

How to use conventional spelling, punctuation and mechanics

Before you begin

What you need:

Related text: **“Seven Wonders” by Lewis Thomas**

Exit with Success and *The Bare Essentials Plus* (optional)

An English dictionary

A French/English dictionary (optional)

Approximate time this exercise should take you: **30 minutes**

Part 1 - Reminder

In this exercise you will be identifying and correcting various types of errors related to the use of conventional spelling, punctuation and mechanics. This is the part of your writing where you need to understand and remember the standard rules of writing and when and where to apply them. For example, in spelling, there are many rules to help you spell correctly. Unfortunately, it is also very easy to confuse certain French and English spellings because they are so similar: futur/future, for example.

If you use any direct quotations from the text you are writing about, make sure to copy accurately, especially in your essay’s introduction when you state the author’s name and title of the text! You should also review the rules of capitalization. Simple applications, such as clearly capitalizing the beginning of a sentence, can make a difference in your grade. In terms of punctuation, you must remember where to place a comma, apostrophe, semi-colon or colon. Additionally, make sure you know how to punctuate properly when quoting from the text. This is another area where you could easily be penalized for faulty mechanics. You can review spelling, punctuation and mechanics in the appropriate chapters of *The Bare Essentials Plus* and *Exit with Success*.

Instructions

In this review of general writing conventions, correct the errors in spelling, punctuation and mechanics. Underline the correct answer from the choices in parenthesis. Use your dictionary here and when you write the English Exit Exam.

Exercise

Below is an example showing the kind of errors reviewed in this exercise. The correct answers are underlined.

Despite his fears about human nature, the author is cautiously optimistic about (**mankinds/ mankind's**) future and argues (: / , / ;)“We can build structures for human (**societe/ society**) never seen before, thoughts never thought before, music never heard before.”

1. He examines the beetle; the human child; the planet earth; the termite; the scabies virus (; / ,) the close (cousin/cousine) of the CJVirus; and the olfactory cell.
2. Thomas’s essay becomes at one point a warning to humanity (; / : / ,) “when we gather in very large numbers...we seem capable of levels of (folly/folle) and self-destruction to be found nowhere else in all of Nature.“
3. One of the (principal/principle) themes of“Seven Wonders” is that our (naturel/natural) world is a (mystere/mystery), a marvel, an (enigma/enigme) waiting to be explained.
4. The author’s (writing/writting) questions the morality of mankind’s mob (psychology/psycology.)
5. Thomas’s essay questions (where/whare) we are heading as a species (: / ,) is our DNA coded so we may make multiple choices or are we limited to binary reactions?
6. (Lewis/Thomas) uses enumeration to organize his essay, and deals with each of the (exemples/ examples) (separately/seperately).
7. One of his purposes is to encourage the readers to think up (their/thier) own “seven wonders.”
8. The Olympic (Tour/Tower) would not qualify as one of the seven wonders (; / ,) however, Montrealers might nominate the Olympic debt for the honour.
9. Thomas’s essay has (inspired/enspired) me to take a biology course next (semester/semestre).
10. How could (anyone/anyone) consider the scrapie virus a modern wonder?

Answer key

1. He examines the beetle; the human child; the planet earth; the termite; the scabies virus (; / ˌ) the close (**cousin**/cousine) of the CJVirus; and the olfactory cell.
2. Thomas's essay becomes at one point a warning to humanity (; / ː / ,) "when we gather in very large numbers...we seem capable of levels of (**folly**/folle) and self-destruction to be found nowhere else in all of Nature."
3. One of the (**principal**/principle) themes of "Seven Wonders" is that our (naturel/**natural**) world is a (mystere/**mystery**), a marvel, an (**enigma**/enigme) waiting to be explained.
4. The author's (**writing**/writting) questions the morality of mankind's mob (**psychology**/psycology.)
5. Thomas's essay questions (**where**/whare) we are heading as a species (ː / ,) is our DNA coded so we may make multiple choices or are we limited to binary reactions?
6. (Lewis/**Thomas**) uses enumeration to organize his essay, and deals with each of the (exemples/**examples**) (**separately**/seperately).
7. One of his purposes is to encourage the readers to think up (**their**/thier) own "seven wonders."
8. The Olympic (Tour/**Tower**) would not qualify as one of the seven wonders (ː / ,) however, Montrealers might nominate the Olympic debt for the honour.
9. Thomas's essay has (**inspired**/enspired) me to take a biology course next (**semester**/semestre).
10. How could (**anyone**/enyoone) consider the scrapie virus a modern wonder?

Part 2 - Reminder

One area we haven't covered in any depth is the integration of quotations from the text into your essay. Short quotations can be built into the flow of your writing. Use a "signal" or "lead in" phrase to provide transition from your words to those of the author.

There are many such phrases, but here are some especially useful ones:

- According to Lewis Thomas, "...."
- The author argues "...."
- As Thomas points out, "...."

If you introduce your quotation with an independent clause (a complete sentence), follow it with a colon:

- Thomas is an optimist: "...."

You can cut out irrelevant quoted words in a passage by indicating the omission with an ellipsis (three dots). You should not use ellipsis dots at the beginning of a quotation, however. Your ellipses should be enclosed in square brackets – [] – to differentiate them from ellipses in the original.

Square brackets should also be used to indicate where you have made a change in the wording (editing) for the sake of grammar or syntax.

When you summarize, be very careful to paraphrase rather than plagiarize the author's words. Refer to the author and then use your own words to express his/her idea. Using an occasional key word is acceptable but phrases should be quoted. Do not include irrelevant or unnecessarily lengthy quotations. As a general rule, we suggest that you avoid a quotation of more than forty words in a short essay such as the Exit Exam, because it gives the impression that you are "padding" your essay.

Instructions

The following passage is from Thomas's "Seven Wonders." The first three questions that follow refer to this text.

Exercise

My Number Three Wonder is oncideres, a species of beetle encountered by a pathologist friend of mine who lives in Houston and has a lot of mimosa trees in his backyard. This beetle is not new, but it qualifies as a Modern Wonder because of the exceedingly modern questions raised for evolutionary biologists about the three consecutive things on the mind of the female of the species. Her first thought is for a mimosa tree, which she finds and climbs, ignoring all other kinds of trees in the vicinity.

1. Thomas considers the oncideres as one of his seven wonders because its complicated reproductive behaviour challenges evolutionary theory.

Is this _____?

a. acceptable paraphrasing b. plagiarising c. unnecessary padding

2. Thomas's third wonder is "oncideres, a species of beetle encountered by a pathologist friend of mine who lives in Houston and has a lot of mimosa trees in his backyard."

Is this _____?

a. an acceptable quotation b. plagiarism c. unnecessary padding

3. The author nominates oncideres as a wonder, "because of the exceedingly modern questions raised for evolutionary biologists [...]" about the reproductive habits of this beetle.

Is this _____?

a. an acceptable quotation b. plagiarism c. padding

Here is another passage from Thomas's essay. Questions 4 and 5 refer to this passage.

"There is nothing at all wonderful about a single, solitary termite, indeed there is no such creature, functionally speaking, as a lone termite, any more than we can imagine a genuinely solitary human being; no such thing."

4. Quote from this passage using a lead in or signal phrase. Replace any unnecessary words using ellipses.

5. Paraphrase the passage in a short sentence.

Answer key

- 1 a. Acceptable paraphrasing
- 2 c. Unnecessary padding
- 3 a. Acceptable quoting
4. **Suggested answer.** Thomas argues that “there is no such creature, functionally speaking, as a lone termite, any more than we can imagine a genuinely solitary human being [...]”
5. **Suggested answer.** Thomas suggests that neither the termite nor the human being is a solitary creature but that both should be regarded as collective organisms.