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Page 3 of 321

English Grammar Workbook For Dummies®

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Preview from Notesale.co.uk
Page 7 of 321

Introduction

Good grammar pays. No, I'm not making a sentimental statement about the importance of a job well done or the satisfaction of learning for learning's sake, though I believe in both of those values. I'm talking about cold, hard cash, the kind you fold and put into your wallet. Don't believe me? Fine. Try this little test: The next time you go to the movies, tear yourself away from the story for a moment and concentrate on the dialogue. Chances are the characters who have fancy jobs or piles of dough sound different from those who don't. I'm not making a value judgment here; I'm just describing reality. Proper English, either written or spoken, tends to be associated with the upper social or economic classes. Tuning up your grammar muscles doesn't guarantee your entry into the Bill Gates income tax bracket, but poor grammar may make it much harder to fight your way in.

Another payoff of good grammar is better grades and an edge in college admissions. Teachers have always looked more favorably on nicely written sentences, and grammar has recently become an additional hurdle that applicants must jump over or stumble through when they sit for the SAT or the ACT, the two most important standardized tests for the college bound.

The good news is that you don't have to spend a lifetime improving your English. Ten minutes here, ten minutes there, and before you know it, your grammar muscles will be toned to fighting strength. This book is the equivalent of a health-club membership for your writing and speaking skills. Like a good health club, it doesn't waste your time with lectures on the physiology of flat abs. Instead, it sends you right to the mat and sets you up with the exercises that actually do the job.

About This Book

English Grammar Workbook For Dummies doesn't concentrate on what we English teachers (yes, I know I am one) call *descriptive grammar* — the kind where you circle all the nouns and draw little triangles around the prepositions. A closely guarded English-teacher secret is that you don't need to know any of that terminology (well, hardly any) to master grammar. Instead, *English Grammar Workbook For Dummies* concentrates on *functional grammar* — what goes where in real-life speech and writing.

Each chapter begins with a quick explanation of the rules (don't smoke, don't stick your chewing gum on the bedpost, be sure your sentence is complete, and so forth). Okay, I'm kidding about the smoking and the chewing gum, but you get the idea. I start off telling you what's right and wrong in standard English usage. Next, I provide an example and then hit you with ten or so quick questions. Just to make sure you know that I'm not wasting your time, in every chapter I give you a sample from real-life English (with a fairly absurd situation, just to keep your funny bone tingling), so you can see how proper grammar actually aids communication.

After filling in the blanks, you can check your answers at the end of the chapter. In *English Grammar Workbook For Dummies*, I also tell you why a particular choice is correct, not just for the sake of learning a set of rules but rather to help you make the right decision the next time — when you're deciding between *their* and *they're* or *went* and *had gone*, for example.

In this part . . .

If you've ever built a house — with real bricks or with kiddy blocks — you know that the whole thing is likely to fall down unless it's sitting atop a strong foundation. This part provides the stuff you need to lay the best foundation for your writing. Chapter 1 takes you through Verbology 101, explaining how to select the best verb for present, past, and future situations. In the same chapter, you find the most popular irregular verbs and everything you need to know about the ever-helpful helping verb. Chapter 2 sorts verbs into singular and plural piles and helps you match each verb to the correct subject. Then you're ready to pair pronouns and nouns (Chapter 3) and to distinguish complete from incomplete or too-long sentences (Chapter 4). Ready? I promise I won't let the roof fall on your head!

Answers to Problems on Verbs and Verb Tenses

- 1 **selects.** Notice the time clues? The first part of the sentence contains the word *is*, a present-tense verb, and the second part includes the word *always*. Clearly you're in the present with a recurring action.
- 2 **challenged.** Another time clue: *last year's* places you in the past.
- 3 **is buying or buys.** The second verb in the sentence (*is*) takes you right into the store with David, watching the unfolding action. Present progressive tense gives a sense of immediacy, so *is buying* makes sense. The plain present tense (*buys*) works nicely also.
- 4 **will flatter.** The key here is *next*, which puts the sentence in the future.
- 5 **is writing.** The time clue "right now" indicates an ongoing action, so the present progressive form *is writing* works well here.
- 6 **purchased.** Diane's bad taste splurge happened *once*, which means it took place in the past.
- 7 **was charging or charged.** The second part of the sentence includes the verb *urged*, which places you in the past. I like the past progressive (*was charging*) here because the word *while* takes you into the process of charging, which went on over a period of time. However, the sentence makes sense even when the process isn't emphasized, so *charged* is also an option.
- 8 **muttered or was muttering.** The clue to the past is *two days later*. The second answer gives more of a "you are there" feel, but either is correct.
- 9 **will invest.** The time words *not yet*, *as soon as*, tell you that the action hasn't happened yet.
- 10 **chimed.** If David *gave*, you're in past tense.
- 11 **placed.** The first verb in the sentence (*received*) is in the past tense, so you know that the action of placing the award on the shelf is also in past tense.
- 12 **wonder.** The time clue here is "every day," which tells you that this action is still happening at the present time and should be in present tense.
- 13 **explained.** The "yesterday" is a dead giveaway; go for past tense.
- 14 **stated.** The saga of Grace and Diane's award is in past tense, and this sentence is no exception. Even without the story context, you see the first verb (*earned*) is in past tense, which works nicely with the past-tense verb *stated*.
- 15 **will visit.** The time clue is "tomorrow," which places the verb in the future.
- 16 **had been skating or had skated.** You have two actions in the past — the skating and the hearing. The two hours of skating came before the hearing, so you need past perfect tense. Either the plain or the progressive form works here, so give yourself a gold star for either answer.
- 17 **has been warning or has warned.** The second half of the sentence indicates the present (*won't listen*), but you also have a hint of the past (*for years*). Present perfect is the best choice because it links past and present. I like the immediacy of progressive here (I can hear Diane's ranting), but plain present perfect also is okay.

- ✓ **Talking about someone in the present tense requires different verb forms for singular and plural.** The singular verb ends in *s*, a strange reversal of the regular nouns, where the addition of *s* creates a plural. (“He spits” and “They spit.” *Spits* is singular; *spit* is plural.)
- ✓ **Verbs that include *does/do* or *has/have* change forms for singular and plural.** With one important exception (that I explain in a minute), singular verbs use *does* or *has*. (“Does John paint his toenails blue?” *Does paint* is a singular verb. “John has stated that his toenails are naturally blue.” The verb *has stated* is singular.) Now for the exception: *I* (the one, the only, always singular pronoun) pairs with *do* and *have*. Why? I have no idea. Just to make your life more difficult, probably.
- ✓ **The verb *to be* changes form according to the noun or pronoun paired with it.** The singular verb forms and some matching pronouns include *I am*, *you are*, *he/she/it is*, *we/they are*, *I was*, *you were*, *he/she/it was*, *we/they were*.
- ✓ **Two subjects joined by *and* make a plural and take a plural verb.** As you discovered in kindergarten, one plus one equals two, which is a plural. (“Kristin and David plan a bank job every two years.” *Kristin and David* forms a plural subject, and *plan* is a plural verb.)
- ✓ **Two singular subjects joined by *or* take a singular verb.** The logic here is that you’re saying one *or* the other, but not both, so two singles joined by *or* don’t add up to a double. (“David or his friendly branch manager is cooking the books to cover the theft.” *David* is a singular subject, and so is *manager*, and each is matched with the singular verb *is cooking*.)
- ✓ **Ignore interrupters when matching subjects to verbs.** *Interrupters* include phrases such as “of the books” and “except for . . .” and longer expressions such as “as well as . . .” and “which takes the cake.” Some interrupters (*as well as*, *in addition to*) appear to create a plural subject, but grammatically they aren’t part of the subject and, like all interrupters, have no effect on the singular/plural issue. (“Kristin, as well as all her penguins, is marching to the iceberg today.” The subject, *Kristin*, is singular and matched with the singular verb *is*.)
- ✓ ***Here* and *there* can’t be subjects.** It’s in their contract. In a *here* or *there* sentence, look for the subject after the verb. (“Here are five pink beans.” In this sentence, *beans* is a plural subject, and *are* is a plural verb.)
- ✓ **The subject usually precedes the verb but may appear elsewhere.** (“Around the corner speed Kristin and David, heading for the getaway car.” *Kristin and David* form a plural subject, which is matched with *speed*, a plural verb.)



Test yourself with this example. In the blank, write the correct form of the verb in parentheses.

Q. John’s podiatrist _____ interested in the toenail-color issue. (*remain/remains*)

A. **remains.** The subject is singular (John has only one foot doctor!) so the verb must also be singular. The letter *s* creates a singular verb.

11. Hinting delicately that blue _____ not a natural color for nails, Nadine _____ her toes in distress. (*is/are*, *wriggle/wriggles*)

12. John, whose hair _____ been every color of the rainbow, says that he _____ from a toe condition. (*has/have*, *suffer/suffers*)

13. We _____ not buying his story. (*am/is/are*)

42. I don't understand the tattoo fixation because neither of Lola's parents (has/have) any tattoos.
43. Perhaps every one of Lola's 20 tattoos (is/are) a form of rebellion.
44. Some of the tattoos, of course, (is/are) to be covered by makeup, because Lola's character is an innocent schoolgirl.
45. However, each of the tattoos (has/have) special meaning to Lola, and she is reluctant to conceal anything.
46. "Truth," she says, "is important. All the fame in the world (is/are) not as valuable as honesty."
47. Lola talks a good line, but all her accountants (believes/believe) that she will go along with the necessary cover-up.
48. (Has/Have) someone mentioned the Tony Awards to Lola?
49. Either Lola or her producers (is/are) sure to win at least one award — if nobody else (enters/enter) the contest.
50. Every Tony and Oscar on Lola's shelf (is/are) a testament to her talent.
51. Neither of her Tony awards, however, (has/have) been polished for a long time.
52. Perhaps someone (has/have) neglected to hire a cleaning professional to spruce up Lola's house.
53. Both of Lola's brothers (is/are) in the field of furniture maintenance.
54. (Was/Were) either of her brothers called in to consult about trophy cleaning?
55. Also, perhaps either Lola's brothers or Lola herself (is/are) on the verge of a cleaner future.
56. Most of us, I should point out, (believe/believes) that Lola will never forget to shine her Oscar statuettes.
57. In fact, some of the Oscars that Lola has won (sparkles/sparkle) blindingly.
58. All of the Oscar-night attention (is/are) very appealing to Lola, who doesn't even attend the Tony ceremony, even when she's nominated.
59. Because neither Tom Cruise nor his costars (attends/attend) the Tony ceremony, Lola makes a point of being "on location" when the big night rolls around.
60. Each of the last fifteen Oscar nights, however, (is/are) an almost sacred obligation, in Lola's view.

Answers to Subject and Verb Pairing Problems

- 1 **clinics.** For a regular plural, just add *s*.
- 2 **nuthouses.** Regular plural here: Add an *s*.
- 3 **thatches.** For a noun ending in *ch*, add *es*.
- 4 **sexes.** To a noun ending in *x*, add *es* to form a plural.
- 5 **graphs.** Did I fool you? The *h* at the end of the noun doesn't, all by itself, call for *es*. Only words ending in *sh* or *ch* require an added *es* in the plural form. For *graph*, a plain *s* will do.
- 6 **turkeys.** For nouns ending in *ay*, *ey*, and *oy*, add *s* to form a plural.
- 7 **women, lashes.** The plural of *woman* is irregular. The second noun ends in *sh*, so you must tack on *es* for a plural.
- 8 **sighs.** Regular plurals are fun; just add *s*.
- 9 **belfries.** The plural of a noun ending in consonant-*y* is created by dropping the *y* and adding *ies*.
- 10 **deer, squirrels, geese.** The first and third nouns form irregular plurals, but good old *squirrels* follows the rule in which you simply add *s* to the singular.
- 11 **is, wriggles.** You need two singular forms here: *But is* and Nadine *wriggles*.
- 12 **has, suffers.** The verbs *has* and *suffers* are singular, as they should be, because the subject-verb pairs are *hair has* and *he suffers*.
- 13 **are.** The plural verb *are* matches the plural subject *we*.
- 14 **believe, give.** The pronoun *you* always takes a plural verb such as *believe* and *give*.
- 15 **Do, tell.** Both verbs are plural, matching the plural subjects *you* and *friends*. In the first pair, the subject is tucked between the two parts of the verb because the sentence is a question.
- 16 **Has.** You need a singular form here to pair with the singular subject *his story*.
- 17 **knows, is.** Both answers are singular and match the singular subjects *no one* and *John*.
- 18 **has.** Because *he* is singular, the verb *has* must also be singular.
- 19 **does.** The pronoun *everyone* is singular, so it matches the singular form *does*.
- 20 **was.** The singular verb *was* matches the singular subject *I*.
- 21 **were.** The subject is *guards*; *there* is never a subject. *Guards* is plural and takes the plural verb *were*.
- 22 **was.** Ignore the interrupters (*as well as . . . Alissa*) and zero in on the real subject *David*. Match the singular verb *was* to the singular subject.

59. Chad's sister has already won one Oscar for her portrayal of a kind but slightly cracked artist who can't seem to stay in one place without extensive support.

60. Rachel, who served as a model for Chad's sister, thought her interpretation of the role was the best.

61. In the film, the artist creates giant sculptures out of discarded hubcaps, although these are seldom appreciated by museum curators.

62. When filming was completed, Rachel was allowed to keep the leftover chair cushions and hubcaps, which she liked.

63. Rachel loves what she calls "found art objects," which she places around her apartment.

64. Chad's sister kept one for a souvenir.

65. Rachel, Chad, and Chad's sister went out for a cup of coffee, but he refused to drink his because the cafe was out of fresh cream.

66. Rachel remarked to Chad's sister that Chad could drink her iced tea if he was thirsty.

67. Chad called his brother and asked him to bring the cream from his refrigerator.

Preview from Notesale.co.uk
Page 58 of 321

Chapter 4

Finishing What You Start: Writing Complete Sentences

In This Chapter

- ▶ Recognizing what makes a sentence complete
- ▶ Avoiding fragments and run-ons
- ▶ Combining sentences legally
- ▶ Placing endmarks properly

Have you heard the story about the child who says nothing for the first five years of his life and then begins to speak in perfect, complete sentences? Supposedly the kid grew up to be something important, like a Supreme Court Justice or a CEO. I question the story's accuracy, but I don't doubt that Supreme Court Justices, CEOs, and everyone else with a good job know how to write a complete sentence.

You need to know how to do so too, and in this chapter I give you a complete (pardon the pun) guide to sentence completeness, including how to punctuate and how to combine thoughts using proper grammar.

To write a proper, complete sentence, follow these rules:

- ✓ **Every sentence needs a subject/verb pair.** More than one pair is okay, but at least one is essential. Just to be clear about the grammar terms: a verb expresses *action* or *state of being*; a subject tells you *who* or *what* is acting or being.
- ✓ **A complete sentence contains a complete thought.** Don't leave the reader hanging with only half an idea. ("If it rains" = incomplete thought, but "If it rains, my paper dress will dissolve" = complete and truly bizarre thought.)
- ✓ **Two or more ideas in a sentence must be joined correctly.** You can't just jam everything together. If you do, you end up with a run-on or a "fused" sentence, which is a grammatical felony. Punctuation marks and what grammarians call *conjunctions* — joining words — glue ideas together legally.
- ✓ **Every sentence finishes up with an endmark.** Endmarks include periods, question marks, and exclamation points.

Just four little rules. Piece of cake, right? In theory, yes. But sometimes applying the rules gets a little complicated. In the following sections I take you through each rule, one at a time, so you can practice each step.

- 17 Truffle (S), Duke (S)/sniffed (V).** First, find the verb. If you sniff around this sentence looking for an action word, you come up with *sniffed*. Now ask, *Who sniffed?* Bingo: *Truffle and Duke sniffed*. A good compound (double) subject for a good verb — you're all set with a complete sentence.
- 18 dogs (S)/sped (V).** This one may have surprised you because the subjects follow the verb — an unusual, but perfectly fine position. If you follow the normal procedure (locating the verb and asking who did the action), you find *dogs*, even though they appear last in the sentence.
- 19 incomplete.** This statement contains a verb form, *stopping*, but no subject matches it. Verdict: ten years in the grammar penitentiary for failure to complete the sentence.
- 20 They (S)/lapped (V).** The action here is *lapped*, which unites nicely with *they*. Completeness rules!
- 21 incomplete.** The reader is waiting to hear something about the *cow*. The way the sentence reads now, you have a description of *cow* — *who used to work for NASA until she got fed up with the bureaucracy* — but no action word to tell the reader what the cow is doing.
- 22 complete.** The sentence tells you everything you need to know, so it's complete.
- 23 complete.** The question makes sense as is, so the sentence is complete.
- 24 incomplete.** The statement gives you an idea — *milking* — and some descriptions but never delivers with a complete thought about milking.
- 25 complete.** Short, but you have everything you need to know about the *protesting cow*.
- 26 incomplete.** The word *because* implies a cause and effect relationship, but the sentence doesn't supply all the needed information.
- 27 incomplete.** What did the mama cow do when she was only a calf? The sentence doesn't actually say, so it's incomplete.
- 28 incomplete.** Not enough information appears in this sentence, which, by the way, also lacks a subject/verb pair.
- 29 complete.** All you need to know about moon-jumping (that it's enough for any cow) is in the sentence.
- 30 complete.** This sentence contains enough information to reform NASA, should it indeed choose to enter the field of moon-jumping.
- 31 incomplete.** The sentence begins to make a statement about *sheep* but then veers off into a description (*which were once rejected from moon duty*). No other thought is ever attached to *sheep*, so the sentence is incomplete.
- 32 complete.** This question makes sense as is. You may wonder what NASA will do, but you won't wonder what's being asked here because the question — and the sentence — is complete.
- 33 incomplete.** The first part of the sentence is a description, and the second is a qualifier, explaining a condition (*though female sheep produce milk*). Neither of these two parts is a complete thought, so the sentence is incomplete.
- 34 complete.** You have everything you need to know here except why anyone would want to send sheep to the moon. Grammatically, this is a complete thought.

Preview from Notesale.co.uk
Page 81 of 321

6. Ladies and Gentlemen I present the Fifth Annual Elbox Championships.
7. I know Mort that you are an undefeated Elbox competitor. Would you tell our audience about the sport?
8. Elboxing is about 5,000 years old Chester. It originated in ancient Egypt.
9. Really? Man I can't believe you knew that!
10. Yes, the sport grew out of the natural movement of the elbow when someone tried to interfere with a diner's portion by "elbowing" Chester.
11. Excuse me a moment. The reigning champion has decided to pay us a visit. Miss William could you tell us how you feel about the upcoming match?
12. Certainly Sir. I am confident that my new training routine will pay off.
13. What type of exercises did you do Placida? I may call you "Placida," right?
14. Sure! I arm-wrestled for eight hours a day Mort and then swam a mile or so for the aerobic benefit.
15. We wish her the best of luck, don't we folks?

Dating and Addressing

No, this section doesn't tell you what to wear when taking a comma to dinner and a movie. Nor does this section deal with what sort of speech you need to make when you first meet a comma. Instead, this section enables you to practice placing commas in dates (as in July 20, 2009) and addresses (as in Boise, Idaho).

The date rules are fairly simple:

- ✓ **For a date that includes (in order) the month, day, and year**, place a comma after the day. If this kind of date is in a sentence that continues beyond the year, place a comma after the year. ("I plan to blow up the rutabaga patch on August 4, 2006, unless I find a more enticing vegetable.")
- ✓ **For a date that includes (in order) the day, month, and year**, open-style punctuation, which drops commas faster than Superman drops Kryptonite, favors no commas anywhere — before, after, inside, over, or under. You get the idea; no commas. ("The last rutabaga will be harvested on 4 August 2006 and sold at auction.") Some very traditional English teachers (I'm one) always place a comma after the month and after the year, unless the year ends the sentence, in which case the endmark follows the year. ("The last cabbage will be picked on 30 September, 2008, and made into a doll.") If you're writing for a particular person (a professor or a boss), you should check his or her preference. As always, whatever style you choose should be consistent throughout.
- ✓ **For a date that includes (in order) only the month and year**, you don't need any commas. ("In honor of farmer Bill, I will send a contribution to Save the Rutabaga on September 12.")
- ✓ **For a date that includes (in order) the month and year**, no commas are required. ("Bill bought the farm in January 2006 and sold it five years later.")

- 13 **What type of exercises did you do, Placida? I may call you “Placida,” right?** *Placida* is being addressed, so the name requires a comma. Also, as reigning champ, she requires a bowl of jelly beans with the green ones removed. It’s in her contract.
- 14 **Sure! I arm-wrestled for eight hours a day, Mort, and then swam a mile or so for the aerobic benefit.** The direct address term *Mort* is in the middle of the sentence, so two commas are needed to cut it away from the main idea.
- 15 **We wish her the best of luck, don’t we, folks?** In this sentence, *folks* are being addressed, so the term must be set off by a comma.
- 16 **An article in *The New York Times* of 12 November 2006 reports that rutabagas have very few calories.** Or, **An article in *The New York Times* of 12 November, 2006, reports that rutabagas have very few calories.** Surprise! Two answers are possible. The more modern solution calls for no commas. The very traditional, “I learned English when quill pens were the rage” style calls for commas between the month and year and the year and the rest of the sentence.
- 17 **Evelyn is partial to the rutabagas sold by Clearview Nurseries, 17 Fort Benn Parkway, Kalama, Florida 05789, although they are quite expensive, and its rates are going up in September 2007.** Each line of the address is separated from the next by a comma. A comma also follows the address. The last date doesn’t need a comma, but you may place one between the month and the year if you wish to follow the older, traditional style.
- 18 **Her last will and testament is dated April 8, 1990, and specifies that rutabaga roses be placed on her grave.** Traditional month-day-year style dates take commas between the day and the year and also after the year within a sentence.
- 19 **Her attorney, Hubert Wilberforce, may be contacted at 78 Crescent Square, London, Connecticut 86689, for more information.** The lines of Hubert’s address are separated by commas, and the whole thing is followed by a comma. No comma ever appears between the state and the ZIP code.
- 20 **Instead of flowers, Evelyn wrote that friends and loved ones should contribute to the United Rutabaga Society, 890 Pacific Street Northwest, Agonis, Oregon 98989.** Did the *Northwest* throw you off? *Northwest* is part of the street line, so it doesn’t need to be set off by a comma from *Pacific Street*. If you interpreted the location as *Northwest Agonis*, no problem. In that case the comma follows *Street*. (Neither *Agonis* nor *Northwest Agonis* exists, so I don’t care which you choose. In real life, of course, you have to use the proper address.)
- 21 **In desperate need of a pizza fix, Brad turned to his cellphone.** The introductory expression here merits a comma because it’s fairly long. Length doesn’t always determine whether you need a comma, but in general the longer the introduction, the more likely you’ll need a comma.
- 22 **Cindy, on the other hand, checked the phone number in the pizza directory she had thoughtfully stashed in her purse.** The expression inside the commas makes a comment on the rest of the sentence, contrasting it with the actions of *Brad*. As an interrupter, it must be separated by commas from the rest of the sentence.
- 23 **Yes, pizza was an excellent idea.** *Yes* and *no*, when they show up at the beginning of a sentence, take commas if they comment on the main idea.
- 24 **The toppings, unfortunately, proved to be a problem.** The *unfortunately* is short and closely tied to the meaning of the sentence. However, setting the word off with commas emphasizes the emotional, judgmental tone. I’ve gone with the commas, as you see, but I can accept a case for omitting them.

Chapter 6

Made You Look! Punctuation Marks That Demand Attention

In This Chapter

- ▶ Placing hyphens where needed
- ▶ Using dashes for drama and interruptions
- ▶ Examining colons and semicolons

The punctuation marks I discuss in this chapter don't sit in the corner at parties murmuring, "Just forget about me." Instead, they scream, "I'm important! Pay attention, NOW," wherever they appear. Happily, placing these marks in the proper spots is a cinch.

Connectors and Dividers: Hyphens

Hyphens (-) are the shortest horizontal marks in the punctuation world. (Dashes are the long ones.) Sometimes, hyphens function as word breakers. When you arrive at the right-hand margin in the middle of a word, a hyphen enables you to finish the word on the next line. Just break the word at the end of a syllable (the dictionary guides you on this point), but don't leave only one or two letters all by themselves, and don't attempt to divide any one-syllable words, even a long one such as *through* (if you're working on a computer, though, you can let your word processing program to take care of end-of-line hyphenation for you).

Hyphens also create *compounds* (two words linked to create one meaning) and sometimes to attach a prefix to a word. Prefixes (*pre-*, *post-*, *ante-*, *un-*, and so on) grab onto the front of other words, thereby changing the meaning. Most prefixes attach without hyphens, but a couple (*self-*, for example) tend to appear with hyphens.



As with other punctuation marks, the hyphen is subject to fashion. Many prefixed and hyphenated compounds of a hundred years ago have now become single words. What used to be *non-negotiable* is *nonnegotiable* these days. To make matters worse, the major style guides and publishing companies sometimes differ on the to-hyphenate-or-not question. The dictionary is a good guide for the everyday writer who's unsure about a particular case. If you can't find a dictionary, follow these guidelines:

- ✓ **You need a hyphen if your reader will become confused without one.** You may, for example, be going to *re-create* a work of art or *recreate* at your local amusement park. Without the hyphen, how can the reader tell?
- ✓ **If two vowels show up together, chances are you need a hyphen.** *Anti-insurance* and *re-examine*, for example, need hyphens.



- ✓ **To interrupt the flow of thought with another idea.** “I will not attend the ball — how could I when my glass slipper is cracked? — no matter how much you beg.” Notice that the material inserted into the sentence between the two dashes doesn’t begin with a capital letter, even though in another situation it can stand alone as a complete sentence.
- ✓ **To summarize or define a list.** “Lip gloss, bug repellent, stun gun — Megan had everything she needed for her big date.” The dash divides the list from its definition, which is everything Megan thinks she needs on a date.
If you’re not feeling dramatic, use a colon to precede a list. A colon does the same job grammatically, with less flash than the dash.
- ✓ **To show incompleteness.** “You don’t carry stun —” Megan was nearly speechless at the thought of a date without her trusty stun gun. The dash shows that the sentence is incomplete.
- ✓ **To create drama.** “May I introduce the best golfer in Antarctica — Sam Spearly.” The dash is the equivalent of a drumroll in this sentence. In the sample sentence, “Sam Spearly” may be preceded by a comma, if you favor a quieter approach. (See Chapter 5 for more information on commas.)



When you plop a dash into a sentence, don’t place a comma before or after it, unless you’re showing incompleteness and the sentence requires a comma after the dash.

Dashes aren’t appropriate in some situations. Keep these points in mind:

- ✓ Too many dashes are *really* annoying to the reader.
- ✓ Dashes can’t be used to join complete sentences.
- ✓ You can’t send a dash to do a hyphen’s job.



Now dash through these questions, inserting dashes where appropriate. By the way, did you notice that I didn’t say *where needed*? That’s because dashes aren’t required anywhere for punctuation marks (colons, parentheses, for example) may substitute for the dash, though they’re usually less dramatic. Note that you may have to knock out another punctuation mark before inserting a dash.

Q. A usual Debbie brought too many snacks, chocolate antlers, cherry-coated sardines, and unsalted popcorn.

A. **As usual Debbie brought too many snacks — chocolate antlers, cherry-coated sardines, and unsalted popcorn.** The dash works better than the comma in this sentence, because the comma after *snacks* blends in with the list.

11. Jim plans to attend the truck race, I really don’t know why, along with his personal trainer.
12. “I can scarcely believe that he has a trainer because . . .” sputtered Debbie.
13. He needs help with his fitness routine, four push-ups, a walk around the block, and a 20-minute nap.
14. His personal trainer worked with one of the best athletes on the planet, Karen Green.
15. Push-ups and walking, not exactly demanding exercises, are so easy that even an old lady can do them.

Sorting Out Semicolons

A semicolon (;) is the punctuation mark that people use to create winks in electronic messages. Not surprisingly, that isn't its main job. Instead, semicolons link two complete sentences and separate items in a list when at least one of those items contains a comma. (Chapter 5 tells you more about this function of the semicolon.) One important note: Don't join two sentences with a semicolon unless the ideas are closely related.



Get to work. Insert or delete semicolons as required in Fran's thoughts on a recent heat wave. If no semicolons need to be added or deleted, write "correct" in the blank after the sentence.

Q. Fran is allergic to hot weather, she plans to crank up her air conditioner to maximum cool.

A. **Fran is allergic to hot weather; she plans to crank up her air conditioner to maximum cool.** The original sentence sends a comma to do a semicolon's job. Not a good idea!

16. The reasons why I hate the summer are sweat; sweat; and sweat. _____

17. They say global warming is a myth; I bought two watermelons today. _____

18. Tomorrow I will plan trips to the North Pole; Ross, Alaska; and Antarctica.

19. I will turn on the weather report; but I am sure that it will be sunny and mild.

20. My saltshaker will run out again; I may buy a winter coat. _____

21. Of course, winter coats are now on sale the fact that winter doesn't arrive for three more months is irrelevant. _____

22. Stores that sell merchandise in advance shoppers prefer to buy season-appropriate goods. _____

23. Macy's has a sale on boots with fur linings; cashmere scarves; and leather gloves.

24. I should shop in Australia for clothes I need in the Northern Hemisphere; they sell summer clothes in July. _____

25. July is quite cool in Sydney, Australia; Canberra, Australia, and Wellington, New Zealand.

Preview from Notesale.co.uk
Page 101 of 321

Placing Colons

A colon (:) often shows up — to grammarians' intense disapproval — in e-mails and the like to create smiley faces and other emoticons. Its real job is to introduce a long quotation or a list. Don't place a colon after a form of the verb *to be* or a preposition (*from*, *by*, *to*, and similar words). Also, in the absolute strictest English (and not even I am that picky), a colon may introduce a list or a quotation only when the words before the colon form a complete sentence. If you follow this rule, you can't insert a colon after *for example*, but you can use one after *take a look at this example*. Most business and technical handbooks allow colons after introductory phrases.



Time to “colon-ize” (or not) the sentences in this section. Add or remove colons (and, if necessary, subtract other punctuation). If everything's okay, write “correct” in the blank after the sentence.

- Q. The weather this year may be described with these words, horrible, freezing, humid, and windy. _____
- A. **The weather this year may be described with these words: horrible, freezing, humid, and windy.** The list of weather descriptions doesn't include *words*. Placing a comma after *words* allows *words* to blend in with the list of descriptions. A colon marks the separation between the introduction and the list.
26. As I watched the thermometer rise, I told my friend what I felt: “There should be a national monument to the inventor of air-conditioning. If I had to live in the days when a bucket of ice and a fan were the only remedies for hot weather, I'd move to the North Pole.” _____
27. Did I tell you that I bought books by Marv Heatfree, Helen Icicle, and October Surprise? _____
28. When I return, I will say: “Great vacation.” _____
29. The announcer will explain: that a strong cold front has wiped out the humidity. _____
30. I am astonished: a great, heat-free day! _____

Calling All Overachievers: Extra Practice with Hyphens, Dashes, Colons, and Semicolons



Fran recently received a travel brochure, and she's thinking about spending her vacation at La Bocaville Resort. Ignoring the wisdom of Fran's choice, read the following excerpt (see Figure 6-1) with an eye toward correct (actually, incorrect) punctuation. You need to find ten errors in hyphens, dashes, colons, and semicolons. Cross out the offending marks and substitute the correct punctuation. Enjoy your trip!

Figure 6-1:
Sample
brochure
excerpt
from a
less-than-
alluring
resort.

La Bocaville Resort welcomes — you to the best vacation of your life!

When you arrive at the airport, you'll be greeted by: a stretch limo and a driver, a complimentary box of chocolates, and a bottle of mosquito repellent. No need to hike 10 miles to La Bocaville the limo will take you to the resort. After you've checked in to our lovingly-restored mansion, you can choose among many alternatives, including — volleyball played with a water filled balloon and a chat with our secretary treasurer, who is also our President of Having a Great Time! She's dedicated to your vacation; and she knows her job depends on your happiness with La Bocaville. You may also want to visit the BocaBite Restaurant: conveniently located inside the pool area. Be sure to take bug-spray along.

Preview from Notesale.co.uk
Page 103 of 321

- ✓ **Separate ownership:** If two or more people own things separately, everyone gets an apostrophe and an *s* (*Abe's and Mary's pajamas*; *George's, Jeb's, and Barbara's shoes*).
- ✓ **Hyphenated owner:** If the word you're working with is hyphenated, just attach the apostrophe and *s* to the end (*mother-in-law's office*). For plurals ending in *s*, attach the apostrophe only (*three secretary-treasurers' accounts*).
- ✓ **Time and money:** Okay, Father Time and Mr. Dollar Bill don't own anything. Nevertheless, time and money may be possessive in expressions such as *next week's test*, *two hours' homework*, *a day's pay*, and so forth. Follow the rules for singular and plural owners, as explained at the beginning of this bulleted list.



Easy stuff, right? See whether you can apply your knowledge. Turn the underlined word (or words) into the possessive form. Write your answers in the blanks provided.

Q. The style of this year muscle car is Jill favorite.

A. **year's, Jill's.** Two singular *owners*. *Jill* is the traditional owner — a person, but the time expression also takes an apostrophe.

26. Carol classic car is entered in tonight show. _____
27. She invested three months work in restoring the finish. _____
28. Carol will get by with a little help from her friends; Jess and Marty tires, which they purchased a few years ago with their first allowance, will be installed on her car.

29. The boys allowance, by the way, is far too generous, despite their sister-in-law objections.

30. Jill weekly paycheck is actually smaller than the brothers daily income.

31. Annoying as they are, the brothers donate a day pay from time to time to underfunded causes such as the Women Committee to Protect the Environment.

32. Carol couldn't care less about the environment; the car gas mileage is ridiculously low.

33. She cares about the car, however. She borrowed Jess and Marty toothbrushes to clean the dashboard. _____
34. Now she needs her helpers maximum support as the final judging nears. _____
35. She knows that the judge decision will be final, but just in case she has volunteered two thousand dollars worth of free gasoline to his favorite charity.

36. Carol success is unlikely, because the court judgments can't be influenced by anything but the law. _____
37. Last week, for example, the judge ruled in favor of a developer, despite the mother-in-law plea for a different verdict. _____
38. Ten hours begging did no good at all. _____
39. Tomorrow the judge will rule on the car show effect on the native animals habitat.

- 41 Poem titles belong in quotation marks. The title of a collection of poems, on the other hand, needs to be underlined.
- 42 The newsletter title is underlined.
- 43 An article title belongs in quotation marks. The period at the end of the sentence belongs inside the closing quotation mark.
- 44 Directly quoted speech belongs in quotation marks, with the period inside the closing mark.
- 45 The quoted words are a question, so the question mark goes inside the quotation marks.
- 46 The interrupted quotation, with an inserted speaker tag, needs two sets of marks. The comma at the end of the first part of the quotation goes inside the closing mark.
- 47 As in the preceding explanation, the period at the end of the sentence goes inside the closing mark.
- 48 Another article title, another set of quotation marks. The period goes inside.
- 49 This quotation reproduces the exact written words and thus calls for quotation marks. The period goes inside.
- 50 The title of a play, a full-length work, needs to be underlined or italicized.
- 51 The title of a song needs to be in quotation marks.
- 52 Quoted lines from a song need to be in quotation marks.

Preview from Notesale.co.uk
 Page 129 of 321

Answers to Capitalization Problems

- 1 **Mayor.** Titles and proper names take capitals; common nouns, such as *servants* and *tape*, don't.
- 2 **Harris.** Names take capitals, but titles written after the name usually don't.
- 3 **municipal dogcatcher, E.** The title in this sentence isn't attached to the name; in fact, it's separated from the name by a comma. It should be in lowercase. Initials take capitals and periods.
- 4 **Dogcatcher.** Now the title is attached to the name, and thus it's capitalized.
- 5 **Ms.** The title *Ms.* is always capitalized, but the period is optional. After you choose a style, however, be consistent. Write either *Mr.*, *Mrs.*, and *Ms.* or *Mr*, *Mrs*, and *Ms* but not some from each set.
- 6 **dogcatchers, Agnes.** The common noun *dogcatchers* doesn't need a capital letter, but the proper name *Agnes* does.
- 7 **correct.** The name of the champion must be capitalized. About that name — people are allowed to spell their own names (and the names of their pets) as they wish. The capital letter inside the name is a style; you may not like it, but the namer's preference should be honored.
- 8 **civil servants.** Once again, the title and name are in caps, but the common job classification isn't.
- 9 **correct.** This title isn't attached to a name, so it takes lowercase.
- 10 **correct.** Names are in caps, but the title isn't, except when it precedes the name.
- 11 **vice president.** A title that isn't attached to a name shouldn't be capitalized.
- 12 **President.** In this sentence the title precedes the name and thus should be capitalized.
- 13 **chief financial officer.** This title isn't attached to a name. Go for lowercase.
- 14 **president.** Don't capitalize the title of president written without a name unless you're talking about a major world leader such as the President of the United States. (Even then, some style manuals call for lowercase.)
- 15 **bank president.** This title isn't connected to a name; therefore, it should be lowercased.
- 16 **Reverend.** The title precedes the name and becomes part of the name, in a sense. A capital letter is appropriate.
- 17 **bishop.** In this sentence *bishop* doesn't precede a name; lowercase is the way to go.
- 18 **general manager.** I love the Devils (my son's favorite team), but even so, lowercase is best for this title, which isn't connected to a name.
- 19 **player development director.** Another title that's all by itself. Opt for lowercase.
- 20 **president.** To be president is a big deal, but not a big letter.
- 21 **United Nose Ring Company.** Although college freshmen think they're really important (and, of course, they are), they rate only lowercase. The name of the company is specific and should be in uppercase.

In this part . . .

When was the last time you chatted with a grammar teacher? Never? I'm not surprised. When people find out that someone cares about proper English, they tend to discover that silence is indeed golden. The urge to clam up rather than to risk an error is nearly overpowering. However, most grammar teachers aren't out to nail anyone for confusing verb tenses. Furthermore, most of the issues that people obsess about are actually extremely simple. Take *who* and *whom*, for example. Deciding which one is appropriate is not rocket science; it's just pronoun case, which you can practice in Chapter 11. Chapters 11 and 12 help you master tricky (okay, picky) points of pronoun and verb usage. If you've ever stumbled over *everyone brought their lunch* or *she said she has/had a cold*, these chapters rescue you. Finally, Chapter 13 explains how to deal with verb moods (not irritable or ecstatic but indicative, imperative, and subjunctive).

Preview from Notesale.co.uk
Page 143 of 321

Some pronouns, such as *you* and *it*, appear on both lists. They do double duty as both subject and object pronouns. Don't worry about them; they're right for all occasions. Other one-case-fits-almost-all pronouns are *either*, *most*, *other*, *which*, and *that*.



Another type of pronoun is a reflexive, or *-self* pronoun (*myself*, *himself*, *ourselves*, and so forth). Use these pronouns only when the action in the sentence doubles back on the subject. ("I told myself that the grammar test would be easy." "They washed themselves 50 times during the deodorant shortage.") You may also insert the *-self* pronouns for emphasis. ("She herself baked the cake.") Don't place a *-self* pronoun in any other type of sentence.



In the following sentences, choose the correct pronoun from the parentheses. Take care not to send a subject pronoun to do an object pronoun's job, and vice versa. Violators will be prosecuted. Try your hand at an example before moving on.

Q. Matt took the precious parchment and gave (she/her) a cheap imitation instead.

A. her. In this sentence, Matt is the one taking and giving. The pronoun *her* is on the receiving end because Matt gave the imitation to *her*. *Her* is an object pronoun.

1. Matt, Peyton, and (I/me/myself) have a date with destiny.
2. The parchment, which (he/him) discovered in the back pocket of a pair of jeans made in 1972, is covered with strange symbols.
3. I wanted to call Codebusters because (they/them) solved the riddle of the Subway Tapestry last year.
4. I can't decide whether (they/them) should contact Matt first or wait until Matt realizes that he needs (they/them).
5. The president of Codebusters knows that Peyton is better at figuring out obscure symbols than (he/him).
6. Peyton won't tell (I/me) a thing about the parchment, but (she/her) did nod quietly when I mentioned Martians.
7. Peyton's friends — Lucy and (she/her) — are obsessed with Martians and tend to see Little Green Men everywhere.
8. If the Martians and (she/her) have a message for the world, (they/them) will make sure it gets out with maximum publicity.
9. Elizabeth and (I/me/myself) will glue (we/us/ourselves) to the all-news channel just in case Peyton decides to talk.
10. Sure enough, Peyton just contacted the relevant authorities, Dan Moore and (he/him), to arrange an interview.
11. Elizabeth favors sending NASA and (we/us/ourselves) the parchment.
12. I pointed out that NASA knows a lot more than (she/her) about space, but nothing about ancient parchments.
13. Matt checked the Internet, but it had little to offer (he/him), though Codebusters did.
14. (I/me/I myself) think that the parchment is a fake.

A. Given that he has no skill whatsoever, Jeffrey is unlikely to get his dream job, which features a corner office, three-hour lunches, and frequent “research” junkets to Tahiti. The preceding sentence is just one possible solution, in which the pronoun *which* takes the place of *job*. Here’s another: **The fact that Jeffrey has no skill whatsoever makes his dream job, which features a corner office, three-hour lunches, and frequent “research” junkets to Tahiti, unlikely.** Any sentence that achieves the goal of one noun out, one pronoun in is fine. The original doesn’t work because *which* replaces an entire sentence, *Jeffrey’s dream job features a corner office, three-hour lunches, and frequent “research” junkets to Tahiti.*

46. Jeffrey jogged for an hour in an effort to work off the pounds he had gained during his last three-hour lunch, but this didn’t help.

47. He’s always admired the superhero’s flat-ab look, but no matter how hard he tries, he can’t be one.

48. The 15 sit-ups that were prescribed by his exercise coach didn’t help at all.

49. Jeffrey’s next fitness endeavor ended in disaster, but it did not discourage him.

50. He simply ignored the arrest warrant and continued to run; this was only a temporary solution.

51. Next, Jeffrey joined a gym, where he recites Shakespeare’s sonnets, which help him to stay focused.

52. The great poet inspired Jeffrey to study it also.

Preview from Notesale.co.uk
Page 164 of 321

Calling All Overachievers: Extra Practice with Tricky Pronoun Situations



Here's a field trip report (see Figure 11-1), written by a battle-weary teacher after a particularly bad day. Can you find ten pronoun errors that cry out for correction? Circle the mistakes and give a thought to how you would fix them.

Mr. Levi Martin

Associate Professor, English 103

Field Trip Report, 1/18/12

I left school at 10:03 a.m. with 45 freshmen, all of whom were excited about our visit to Adventure Land. The day passed without incident, which was a great relief to me. I sat in the Adventure Land Bar and Grille for five hours while the youngsters visited Space Camp, Pirates' Mountain, and other attractions that are overrated but popular. The group saw me eating and said they wanted one too, but I replied that everyone had their school-issued lunch. This was a disappointment, and several students threw them at me. We got on one of the vans that was overdue for maintenance. The motor whined loudly, and it scared the van driver. We drove to Makoski Brake and Wheel Repairs because the driver said their expertise was what we needed. Makoski is also the only one of the many repair shops on Route 9 that take credit cards, which was helpful because I had spent all my money in the Adventure Land Bar and Grille.

Figure 11-1:

A field trip report, written by a teacher who doesn't use pronouns correctly (shame!).

- 21 **its, themselves.** In the first part of the sentence, the possessive pronoun refers to the organization, the United Countries Association. Because the organization is singular, it should be matched with a singular possessive, *its*. In the second part of the sentence, the pronoun refers to the individual staffers, who like to chow down and party hearty. Because lots of staffers are stuffing, *themselves* is the best choice.
- 22 **its.** The possessive pronoun refers to the WHMA, a singular organization. The singular pronoun is the one you want.
- 23 **its.** I know, I know. The word that sounds correct here is *their*. Unfortunately, the correct word is *its*, the singular pronoun that matches the singular organization.
- 24 **its.** Mrs. Moo's Cookie World is one business, so it must pair with the singular *its*.
- 25 **It.** Use your logic. Carrie is referring to the WHMA, and thus *it* is appropriate. If she were referring to the staff or to the administration, *they* would work.
- 26 **she.** The singular feminine pronoun *she* refers to Carrie, a singular female.
- 27 **its.** The company is singular, so pronouns referring to it must also be singular.
- 28 **It.** The service is singular (and the technician, I happen to know, is also single). The singular possessive works well here.
- 29 **she, her.** These two pronouns refer to Carrie, so singular and feminine rule.
- 30 **its.** The organization's name implies a plural, but in reality, a singular entity is referenced, and *its* matches up correctly.
- 31 **its.** The National Institute of Health is an organization that in real life has never done anything remotely like the actions in this exercise, should be referred to with the singular pronoun *its* in this sentence.
- 32 **its.** Mrs. Moo's Cookie World is one business, so *its*, the singular pronoun, is best.
- 33 **its.** To refer to the organization, use the singular pronoun *its*.
- 34 **it.** The NIH, an organization, takes the singular pronoun *it*.
- 35 **they.** This pronoun refers to the 12 cookies that Mrs. Moo scarfed down. *Twelve cookies* is a plural, so the plural pronoun *they* makes a match.
- 36 **was.** The clue here is *the only one*. Not all, or even some, sharks would take Kristin's unusual bait. *Only one was hungry enough*. The pronoun *that* is singular.
- 37 **was.** The pronoun *that* replaces *bait*, a singular word that must match with the singular *was*.
- 38 **likes.** Now Kristin is talking about *one shark*, and the pronoun *that* is singular.
- 39 **sail.** The pronoun *who* refers to *fans*, so the *who* is plural and takes a plural verb, *sail*.
- 40 **doesn't.** The *only* tells you that the pronoun *that* is singular and is therefore desperate for a singular verb, *doesn't*. Okay, not desperate, but you get the idea.
- 41 **believe.** She's not the only one; she's one out of a crowd. The people in the crowd *believe*.
- 42 **is.** The pronoun *that* represents *bait*, so *that* is singular and takes the singular verb *is*.

- 43 were.** How many people are doubled over in mirth? Not just one. (Knowing Kristin, I'd guess thousands.) The *who* is plural, as is its verb, *were*.
- 44 is.** Just one taxidermist, so singular is the way to go.
- 45 are.** Strange as it may sound, more than one brand of peanut butter is shark-friendly (no sharks were harmed in the grinding or bottling operation). Bingo, you need a plural.
- 46 Jeffrey jogged for an hour in an effort to work off the pounds he had gained during his last three-hour lunch, without success.** The easiest way to fix the pronoun problem (in the original sentence, *this* incorrectly refers to a complete sentence, not to a single noun) is to eliminate *this*. You can dump *this* with any number of rewrites, including the one given here.
- 47 He's always admired the superhero with flat abs, but no matter how hard he tries, he can't be one.** Now the pronoun *one* refers to *superhero*. In the original, the noun *superhero* doesn't appear, just the possessive *superhero's*, which doesn't match the nonpossessive pronoun *one*.
- 48 correct.** The pronoun *that* replaces one word: *sit-ups*.
- 49 The fact that Jeffrey's next fitness effort ended in disaster did not discourage him.** Eliminate the pronoun and you eliminate the problem, which is the pronoun *that*. *That* may not refer, as it does in the original sentence, to a whole sentence (*Jeffrey's next fitness effort ended in disaster*).
- 50 As a temporary solution, he simply ignored the arrest warrant and continued to run.** The pronoun *this* needs a one-word reference, but in the original, *this* replaces everything that appears before the semicolon. As usual, an easy fix is to rewrite without a pronoun.
- 51 correct.** Surprised? The pronoun *which* refers to *sonnets*. One word out and one in: You're okay.
- 52 The great poet inspired Jeffrey to study poetry also.** In the original, no one can figure out what *it* means. The solution is to insert a noun (*poetry*) and dump the pronoun.
- 53 "No, I did not see the car when I directed my bicycle into the street," testified Jeffrey, "but my distraction wasn't the cause of the accident."** One possible fix is to cut *that* and insert a specific. I've chosen *distraction*, but you may select *blindness*, *lack of awareness*, or something similar.
- 54 correct.** The pronoun *which* refers to *phone*, a legal use.
- 55 The judge was not impressed by Jeffrey's testimony and fined him, and Jeffrey paid the \$500.** Okay, pick any amount you want, so long as you dump the *it*. Why is *it* illegal? The original sentence has no *fine*, just the verb *fined*. A pronoun replaces a noun, not a verb.
- 56 When Jeffrey paid the fine, he was impressed by the court clerk, who quoted Shakespeare.** The problem here is the pronoun *which*. In the original sentence, the *which* refers to the fact that the court clerk spouted sonnets while Jeffrey counted out his money. In my suggested rewrite, I drop the *which* altogether.
- 57 "I see you are a sonneteer," commented Jeffrey as he smiled and gave the clerk a romantic look; she was not impressed by Jeffrey's efforts at all.** The original sentence contains a vague pronoun (*this*). You can eliminate this vagueness in a couple of different ways; just write a noun instead of *this* and you're all set.
- 58 "Please pay your fine and leave the room," she roared, flattening Jeffrey's hopes for a Saturday night date.** Jeffrey has no reason to hope for a Saturday night date (unless he signs up for some sort of television makeover show). You have plenty of reason to hope for proper pronoun usage. Simply rewrite the sentence to omit the vague pronoun *that*.

Progress Report: Coffee Break Control		
From: Ms. Bell, Coffee Break Coordinator		
To: Ms. Schwartz, Department Head		
Re: Coffee Break Control		
July 31, 2006		
36	As you <u>know</u> , I were <u>am</u> now in charge of implementing the new directive	
37	that every employee submits <u>submit</u> to a coffee-residue test. If a test	
38	were <u>is</u> given at a time when coffee-sipping were <u>is</u> not <u>authorized</u> and the	40
39	results were <u>are</u> positive, the policy require <u>requires</u> that the worker	42
41	" donates " " <u>donate</u> " a pound of coffee to the break room.	
43	<u>Do not</u> asked <u>ask</u> me to describe the union's reaction to this directive. If I	
44	would tell <u>were to tell</u> you what the shop steward would have said , you	46
45	had blushed <u>would blush</u> . All I would say <u>will say</u> is that the steward	48
47	were <u>was</u> not happy.	
49	Would <u>Had</u> you have known about the reaction before issuing the directive,	
50	you would have <u>had reconsidered</u> . One more thing: the coffee stains on	
51	my shirt, if they were to come <u>should</u> not make you thought <u>think</u> that I	53
52	were drinking <u>drank</u> once outside of the official break time. These stains	
54	result <u>are</u> from coffee being thrown at me.	
55		

36 Correct

37 The indicative is called for here because the sentence expresses a truth, not a condition-contra-ry-to-fact or a command.

38 This part of the sentence expresses an indirect command, *that every employee submit*. The indicative verb that matches the singular subject *every employee* is *submits*, but the subjunctive form (*submit*) is needed here.

39 A normal indicative verb works here because possibility exists.

40 The indicative *is* works best in this sentence, which expresses a real possibility and not a condition-contra-ry-to-fact.

41 Because the possibility exists, the indicative is called for.

42 This statement is simply a fact, so the indicative is needed.

43 The second part of the sentence is an indirect command (the employee "donate") and needs the subjunctive.

Chapter 14

Writing Good or Well: Adjectives and Adverbs

In This Chapter

- ▶ Choosing between adjectives and adverbs
- ▶ Managing tricky pairs: *good/well* and *bad/badly*
- ▶ Selecting *a*, *an*, or *the*

Do you write *good* or *well* — and what's the difference? Does your snack break feature *a apple* or *an apple* or even *the apple*? If you're stewing over these questions, you have problems . . . specifically, the problems in this chapter. Here you can practice choosing between two types of descriptions, adjectives and adverbs. This chapter also helps you figure out whether *a*, *an*, or *the* is appropriate in any given situation.

Distinguishing Between Adjectives and Adverbs

In your writing or speaking, of course, you don't need to stick labels on adjectives and adverbs. But you do need to send the right word to the right place in order to get the job done, the job being to communicate your meaning to the reader or listener. (You also need to punctuate strings of adjectives and adverbs correctly. For help with that topic, check out Chapter 5.) Many wonderful words (*fast*, *short*, *last*, and *likely*, for example) function as both adjectives and adverbs, but for the most part, adjectives and adverbs are *not* interchangeable.

Adjectives describe nouns — words that name a person, thing, place, or idea. They also describe pronouns, which are words that stand in for nouns (*other*, *someone*, *they*, and similar words). Adjectives usually precede the word they describe, but not always. In the following sentence, the adjectives are italicized:

The *rubber* duck with his *lovely orange* bill sailed over the *murky bath* water. (*Rubber* describes *duck*; *lovely* and *orange* describe *bill*; *murky* and *bath* describe *water*.)

An adverb, on the other hand, describes a verb, usually telling how, where, when, or why an action took place. Adverbs also indicate the intensity of another descriptive word or add information about another description. In the following sentence, the adverbs are italicized:

The alligator snapped *furiously* as the duck *violently* flapped his wings. (*Furiously* describes *snapped*; *violently* describes *flapped*.)



Most adverbs end in *-ly*, but some adverbs vary, and adjectives can end with any letter in the alphabet, except maybe *Q* or *Z*. If you're not sure which form is an adjective and which is an adverb, check the dictionary. Most definitions include both forms with handy labels telling you what's what.

28. Truffle, on the other hand, tends to bite the poor guy whenever the race doesn't turn out (good/well).
29. Truffle's owner named him after a type of chocolate candy she likes very (good/well).
30. The slightly deaf letter carrier thinks high-calorie snacks are (bad/badly).
31. He eats organic sprouts and wheat germ for lunch, though his meal tastes (bad/badly).
32. Truffle once caught a corner of Arbel's lunch bag and chewed off a (good/well) bit.
33. Resisting the urge to barf, Truffle ate (bad/badly), according to his doggie standards.
34. Truffle, who didn't feel (good/well), barked quite a bit that day.
35. Tired of the din, his owner confiscated the kibble and screamed, "(Bad/Badly) dog!"

Mastering the Art of Articles

Three little words — *a*, *an*, and *the* — pop up in just about every English sentence. Sometimes (like my relatives) they show up where they shouldn't. (I probably just blew my Thanksgiving invitation.) Technically, these three words are adjectives, but they belong to the subcategory of articles. As always, forget about the terminology. Just use them properly!

Here's how to tell the difference:

- ✓ *The* refers to something specific. When you say that you want *the book*, you're implying one particular text, even if you haven't named it. *The* attaches nicely to both singular and plural nouns.
- ✓ *A* and *an* are more general in meaning, and they work only with singular nouns. If you want *a book*, you're willing to read anything, or at least to browse the bookshelves a bit. *A* precedes words beginning with consonants, and *an* comes before words beginning with vowels. In other words, you want *a book* but *an encyclopedia*.

If you want a general term but you're talking about a plural, try *some* or *any* instead of *a* or *an*, because these last two articles can't deal with plurals.



Write an article covering the Miss Grammar Pageant — oops, wrong type of article. Write the correct article in each blank in the sentences that follow.

- Q. When Lulu asked to see ____ wedding pictures, she didn't expect Annie to put on ____ twelve-hour slide show.
- A. **the, a.** In the first half of the sentence, Lulu is asking for something specific. Also, *wedding pictures* is a plural expression, so *a* and *an* are out of the question. In the second half of the sentence, something more general is appropriate. Because *twelve* begins with the consonant *t*, *a* is the article of choice.
36. Although Lulu was mostly bored out of her mind, she did like ____ picture of Annie's Uncle Fred that caught him snoring in the back of the church.
37. ____ nearby guest, one of several attempting to plug up their ears, can be seen poking Uncle Fred's ribs.
38. At Annie's wedding, Uncle Fred wore ____ antique bow tie that he bought in ____ department store next door to his apartment building.

Chapter 15

Going on Location: Placing Descriptions Correctly

In This Chapter

- ▶ Placing *even*, *only*, *almost*, and similar words
- ▶ Avoiding misplaced, dangling, or confusing descriptions

My out-of-town friends always tell me that I can buy a ten-room mansion for the price of a closet in New York City. My standard reply is that location is everything. That statement is as true for descriptive words as it is for home prices. Plop one in the wrong spot, and your meaning may sink like a stone.

First, some definitions: Descriptions in English may be composed of one word or, if you like to pour it on, twenty or more. Regardless of length or form, descriptive elements fall into one of two huge categories. They belong in the *adjective* bin if they describe people, places, things, or ideas (in grammar terms, nouns or noun phrases). The *adverb* family claims them if they describe verbs (action or being verbs) or other descriptions. Flip to Chapter 14 for a host of practice exercises with basic adjectives and adverbs.

The general principle guiding the placement of descriptions is simple: Descriptive words should clearly relate to what they describe. Some sentences give you a bit more leeway than others. Move a descriptive word an inch and the meaning still comes across. But a few words require precision.

In this chapter you can practice that precision and, like a real estate agent, concentrate on location, location, location.

Little Words Mean a Lot: Situating “Even,” “Only,” and Similar Words

The other day I saw a tee shirt that made me want to turn my grammar book into a guided missile. The shirt declared that *My Grandma went to NYC and only bought me this lousy tee shirt*. Why, as a founding member of Grammarians Anonymous, was I upset? Because the descriptive term *only* was misplaced. The sentence as written means that Grandma did nothing at all in NYC except buy one tee shirt — no theater, no walk in Central Park — just tee-shirt buying.

Little words — *only*, *even*, *almost*, *just*, *nearly*, and *not* — will torpedo the meaning of your sentence if you put them in the wrong spot. Each of these descriptions should precede the word being described. Take a look at these examples:

A. The senator speaking voted against the Clarity Bill last week. Or, The senator who spoke last week is the one who voted against the Clarity Bill. You may find still other variations. As long as your sentence indicates whether *last week* is attached to *speaking* or *voted*, you're fine.

36. Running a red light once earned a stiff fine.

37. Backing away from the traffic cop swiftly caused a reaction.

38. The ticket he got last summer was a blot on his spotless driving record.

39. The judge said when the case came to trial he would punish the drivers severely.

40. The warden of the driving-infraction division soon arrived on the scene.

41. Speaking to the driver forcefully made the point.

42. The driver charged with reckless driving recently went to court.

43. The driver education course redesigned a year ago won an award.

Preview from Notesale.co.uk
Page 214 of 321

Preview from Notesale.co.uk
Page 221 of 321

12. The clerk told me my request was the _____ he had ever encountered. (*silly*)
13. I replied that I preferred to deal with store clerks who were _____ than he. (*snobby*)
14. Anyway, Helen's transfer wasn't approved, and she is in the _____ mood imaginable. (*nasty*)
15. We all skirt Natalie's desk _____ than Helen's, because Natalie is even _____ than Helen about the refusal. (*widely, upset*)
16. Natalie, who considers herself the _____ person in the company, wanted a promotion to Helen's rank. (*essential*)
17. Larry, however, is sure that he would have gotten the promotion because he is the _____ of all of us in his donations to the Office Party Fund. (*generous*)
18. "Natalie bakes a couple of cupcakes," he commented _____ than the average Mack truck, "and the boss thinks she's executive material." (*forcefully*)
19. "I, on the other hand, am the _____ of the three clerks in my office," he continued. (*professional*)
20. When I left the office, Natalie and Larry were arm wrestling to see who was _____. (*strong*)

Going from Bad to Worse (and Good to Better): Irregular Comparisons

A couple of basic descriptions form comparisons irregularly. Irregulars don't add *-er* or *-est* to create a comparison between two elements. Nor do irregulars tack on *-est* or *-most/least* to point out the top or bottom of a group of more than two, also known as the superlative form of comparisons. (See the preceding section, "Visiting the *-ER* (And the *-EST*)," for more information on comparatives and superlatives.) Instead, irregular comparisons follow their own strange path, as you can see in Table 16-1.

Table 16-1 Forms of Irregular Comparisons

Description	Comparative	Superlative
Good or well	Better	Best
Bad or ill	Worse	Worst
Much or many	More	Most



Take a stab at this section's practice exercises, but don't go to the *-ER* if your aim is faulty and you put the wrong form of the description (which you find in parentheses at the end of each sentence) in the blank. Just read the explanation in the answers section of the chapter and move on.

25. Celeste's demand for a bowl of pink jellybeans during the lecture was as ridiculous, if not more ridiculous, than Elizabeth's request for green gummy bears.

Calling All Overachievers: Extra Practice with Improper Comparisons



Figure 17-1 is an excerpt from a completely fictitious review of an imaginary restaurant, which I designed to give you a thorough review of the rules of comparisons. Be on the lookout for undercooked sausage, incomplete or illogical comparisons, snobby waiters, and messed-up double comparisons. You should find ten mistakes in comparisons and about a million reasons not to eat at this establishment. Correcting the errors may involve adding, removing, or rearranging quite a few words. **Note:** Often more than one correction is possible. I supply one answer for each error in the following section, but your answer may differ slightly and still be correct.

Pembroke Diner: You Won't Go Broke, but You Won't Eat Well Either

A recent meal at the Pembroke Diner on 48th Street was most distressing. First of all, the tables are as close together, if not closer together, than bus riders during rush hour. I really did not want to hear my neighbors' conversation about their grandchildren, who are, they claim, so smart. Nor did I want to chew each bite of steak for ten minutes because the steak was tougher than any meat I've eaten in my life. The wine list of the Pembroke is the least interesting. I am, I admit, a wine snob, but even people who drink wine only once a year will have a hard time finding something that is as watery, if not more watery, than the house red. I was surprised to realize that I was less impressed than the diners munching happily in the restaurant. Surely the Pembroke can do better! The potato was much more raw and more expensive. I

recommend that you find a place with better food. The Pembroke must revise its menu and its habits immediately, or the restaurant will be so unpopular.

Figure 17-1:

A poorly written restaurant review.

7. "With a good parka or wearing a warm face mask I'm ready for anything," he says.

8. He adds, "The face mask is useful on the slopes and doing double duty in bank robberies."

9. The ski pants can also be recycled, if they are ripless and without stains.

10. However, robbing a bank and to mug someone on the street is more difficult in ski pants.

11. Robbers need speed and to be private, but they also need pockets.

12. Stashing stolen money and where to put an unwanted ski mask are important issues.

13. Robert, who is actually quite honest and not having the inclination to rob anyone, nevertheless thinks about crime and fashion.

14. He once wrote and had even edited a newsletter called *Crimes of Fashion*.

15. Skiing and to pursue a career in law enforcement are Robert's dreams.

Preview from Notesale.co.uk
page 248 of 321

38. Lulu, on the other hand, both wants the cycling award and the trophy.

39. Not only did Lulu bribe the judges, but also ran a full-page ad bragging about herself.

40. The judges were either unimpressed with Lulu's efforts or liked Lola better.

Calling All Overachievers: Extra Practice with Parallels



Look for any parallelism problems in this letter to an elected official from an unfortunate citizen (see Figure 18-1). You should find ten mistakes in parallelism, various shifts, and conjunction pairs. When you find a mistake, correct it.

Dear Mr. Mayor:

I do not like complaining or to be a nuisance, but if a person is persecuted, they should be heard. As you know, the proposed new highway not only runs through my living room but into my swimming pool as well. When I spoke to the Department of Highways, the clerk was rude and that he took my complaint lightly. He said I should either be glad the road didn't touch the breakfast nook or the kitchen. I demand that the issue be taken seriously by you. I have written to you three times already, and you will say that you are "working on the problem." I am angry and in the mood to take legal action. Moving the highway or to cancel it entirely is the only solution. I expect you to cooperate and that you will fire the clerk.

Sincerely,

Joshua Hickman

Figure 18-1:

A disgruntled citizen writes a letter that is unparallelled.

Preview from Notesale.co.uk
Page 259 of 321

6. The bank manager angers easily. Jesse brings out the worst in her.

7. Jesse considered robbing the bank. Jesse is an honest man.

8. The bank manager eventually decided to rob the bank. She drank martinis on a tropical island.

Smoothing Out Choppy Sentences

The term *subordinate* doesn't refer to the poor slob who has to make coffee and open letters for the boss. Instead, a *subordinate* is the part of the sentence that, while still containing a subject and a verb, occupies a position of lesser importance in relation to the rest of the sentence. In the world of grammar, which is *not* a tourist destination, the full name is *subordinate clause*. Try not to remember that fact. Do remember that subordinate clauses may fall at the beginning, middle, or end of the sentence.

Some examples, with the subordinate in italics:

The box *which Ellen was told never to open*, practically screamed, "Look inside!"

After she had pried up the lid, Ellen ran screaming down the hall.

Ellen is planning to repair *whatever was damaged if she ever manages to replace the lid*.

(This one has two subordinates, *whatever was damaged* and *if she . . . the lid*.)

As you see, subordination is useful for tucking one idea into another. If you have a lot of short sentences strung together, subordination can make your writing less choppy.

Take a shot at inserting ideas. Combine the ideas in these exercises into one sentence per question, using subordinate clauses.



Q. Ellen's boss held a press conference. The boss issued a statement about "the incident."

A. **Ellen's boss held a press conference at which he issued a statement about "the incident."** More than one answer is possible here. Here's another: **Ellen's boss, who held a press conference, issued a statement about "the incident."**

9. Joseph Shmo is a prize-winning reporter. He asked the boss a number of questions.

Answers to Sentence Improvement Problems

- 1 **Despite the fact that Jesse is considering retirement, his mortgage holder thinks that Jesse should work at least 100 more years.** My answer begins with a prepositional phrase. You may also start with *Although Jesse is . . .* or *Contrary to Jesse's desire to . . .*
- 2 **Because Jesse's debt is quite large, the bank wants him to work hard.** The first time I show this sentence structure to my students, they often protest that "you can't begin a sentence with *because*." Yes, you can, as long as you have a complete thought in the sentence.



Take care not to dangle an introduction here. (See Chapter 15 for more information on dangles.) If you write something like *Wanting Jesse to work hard, Jesse's debt . . .*, you're saying that *the debt*, not the bank, wants Jesse to work hard.

- 3 **In addition to his desire to drink martinis on a tropical island, Jesse also wants to keep his house.** I start here with a prepositional phrase, but a clause (*Even though Jesse wants to drink martinis on a tropical island*) would also be a good beginning, pairing nicely with the rest of the sentence (*Jesse also wants to keep his house*).
- 4 **Impractical in every way, the plan is especially unrealistic in letting Jesse drink martinis all day.** The introduction here is just another way to describe *plan*, the subject of the main part of the sentence.
- 5 **Speaking to Jesse in a loud voice, the bank manager points out that he has \$.02 in his savings account.** Here the bank manager is still speaking, but that thought is expressed by an introductory verb form now, not by a separate sentence.
- 6 **Angering easily, the bank manager admits that Jesse brings out the worst in her.** I added *admits* so that *the bank manager* is the subject of the sentence. A dangler (an error I explain in Chapter 15) would be created by leaving *Jesse* as the subject and beginning with *angering* or a similar expression. In such a sentence, *Jesse* would be the one *angering easily* — not the meaning you want to convey. Another possible correction: *Bringing out the worst in the bank manager, Jesse angered her easily.*
- 7 **Even though he is an honest man, Jesse considered robbing the bank.** The first part of the sentence is a clause because it has a subject and a verb, but it depends upon the statement in the second part of the sentence to complete the thought.
- 8 **With martinis on a tropical island in her future, the bank manager eventually decided to rob the bank.** Here a nice set of prepositional phrases packs an opening punch.
- 9 **Joseph Shmo, who is a prize-winning reporter, asked the boss a number of questions.** You can also drop the *who is*, leaving *a prize-winning reporter* to do the job. (The shortened form is called an appositive, but you don't need to know that. You don't need to know what was in the box either.)
- 10 **The boss asked Joe to sit down and be quiet, but Joe, who was still looking for information, refused.** Here *who* tacks the extra information about *Joe* firmly to the rest of the sentence.
- 11 **The CIA, which was interested in the case, sent several agents who were supposed to investigate.** The pronoun *which* stands in for the CIA and introduces extra information about that secretive agency.
- 12 **Ellen didn't want to talk to the agents because her boss had told her that her job was in jeopardy.** The new, combined sentence has a cause-and-effect structure introduced by the word *because*.

- 13 When she slipped out of the office, Ellen bought a bus ticket.** The word *when* ties the information about slipping out to the reason Ellen slipped out.
- 14 If the CIA tracks her down, they will deal with her harshly.** Ignoring the CIA isn't nice. Writing choppy sentences isn't nice either! *If* expresses a possibility, as does the verb *may* in the original.
- 15 While Ellen is away, the boss is trying to manage the news media.** A time expression works nicely here, tying Ellen's absence to the boss's press conference.
- 16 Ellen has offered her story to an independent film company that is tentatively interested.** When you use *that* to introduce an idea, a comma is seldom necessary.
- 17 The box has been placed in the nation's most secure prison, which is located in a desert.** When you use *which* to introduce an idea, a comma usually separates the *which* statement from the rest of the sentence. (Check out Chapter 5 for more information on comma use.)
- 18 Whoever knows what was in the box is in danger.** Sounds like the plot of a new TV series, doesn't it? When you're tucking ideas into your sentences, don't forget *whatever* and *whoever* — very useful little words!
- 19 Sprinting from the kitchen, sliding through the living room, and making a bee-line for the lawn was Duke, our favorite Pug.** By placing the subject, *Duke*, near the end, you gain drama.
- 20 In Duke's way was the locked front door.** Not a big change, but placing the *locked front door* at the end is a way to emphasize the tragedy of the barrier that the eager dog can't surmount.
- 21 Duke didn't chew the newspaper and advertise it.** The original sentence is passive, not usually a good choice. The correction is a straightforward, active voice, subject-verb-object order. You can also flip the standard order and place the object before the subject and verb.
- 22 On the front door a few tooth marks and about a hundred scratches placed Duke.** The new order is dramatic, emphasizing *Duke*. It may sound awkward to your ear, however. That's the trade-off with reverse order sentences. You gain interest but startle (and perhaps disturb) your reader. Use this sort of sentence sparingly!
- 23 Unsuccessful for Duke was puppy obedience school.** Leading with the description *unsuccessful* is a surprising, and therefore interesting, choice.
- 24 On the front porch listening to Duke's frantic efforts stood the paper deliverer.** Leading with phrases (*on the front porch and listening to Duke's frantic efforts*) is unusual but effective.
- 25 Not a fan of dogs was he.** This reverse-order sentence has a comic effect, highlighting *not a fan of dogs* by placing it in an unexpected position.
- 26 Seven dog-bite scars had his left leg.** Like question 25, this reverse-order sentence focuses on *seven dog-bite scars*.
- 27 Not to blame for the paper deliverer's tooth marks was Duke.** Leading with a negative (*not*) isn't something you'd want to do every day, but every seven days or so (just kidding — what I mean is on rare occasions), you can get a lot of attention with this pattern.
- 28 On the other hand, Duke did inflict the mail carrier's scars.** The passive voice of the original is a real no-no. You do know, because the sentence tells you, who chomped on the mail carrier. Passive voice is therefore unnecessary and awkward.

- 37 The revision cuts repetition; *rapid* and *quick* are the same.
- 38 The sentence *Henry came running as fast as he could* has been reversed to create an interesting variation on the standard sentence pattern.
- 39 Two sentences — *He neared Darla and gasped. “My angel,” he said.* — have been combined. The new version, with an introductory element (*Nearing Darla*), is more concise.
- 40 A subordinate (*that his cardiologist would worry*) tucks an idea from one sentence into another. Another possibility: He neared Darla and gasped, “My angel.”
- 41 The original story ends with several short, choppy sentences. The revision combines all but the last sentence.
- 42 The last two sentences of the original combine with an introductory verb form, *kneeling*. If you begin with *kneeling*, be sure that *he* or *Henry* is the subject of the main part of the sentence. You can also revise this section in this way: “Angel Pie, you don’t have to pawn your engagement ring,” he said as he knelt next to her.

Preview from Notesale.co.uk
Page 271 of 321

Other pairs (or triplets) are quite different in appearance, but for some reason people mix them up:

Like expresses similarity, but it may not be attached to a subject/verb combo: She jumps *like* Mike.

As expresses similarity too, but it's the one you want in front of a subject/verb: She jumps *as* Mike does, but she gets paid less for her leaps.

Such as introduces examples: Mallory's cupboard is stocked with sweets such as pie filling, pudding mix, and chocolate.

The last commonly confused words often go together, but they aren't interchangeable.

Imply is "to hint": Mallory never actually asked for a gumdrop, but she strongly *implied* that one would be welcome.

Infer is "to figure something out that has been implied": Hearing Mallory's "Ode on a Gumdrop," I *inferred* that the bag of candy would probably be empty after Mallory's visit.



Can you tell the following twins and triplets apart? Circle the best word or phrase in each set of parentheses.

Q. Fueled by the caffeine in two double-lattes, Jake drove (farther/further) than anyone else.

A. **Farther.** If you're dealing with distance, *farther* is the one you want.

1. The judge insisted on (farther/further) proof that the cop's speed gun was broken.

2. I gave the judge tons of proof (like/as/such as) a photo of my car, a statement from my girlfriend about how I always drive slowly, and a perfect-attendance award I earned in second grade.

3. Flipping my wallet vigorously, I (implied/inferred) that it was empty and paying the fine was out of the question.

4. (Like/as) judges often do, Judge Crater stubbornly refused to hear my side of the story.

5. "Don't go any (farther/further) with your testimony," he snarled.

6. (Like/As) a statue, I shut up and sat as still as a stone.

7. The judge, unfortunately, (implied/inferred) from my behavior that I was silently protesting his ruling.

8. The (affect/effect) of this decision was disastrous.

9. Nothing I said, when I started talking again, (affected/effect) the judge's ruling.

10. Financial setbacks (like/as/such as) speeding tickets completely wreck my budget.

11. I can't convince my romantic partner to spend (farther/further) time with me without reservations at an expensive restaurant.

12. High-priced food, in my experience, (affects/effects) the way a potential date reacts; if I plan a bowling evening, my date will (imply/infer) that I'm poor and dump me.

Throwing in “Have” at Random

Another helping verb, *have*, shows up where it has no business, I suspect because it makes the sentence sound more complicated and therefore somehow more “advanced.” Like last year’s style at a fashionable club, an unnecessary *have* stands out, but not in a good way. The *have* error I hear the most is *Nice to have met you*. Oh really? The *have* places the meeting in the past, before another, present action. So *nice to have met you* implies some sort of deadline, as in *nice to have met you before our wedding* or *nice to have met you before it was time for me to clip your toenails*. The better expression is *nice to meet you* (now, in the present, as we talk).

Sending “I” to Do a “Me” Job

Me sounds childlike, doesn’t it? It conjures up memories of “Me Tarzan!” and similar statements. But *I* isn’t the personal pronoun for every sentence. *I* is a subject pronoun, so it belongs in a subject spot — or after a linking verb — and nowhere else. An error that pops up frequently is *I* as the object of a preposition: *between you and I* or *except you and I*. Penalty box! The correct phrases are *between you and me* and *except you and me*.

Speaking or Writing Passively

The government, in my humble opinion, is to blame for this particular overcorrection. Official forms tend to throw passive verbs all over the place, perhaps because passive voice allows the writer to omit the subject — the *you* — and therefore the one responsible — for the action. How much safer it must be to write *the taxes were tripled yesterday* rather than *I tripled your taxes yesterday*; *now please vote for me*. But passive voice comes across as stilted. Unless you’re *li* (perhaps because you truly don’t know who did the action or because the subject isn’t the point of the sentence), opt for active voice.

Making Sentence Structure Too Complicated

Hey, I can handle complications. I live in New York, where buying an apartment involves a two- or three-inch pile of official forms, each of which must be signed in triplicate. But complicated sentences (which abound in the pile of forms I just mentioned) don’t make your writing look more mature. They just make your writing awkward. Stay away from sentences like *It was this treaty that ended the war* and substitute *This treaty ended the war*. Run from *That which he discovered yesterday is the invention which will make his fortune* and toward *The invention he discovered yesterday will make his fortune*.

Letting Descriptions Dangle

Description is good, especially when you’re agreeing to a blind date with someone you’ve never met. (Think of the sentence *Howie is pleasantly plump*, in which *pleasantly plump* tells you something important about *Howie*.) Descriptions containing verb forms are good too, because they give you even more information: *Howie, howling at the moon as he does every*

Chapter 22

Ten Errors to Avoid at All Cost

In This Chapter

- Mistakes that ruin your writing
- Relying too heavily on computers

What did you forget? Your lunch? A parachute? I ask these questions to point out that some mistakes are worse than others. If the plane is going down, I personally am willing to forgo the peanut butter and jelly, but not that handy little life-saving device.

Your writing can crash also, especially if you err in a few specific ways. Ten ways, actually, which I explain here. Everyone makes mistakes, but this chapter shows you how to avoid the big ones.

Writing Incomplete Sentences

Unless, of course, you want to make a style point. I pause to acknowledge that the preceding sentence is incomplete. That's my attempt at irony and also my way of pointing out that sometimes breaking the rules is a good thing. In a forest of complete sentences, an occasional incomplete statement calls attention to an important point. However, a forest of incomplete sentences is no style; it's just poor English and calls into question whether you know how to fashion a complete sentence. That's a bad impression to give your reader. Be sure that each of your sentences has a subject-verb pair, an endmark, and a complete thought. (For more information on complete sentences, take a look at Chapter 4.)

Letting Sentences Run On and On

A run-on sentence is actually two or more sentences stuck together without any legal “glue” — a word such as *and* or a semicolon. The worst form of run-on is what grammarians call a *comma splice*, in which a comma attempts (and fails) to attach one complete sentence to another. Be especially careful with words that resemble legal joiners (*consequently, however, therefore, nevertheless*, and so forth). Use them for the meaning, but not for glue. (Chapter 4 explains run-ons in greater detail.)

Forgetting to Capitalize “I”

Nothing screams louder than a sentence like *Do you realize that i am yours forever?* I’m not even going to discuss *i M yours 4ever*. If you write this way, fine. I wish you a happy life. Ditto if you put a little circle on top of the *i* instead of a dot. You and I will have to agree to go our separate ways. But even if you don’t go that far, you risk alienating the reader by breaking so basic a rule. The personal pronoun *I* is always capped. Period.

Appendix

Grabbing Grammar Goofs

How sharp are your eyes? This appendix is the grammatical equivalent of an optometrist's chart. If you can see it with 20/20 vision, you'll spot 30 mistakes in each of the four exercises. Of course, after you spot the errors, your mission is to correct them. The errors may involve faulty structure or word choice, punctuation, capitalization, and anything else the *English Grammar Workbook For Dummies* covers.

Exercise One

Sneak a peek at the college catalogue (from a university that exists only in my mind) in Figure A-1. This course description has many faults — 30, by my count. Your count may differ slightly depending on how you group your answers. Don't worry about numbers — your mission is to search and destroy the mistakes.

6901 World Domination (3 credits): Professor Peck, Mr. Lapman, Ms. Austin. One two-hour lecture period per week is required. Three periods of fieldwork per week is also required.

This course on world domination and dictatorship involve both lecture and that they put into practice what students will learn. A student will report to their faculty advisors once a month. Everyone must keep a journal of revolutions started, governments overthrown, and peasants' oppressed. Readings include Karl and Groucho Marx's masterful essay, "Laughing All The Way to The Throne", and Chairman Mayo's autobiography, *Hold the Bacon*. This is sure to interest students who's career plans are to be an emperor; tsar; dictator; or reality-show winner. By the time the course concludes, students have gathered all necessary information about what it takes to rule the world. We will be discussing topics like propaganda, media manipulation, and telegenic coronation clothes (including crown-jewel selection). Working in the field, spy networks will be set up, this will count as a quarter of the grade. The students's task is to outmaneuver everyone in the course by becoming the first to conquer a hostile country that is required for graduation. Exams also emphasizes real practical skills, and theoretical ideas. Students only write two papers.

Figure A-1:
A scary
sample
course
description
that needs
some work
(in more
ways than
one).

Admission to this course and it's sequel (Universal Domination) are by permission of the Department of Politically Science Irregardless of age or class rank, applicants should be as motivated than the average freshman and should try and visit the departmental office for an interview.

Exercise Four

Don't you hate computer manuals? The one in Figure A-4 is even worse than the usual techno-babble because it contains 30 mistakes. Correct them!

Installing You're New Widget Wheel

To install the widget wheel, a computer should first be turned off, then follow these simple steps.

Important: If you have an A4019 or a newest model, please discard this manual. You must have sent for manual number 218B, or, in the case of a computer that previously has a widget, for manual number 330B. Being that your computer is not covered in this manual, discard it. Faulty directions have been responsible for explosions and that software crashed.

1. Unpack the widget wheel which looks like a sharks tooth.
2. Unpack the two disk poles. Grasp the disk pole that is more circular. Lining up the teeth with the teeth on the widget. *Note:* Teeth should be brushed everyday with a WidgetBrush. see enclosed order form for more information.
3. After the teeth are tight clenched, a person should insert the widget disk into slot C. However, if the widget disk has a blue strip, in which case it should be inserted into slot D. Don't mix up the slots as the computer will catch fire. Neither of these slots are open when the computer is standing upright. Sit the computer on its side before beginning this step.
4. Turn on the computer. If the screen is blank call the service specialist at 914-555-5039. If the screen flicks rapid from red to green (or from blue to yellow in model 2W4T), run further from the screen. This means the widget was installed improper; the computer is all together unusable.
5. You are almost ready to enjoy your new widget!! Place a hand on the mouse that is not wearing any rings, including wedding rings. Depending upon the model number, either press firmly or softly. Some widgets can work good no matter what the pressure.

Figure A-4
The world's
biggest
headache
inducer:
A sample
of a poorly
written
computer
manual.

Preview from Notesale.co.uk
Page 297 of 321

Answers to Exercise Two

In the following figure the errors from the original letter are boldfaced and crossed out, with a possible correction following each one, as well as an occasional addition of a missing word or mark. All corrections are boldfaced and underlined. Check the corresponding numbered explanations that follow the revised letter.

	Higgen Publishing Company	
31	459 elm <u>Elm</u> Avenue	
	Bronxton, VT 05599	
	October 31, 2006	
	Mr. Chester Slonton	
	33 Warwickville Road	
	Alaistair, CA 90990	
	Dear Mr. Slonton:	
	Thank you for sending us your novel, " The Lily Droops at Dawn. " <u>The Lily Droops at Dawn.</u>	32
33	To read over more than 1,000 pages about a love affair between plants is a very unique	34
	experience. In your talented hands, both of the plants becomes <u>become</u> characters that are	35
36	well-rounded and of great interest <u>interesting</u> to the reader. Before Mr. Higgen who	37
	you know is our founder, commits to publishing this masterpiece, I must ask for some	
38	reat <u>really</u> minor changes.	
39	Most of the editors, including Mr. Higgen, was <u>were</u> confused about the names. You are	
40	absolutely right in stating that each of the lovers are <u>is</u> in the lily family; scientifically they have	41
	similar characteristics. Calling the lovers Lila and Lyle could not of have been a problem if the	42
	characters were distinguished from one another in personality or habits or appearance.	
	Unfortunately, your main characters resembles <u>resemble</u> each other in petal color and height.	43
44	True, one of the lilies is said to be smartest <u>smarter</u> , but the reader doesn't know which.	45
46	A second problem are is the love scenes. You mention in your cover letter that you can make	
47	them more lengthier. Mr. Higgen feels, and I agree, that you write vivid <u>vividly</u> ; nevertheless,	48
49	we think you could cut them alot <u>a lot</u> without losing the reader's attention. After all, once a	
	person has read one flower proposal, he or she has essentially read them all.	
	Finally, the ending needs work. When the lily droops, the book ended <u>ends</u> . Are you	50
51	comfortable with a tiny change/? Market research shows that books with happy endings appeal	
52	to the readers, whoever he or she <u>they</u> may be. These volumes sell good <u>well</u> . Instead of	53
54	drooping, perhaps the lily could spread its petals and welcome the dawn. Or dawn or become	55
	a rose.	
	Higgen Publishing would like this novel for their <u>its</u> fall list. I hope that you are open to the	56
57	changes I had outlined in this letter. I cannot help but mention <u>mentioning</u> that Higgen	58
	Publishing is probably the only publisher with experience in plant romance volumes. I look	59
60	forward to having talked <u>talking</u> with you about the editing process.	
	Sincerely,	
	Cynthia Higgen	

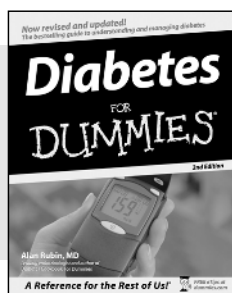
Answers to Exercise Four

In the following figure the errors from the original manual are boldfaced and crossed out, with a possible correction following each one, as well as an occasional addition of a missing word or mark. All corrections are boldfaced and underlined. Check the corresponding numbered explanations that follow the revised manual.

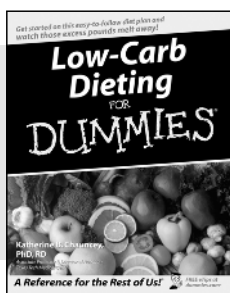
91	Installing You're <u>Your</u> New Widget Wheel	
	To install the widget wheel, a computer should first be turned off <u>first turn the computer off/and</u> then follow these simple steps.	92
	<i>Important:</i> If you have an A4019 or a newest <u>newer</u> model, please discard this manual. You must have sent <u>send</u> for manual number 218B, or, in the case of a computer that previously	93
95	has had a widget, for manual number 330B. Being that <u>Because</u> your computer is not covered	94
96	in this manual, discard it the manual . Faulty directions have been responsible for explosions	97
98	and that software crashed <u>software crashes</u> .	
99	1. Unpack the widget wheel, which looks like a shark's tooth.	
100	2. Unpack the two disk poles. Grasp the disk pole that is more <u>nearly</u> circular. <u>Align</u> <u>Line</u> up	101
102	the teeth with the teeth on the widget. <i>Note:</i> Teeth should be brushed everyday <u>every day</u>	103
105	with a WidgetBrush. s See enclosed order form for more information.	104
106	3. After the teeth are tight <u>tightly</u> cleaned, a person should insert the widget disk into slot C.	107
108	However, if the widget disk has a blue string in which case it should be inserted into slot D	
109	insert the widget into slot D . Do not mix up the slots as the computer will catch fire. Neither	110
112	of these slots are is open when the computer is standing upright. Sit <u>Set</u> the computer on its	111
113	side before beginning this step.	
115	4. Turn on the computer. If the screen is blank, call the service specialist at 914-555-5039. If the screen blinks rapid <u>rapidly</u> from red to green (or from blue to yellow in model 2W4T), run	114
117	further <u>further</u> from the screen. This <u>Blinking</u> means the widget was installed	116
	improper <u>improperly</u> ; the computer is all together <u>altogether</u> unusable.	
120	5. You are almost ready to enjoy your new widget! Place a hand <u>that is not wearing any rings, including wedding rings</u> , on the mouse that is not wearing any rings, including wedding rings . Depending upon the model number, either press <u>either</u> firmly or softly.	118
	Some widgets can work good <u>well</u> no matter what the pressure.	119

- 91 The contraction *you're* means "you are." In this sentence you want the possessive pronoun *your*.
- 92 An introductory verb form (*to install the Widget Wheel*) must refer to the subject, but the subject in the original sentence is *a computer*. Reword the sentence so that the subject is the person who is installing — the understood *you*.
- 93 The adverb *then* is not capable of uniting two complete sentences on its own. Delete the comma and insert *and*.
- 94 The *-est* comparison singles out one extreme from a group of three or more. In this sentence you're talking about a comparison between two things only — model A4019 and the group of everything *newer*. (The group counts as one thing because the items in the group aren't discussed as individuals.)
- 95 The verb *send* is in present tense and addresses what the installer must do now, not what the installer must have done previously. The present perfect tense (*have sent*) implies a connection with the past.
- 96 The word *previously* tips you off to the fact that you're talking about past tense, so *had* works better than *has*.
- 97 The expression *being that* is not standard; use *because* instead.
- 98 The pronoun *it* must have a clear meaning, but the original sentence provides two possible alternatives, *computer* and *manual*. The correction clarifies the meaning of *it*.
- 99 Two terms linked by *and* need a similar grammatical identity in order to keep the sentence parallel. The original sentence joins a noun (*explosions*) with a clause (*that software crashed*). The correction links two nouns, *explosions* and *crashes*.
- 100 A description beginning with *which* is usually set off by a comma from the word it describes.
- 101 The tooth belongs to the shark, so you need the possessive *shark's*.
- 102 *Circular* is an absolute. It may be approached but not compared. The disk pole may be *circular* or *more nearly circular*.
- 103 The original sentence is a fragment; it has no complete thought. The correction has a subject (the understood *you*) and a verb (*line*) and a complete thought.
- 104 *Everyday* means "ordinary." *Every day* means "daily."
- 105 A sentence always begins with a capital letter.
- 106 *Tightly* is an adverb, needed to describe the verb *clenched*.
- 107 *A person* is a new expression in this piece, which has been addressing *you* either directly or by implication. For consistency, change *a person* to *you* understood.
- 108 The original is a fragment, not a complete sentence. The reworded version has a complete thought.
- 109 The pronoun *neither* is singular and takes the singular verb *is*.
- 110 *Sit* is what the subject does by bending knees and plopping onto a chair. *Set* means that you're placing something else into some position.

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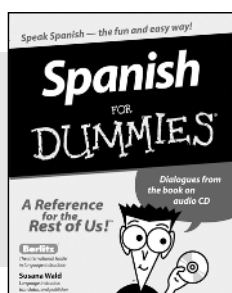
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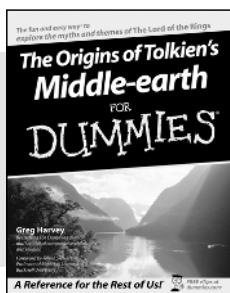
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