons to use an apostrophe:

- a) to indicate that something belongs to a person, object or organisation
- b) to indicate that there is a letter 'missing' or that two words have been made into one e.g. 'don't' for 'do not' or 'you're' for 'you are' or 'they're' for 'they are'

By the way don't forget it's 'your' if you own it, but 'you're' if it means 'you are'

So how do you use them?

Examples for a) belonging to something/somebody there's only one of - add an apostrophe and an 's'.

Charlotte borrowed Nikki's butter from the fridge. Yvette's mood had not improved since Tuesday. Eleanor's yearning for nice shoes rivalled Ali's. It was the installer's responsibility to check the wiring, not our client's. The car's brakes failed and caused a crash. The fish's water needed changing.

What if your singular name or word already ends in s? Add another one regardless.

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

Examples for a) belonging to something/somebody there's more than one of - add an apostrophe.

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

Plural nouns. Some nouns are already plural, e.g. mice, men, children. Treat these like a single noun, e.g. The men's shoes were all muddy. The children's tea was ruined. The mice's days were numbered.

The exception:

The word 'its', if it is used to show that something belongs to an object does NOT have an apostrophe. E.g. The dog ate its bone. Everything in its place. In this case, try to think of 'its' as being like 'his', 'her', 'our' or 'their'. None of them have an apostrophe. You only use an apostrophe in 'it's' if it means 'it is' or 'it has' e.g. "It's been real."

Examples for b) when there's (there is) a bit missing:

Wasn't, isn't, doesn't, didn't, can't, don't (the apostrophe replaces the missing 'o')
You're, they're, I'm (replaces a missing 'a') It's, there's, he's, she's (replaces a missing 'i') Let's (replaces a missing 'u') I've, you've, we've, they've (replaces a missing 'ha').

When **not** to use an apostrophe:

Don't put an apostrophe in if you just have a plural – more than one

E.g. The Browns bought a loaf of bread. The summer sales are now on. The holidays are here. The war lasted for the first half of the nineteen forties. A Levels. CVs.

You don't use an apostrophe in a verb, e.g. "The girl dresses quickly", or "The plan encompasses everything", or "Reggie fishes every weekend." There's nothing missing and it doesn't signify ownership, so you don't need an apostrophe.

Test yourself

Which is right?

1.
 - a) The Smiths' house is a disused windmill, and they are delighted with it.
 - b) The Smiths's house is a disused windmill, and they are delighted with it.
 - c) The Smiths house is a disused windmill, and they are delighted with it.
 - d) The Smith's house is a disused windmill, and they are delighted with it.

2.

- a) The changes were for the better.
- b) The changes' were for the better.
- c) The change's were for the better.

3.

- a) He always let's me go first.
- b) He always lets me go first.

4.

- a) Its not as bad as it seems.
- b) It's not as bad as it seems.

5.

- a) I've given the cat its dinner.
- b) I've given the cat it's dinner.
- c) Ive given the cat its dinner.

6.

- a) Your perfectly within your rights.
- b) You're perfectly within your rights.
- c) You're perfectly within you're rights.

7.

- a) My monies on David's cricket team.
- b) My moneys on Davids cricket team.
- c) My monies' on David's cricket team.
- d) My money's on David's cricket team.
- e) My moneys on Davids cricket team.

8.

- a) The 60s were a great decade for pop art.
- b) The 60's were a great decade for pop art.

Kelly Benchmark grammar tips – 2

When to use 'I' or 'Me'

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

If you are the active person in the sentence, use 'I'.

If you are the passive person in the sentence use 'me'.

So if you are doing something it will be, for example, 'I drove the car', 'I went to visit my grandmother' or 'I decorated the spare room'.

Most people don't have a problem with this, they only get confused when another person is added in. But it's easy! Just add them in. 'Peter and I took turns to drive the car', or 'My cousin Sue and I went to visit our grandmother', or 'Dad and I decorated the spare room'.

If something is being done for or to you, it will be, for example, 'the waitress brought me a coffee', 'thank you for giving me your time yesterday' or 'the whole thing seemed wrong to me'. Add the other person in and you get the following:- 'The waitress brought Peter and me our coffee' or 'thank you for giving Simon and me your time yesterday' or 'the whole thing seemed wrong to Jane and me'.

(Incidentally – don't be confused between bought and brought. If you paid money for it, you bought it, as in 'buy' – if you transported it somewhere, you brought it, as in 'bring'.)

The acid test is easy. Think of a sentence inside your head, such as 'Uncle Jim gave Steve and I five pounds.' If you wouldn't say 'Uncle Jim gave I five pounds' then you've got the wrong one! You would say 'Uncle Jim gave me five pounds', so the correct version must be 'Uncle Jim gave Steve and me five pounds'.

Just take out the other person mentally, and whichever sounds right between 'I' or 'me', must be the correct one – unless you have a very strong regional accent, in which case, follow the active and passive rules when writing, even if you can't in speech!!!

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 the girls and I a typing test at the interview.
- b) They gave the girls 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 tips – 3

'Imply' vs 'infer'

This is an active versus passive issue. It all depends whether you are the person giving or receiving information. The application for these words occurs when the information is a bit incomplete, and seems to be pointing towards a further conclusion or piece of information which has not been spelled out specifically.

For example: take the sentence "Half the committee are not dishonest."

It is possible to conclude from this that there is an opinion that half the committee are dishonest.

But who does the implying or inferring?

Basically, the giver of the information implies something, and the recipient infers it.

So if you say or write the sentence "Half the committee are not dishonest" you would be implying that the other half are.

If, however, you hear or read the sentence "Half the committee are not dishonest" you might infer that the other half are.

Test yourself

Fill in the right missing option – is it infer or imply?

From what he said, I could _____ that he wasn't telling the whole story.

She _____ed to Susan that Dennis wasn't her first husband.

He had upset her by _____ing that she was only after his friend's money.

We were left to _____ that the relationship hadn't been a happy one.

I _____ed from his art collection that he was extremely wealthy.

Kelly Benchmark grammar tips – 4

'Effect' vs 'affect'

The word 'effect' can be a verb or a noun.

As a verb, 'effect' means to accomplish something.

For example: "The management effected a complete reorganisation of the factory within three weeks."

It is used about a project, change or work that has been completed.

As a noun, 'effect' means the outcome of something. "The overall effect was to increase productivity by 30%." "The special effects were amazing."

The word 'affect' is a verb, with two meanings. The first, most commonly used, meaning is to have an influence or an impact on something or someone. For example, "The nurses' strike will affect patient welfare." Or "His illness affects everything he does." You can even use it in a fashion context – "Do you always affect sunglasses?" This means "do you always influence how people see you by wearing sunglasses?"

Once you have 'affected' something, there will be an 'effect'!

The second meaning of 'affect' is outdated now as it means to be drawn to or feel affection for someone. The word 'affected' often means showy and artificial, but you can also be 'affected' in the sense of being deeply moved.

Test yourself

Which is it, effect or affect?

He doubted he would be able to _____ significant change without the cooperation of the team.

Either of the two main options would _____ the environment adversely.

The break up was bound to _____ the children.

The overall _____ was pleasing.

Kelly Benchmark grammar tips – Answers

Kelly Benchmark grammar tips - 1

How to use apostrophes

1. a) The Smiths' house is a disused windmill, and they are delighted with it.
2. a) The changes were for the better.
3. b) He always lets me go first.
4. b) It's not as bad as it seems.
5. a) I've given the cat its dinner.
6. b) You're perfectly within your rights.
7. d) My money's on David's cricket team.
8. a) The 60s were a great decade for pop art.

Kelly Benchmark grammar tips - 2

When to use I or Me

1. b) John and I were both very grateful for the present.
2. b) They gave the girls 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.

Kelly Benchmark grammar tips - 3

Imply vs infer

1. From what he said, I could infer that he wasn't telling the whole story.
2. She implied to Susan that Dennis wasn't her first husband.
3. He had upset her by implying that she was only after his friend's money.
4. We were left to infer that the relationship hadn't been a happy one.
5. I inferred from his art collection that he was extremely wealthy.

Kelly Benchmark grammar tips - 4

Effect vs affect

1. He doubted he would be able to effect significant change without the cooperation of the team.
2. Either of the two main options would affect the environment adversely.
3. The break up was bound to affect the children.
4. The overall effect was pleasing.