

Top Ten Grammar Myths

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March 4 is [National Grammar Day](#), so I have a special top-10 show to celebrate the occasion, and before you argue with me, read the whole explanation about why each of these is a myth.

Grammar Girl's Top 10 Language Myths:

10. A run-on sentence is a really long sentence. Wrong! They can actually be quite short. In a run-on sentence, independent clauses are squished together without the help of punctuation or a conjunction. If you write "I am short he is tall," as one sentence without a [semicolon](#), [colon](#), or [dash](#) between the two independent clauses, it's a run-on sentence even though it only has six words. (See [episode 49](#) for more details.)

9. You shouldn't start a sentence with the word "however." Wrong! It's fine to start a sentence with "however" so long as you use a [comma](#) after it when it means "nevertheless." (See [episode 58](#) for more details.)

8. "Irregardless" is not a word. Wrong! "Irregardless" is a bad word and a word you shouldn't use, but it is a word. "Flooetyflop" isn't a word—I just made it up and you have no idea what it means. "Irregardless," on the other hand, is in almost every dictionary labeled as nonstandard. You shouldn't use it if you want to be taken seriously, but it has gained wide enough use to qualify as a word. (See [episode 94](#) for more details.)

Almost everyone believes at least one of these myths.

7. There is only one way to write the possessive form of a word that ends in "s." Wrong! It's a [style choice](#). For example, in the phrase "Kansas's statute," you can put just an apostrophe at the end of "Kansas" or you can put an apostrophe "s" at the end of "Kansas." Both ways are acceptable. (See [episode 35](#) for more details.)

6. Passive voice is always wrong. Wrong! Passive voice is when you don't name the person who's responsible for the action. An example is the sentence "Mistakes were made," because it doesn't say who made the mistakes. If you don't know who is responsible for an action, passive voice can be the best choice. (See [episode 46](#) for more details.)

5. "I.e." and "e.g." mean the same thing. Wrong! "E.g." means "for example," and "i.e." means roughly "in other words." You use "e.g." to provide a list of incomplete examples, and you use "i.e." to provide a complete clarifying list or statement. (See [episode 53](#) for more details.)

4. You use "a" before words that start with consonants and "an" before words that start with vowels. Wrong! You use "a" before words that start with consonant sounds and "an" before words that start with vowel sounds. So, you'd write that someone has an MBA instead of a MBA, because even though "MBA" starts with "m," which is a consonant, it starts with the sound of the vowel "e"--MBA. (See [episode 47](#) for more details.)

3. It's incorrect to answer the question "How are you?" with the statement "I'm good." Wrong! "Am" is a linking verb and linking verbs should be [modified](#) by adjectives such as "good." Because "well" can also act as an adjective, it's also fine to answer "I'm well," but some grammarians believe "I'm well" should be used to talk about your health and not your general disposition. (See [episode 51](#) for more details.)

2. You shouldn't split infinitives. Wrong! Nearly all grammarians want to boldly tell you it's OK to split infinitives. An infinitive is a two-word form of a verb. An example is "to tell." In a split infinitive, another word separates the two parts of the verb. "To boldly tell" is a split infinitive because "boldly" separates "to" from "tell." (See [episode 9](#) for more details.)

1. You shouldn't end a sentence with a preposition. Wrong! You shouldn't end a sentence with a preposition when the sentence would mean the same thing if you left off the preposition. That means "Where are you at?" is wrong because "Where are you?" means the same thing. But there are many sentences where the final preposition is part of a phrasal verb or is necessary to keep from making stuffy, stilted sentences: "I'm going to throw up," "Let's kiss and make up," and "What are you waiting for" are just a few examples. (See [episode 69](#) for more details.)

You can find more information about each of these myths in the Grammar Girl archives.