Some writing skills

The items in this file—with some deletions, additions, and revisions—**are derived from the text** *A Canadian Writer's Reference*

Hacker, Diana (1996). *A Canadian writer's reference*. Scarborough, Ontario: Nelson Canada.

Basic Grammar (Section B)

Grammatical Sentences (Section G)

Effective Sentences (Section E)

Word Choice (Section W)

Notes:

For more information and for useful exercises in matters of essential grammar and punctuation, see the file **"Grammar-Punctuation,"** which can be downloaded from Dearden's shared folder in the G drive.

As well, for extra information and exercise, try the various links that appear throughout these notes. They are links to material on the Dr. Darling website (sponsored by the Capital Community College Foundation of Hartford, Connecticut).

http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/index.htm

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Basic Grammar

B1. Parts of speech

The parts of speech are a system for classifying words. There are eight parts of speech: noun, pronoun, verb, adjective, adverb, preposition, conjunction, and interjection. Many words can function as more than one part of speech. For example, depending on its use in a sentence, the word *paint* can be a noun (*The paint is wet*) or a verb (*Please paint the ceiling next*).

B1-a. Nouns

A noun is the name of a person, place, thing, or an idea. Nouns are often but not always signaled by an article (*a, an, the*).

> The *cat* in *gloves* catches no *mice.*

> *Repetition* does not transform a *lie* into *truth.*

Nouns sometimes function as adjectives modifying other nouns.

> You can't make a *silk* purse out of a *sow*'s ear.

EXTRA INFORMATION AND EXERCISE
http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/nouns.htm

B1-b. Pronouns

A pronoun is a word used in place of a noun. Usually the pronoun substitutes for a specific noun, known as its *antecedent.*

> When the wheel squeaks, *it* is greased.
> [The pronoun "it" refers to its antecedent "wheel."]

Personal pronouns refer to specific persons or things.

> SINGULAR   I, me, you, she, her, he, him, it

PLURAL   we, us, you, they, them

Possessive pronouns indicate ownership.

SINGULAR   my, mine, your, yours, her, hers, his, its

PLURAL   our, ours, your, yours, their, theirs

Intensive and reflexive pronouns. Intensive pronouns emphasize a noun or another pronoun: The minister *herself* met us at the door. Reflexive pronouns name a receiver of an action identical with the doer of the action: Paula cut *herself.*

SINGULAR   myself, yourself, himself, herself, itself

PLURAL   ourselves, yourselves, themselves

Relative pronouns introduce subordinate clauses functioning as adjectives: The man *who robbed us* was never caught. In addition to introducing the clause, the relative pronoun, in this case "who," points back to the noun that the clause modifies, "man."

who, whom, whose, which, that

Demonstrative pronouns identify or point to pronouns. Frequently they function as adjectives: *This* chair is my favorite. But they may also serve as noun equivalents: *This* is my favorite chair.

this, that, these, those

Indefinite pronouns refer to non-specific persons or things. Most are always singular (*everyone, each*). Some are always plural (*both, many*). A few may be singular or plural.

all	another	any	anybody
anyone	anything	both	each
either	everybody	everything	few
many	neither	nobody	none
no one	nothing	one	several
some	somebody	someone	something

Reciprocal pronouns refer to individual parts of a plural antecedent: By turns, we helped *each other* through college.

each other, one another

B1-c. Verbs

The verb of a sentence usually expresses action (*jump, think*) or being (*is, become*). It is composed of a main verb (**MV**) possibly preceded by one or more helping verbs (**HV**).

The best fish *swim* near the bottom.
 MV

A marriage *is* not *built* in a day.
 HV MV

Notice that words can intervene between the helping and the main verb: is *not* built.

Helping verbs

There are twenty-three helping verbs in English: forms of *have, do,* and *be,* which may also function as main verbs; and nine modals, which function only as helping verbs. The forms of *have, do,* and *be* change form to indicate tense; the nine modals do not. Helping verbs combine with the various forms of main verbs to create tenses.

FORMS OF *HAVE, DO,* AND *BE*
have, has, had
do, does, did
be, am, is, are, was, were, being, been

MODALS
can, could, may, might, must, shall, should, will, would (the phrase *ought to* is often classified as a modal too)

Main verbs

The main verb of a sentence is always the kind of word that would change form if put into the following sentences.

> BASE FORM
> Usually I [walk/ride].
>
> PAST TENSE
> Yesterday I [walked/rode].
>
> PAST PARTICIPLE
> I have [walked/ridden] many times before.
>
> PRESENT PARTICIPLE
> I am [walking/riding] right now.
>
> *-S* FORM
> Usually he/she/it [walks/rides].

If a word doesn't change form when slipped into these test sentences, you can be certain it isn't a main verb. For example, the noun *revolution,* though it may seem to suggest an action, can never function as a main verb. Just try to make it behave like one (*Usually I revolution … Yesterday I revolutioned …*) and you'll see why.

When both the past-tense and the past-participle forms of a verb end in *-ed,* the verb is regular (*walked, walked*). Otherwise, the verb is irregular (*rode, ridden*).

The verb *be* is highly irregular, having eight forms instead of the usual five

> BASE FORM
> be
>
> PRESENT TENSE
> am, is, are
>
> PAST TENSE
> was, were
>
> PRESENT PARTICIPLE
> being
>
> PAST PARTICIPLE

being

Some verbs are followed by words that look like prepositions but are so closely associated with the verb that they are a part of its meaning. These words are known as *particles*. Common verb-particle combinations are *bring up, call off, drop off, give in, look up, run into,* and *take off.*

A lot of parents *pack up* their troubles and *send* them *off* to camp.

B1-d. Adjectives and articles

An adjective is a word used to modify or describe a noun or pronoun. An adjective usually answers one of these questions: Which one? What kind of? How many?

the *lame* elephant [Which elephant?]

rare stamps [What kind of stamps?]

nine candles [How many candles?]

Adjectives usually precede the words they modify. However, they may also follow linking verbs, in which case they describe the subject.

Good medicine always tastes *bitter.*

Articles, which may be classified as adjectives, are used to mark nouns. There are only three articles: the definite article *the* and the indefinite articles *a* and *an.*

A good country can be judged by *the* quality of its proverbs.

B1-e. Adverbs

An adverb is a word used to modify a verb (or verbal), an adjective, or another adverb. It usually answers one of these questions: When? Where? How? Why? Under what conditions? To what degree?

> Pull *gently* at a weak rope [Pull how?]

> Read the best books *first.* [Read when?]

Adverbs modifying adjectives or other adverbs usually intensify or limit the intensity of the word they modify.

> Be *extremely* good, and you will be *very* lonesome.

The negators *not* and *never* are classified as adverbs.

EXTRA INFORMATION AND EXERCISE
http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/adverbs.htm

B1-f. Prepositions

A preposition is a word placed before a noun or pronoun to form a phrase modifying another word in the sentence. It often indicates the position of an object in time or space. The prepositional phrase nearly always functions as an adjective or as an adverb.

> The road *to hell* is paved **with** *good intentions.*
> [The words "to" and "with" are the prepositions in the sentence. "To hell" is a prepositional phrase modifying the noun "road." The prepositional phrase "with good intentions" modifies the verb "paved."]

Here are the most common prepositions in English:

about	beneath	for	out	to
above	beside	from	outside	toward
across	besides	in	over	under
after	between	inside	past	underneath
against	beyond	into	plus	unlike

along	but	like	regarding	until
among	by	near	respecting	unto
around	concerning	next	round	up
as	considering	of	since	upon
at	despite	off	than	upon
before	down	on	through	with
behind	during	onto	throughout	without
below	except	opposite	till	

Some prepositions are more than a word long. The phrases *along with, as well as, in addition to, instead of, next to,* and *up to* are common examples.

B1-g.   Conjunctions

Conjunctions join words, phrases, or clauses and indicate the relation between the elements joined.

Coordinating conjunctions connect grammatically equal elements.

and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet

Correlative conjunctions are *pairs* of conjunctions that connect grammatically equal elements

either … or
neither … nor
not only … but also
whether … or
both … and

Subordinating conjunctions introduce subordinate clauses and indicate their relation to the rest of the sentence.

after	in order	though
although	that	unless

as	rather	until
as if	than	when
because	since	where
before	so that	whether
even though	than	while
if	that	

Conjunctive adverbs are adverbs used to indicate the relation between independent clauses.

accordingly	furthermore	moreover	subsequently
also	hence	nevertheless	then
anyway	however	next	therefore
besides	incidentally	nonetheless	thus
certainly	indeed	otherwise	
consequently	instead	similarly	
conversely	likewise	specifically	
finally	meanwhile	still	

EXTRA INFORMATION AND EXERCISE
http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/conjunctions.htm

B1-h. Interjections

Interjections are words used to express surprise or emotion: Oh! Hey! Wow!

EXTRA INFORMATION AND EXERCISE
http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/interjections.htm

B2. Parts of sentences

Most English sentences flow from subject to verb to any objects or complements. *Predicate* is the grammatical term given to the verb plus its objects, complements, and modifiers.

B2-a. Subjects

The subject of a sentence names who or what the sentence is about. The *simple* subject is always a noun or pronoun. The *complete* subject consists of the simple subject (**SS**) and all of its modifiers.

> _____COMPLETE SUBJECT_____
> / *The purity of a revolution* / usually lasts about two weeks.
>   SS

> _____COMPLETE SUBJECT_____
> / *Historical books that contain no lies* / are extremely tedious.
>   SS

> ___CS___
> In every country, / *the sun* / rises in the morning.
>   SS

To find the complete subject, ask Who? or What?, insert the verb, and finish the question.

> What "usually lasts about two weeks"? – "the purity of a revolution"

> What "are extremely tedious"? – "historical books that contain no lies"

> What "rises in the morning"? – "the sun"?

To find the simple subject, strip away all modifiers in the complete subject. These include single-word modifiers such as "the" and "historical," prepositional phrases such as "of a revolution" and subordinate clauses such as "that contain no lies."

A sentence may have a compound subject containing two or more simple subjects joined with a coordinating conjunction such as *and* or *or*.

> *Much industry and little conscience* make us rich.
>   SS   SS

In imperative sentences, which give advice or commands, the subject is an understood (implied) *you*.

> [*You*] Hitch your wagon to a star.
>   SS

Although the subject ordinarily comes before the verb, occasionally it does not. When a sentence begins with *There is* or *There are* (or *There was* or *There were*), the subject follows the verb. The word *there* is an expletive in such constructions, an empty word serving only to get the sentence started.

There is *no substitute for poetry.*
        SS

Sometimes a writer will, for effect, invert the usual subject-then-verb order of sentences.

Happy is the *nation that has no history.*
        SS

[More conventionally, the sentence would be written as *The nation that has no history is happy.*]

In questions, the subject often appears in an unusual position, sandwiched between parts of the verb.

Do *green-eyed men* make the best dancers?
HV   SS   MV

EXTRA INFORMATION AND EXERCISE
http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/subjects.htm

B2-b. Verbs, objects, and complements

Linking verbs and subjects complements

Linking verbs (**LV**) take subject complements (**SC**), words or word groups that complete the meaning of the subject (**S**) by either renaming it or describing it.

The quarrels of friends *are* the opportunities of foes.
       S   LV   SC
[The phrase "the opportunities of foes" renames the complete subject "the quarrels of friends."]

Love *is* blind.
  S LV SC
[The adjective "blind" describes the subject "love."]

Linking verbs are usually a form of *be: be, am, is, are, was, were, being, been.* Verbs such as *appear, become, feel, grow, look, make, prove, remain, seem, smell, sound,* and *taste* are linking when they are followed by a word or word group that names or describes the subject.

Transitive verbs and direct objects

Transitive verbs (**TV**) take direct objects (**DO**), words or word groups that complete the meaning of the verb by naming a receiver of the action. The simple direct object is always noun or pronoun.

> The little snake *studies* the ways of the big serpent.
>   S   TV   DO
> [The verb "studies" is transitive because its meaning is not complete until the direct object, "the ways of the big serpent," is added. The simple direct object is the noun "ways."]

Transitive verbs, indirect objects, and direct objects

The direct object of a transitive verb is sometimes preceded by an indirect object (**IO**), a noun or pronoun telling to whom or for whom the action of the sentence is done.

> You show to *me* a hero, and I will write for *you* a tragedy.
> S   TV   IO   DO   S   TV   IO   DO

Transitive verbs, direct objects, and object complements

The direct object of a transitive verb is sometimes followed by an object complement (**OC**), a word or word group that completes the direct object's meaning by renaming or describing it.

> Some people call a spade *an agricultural implement*.
>   S   TV   DO   OC

> Love makes hard hearts *gentle*.
>   S   TV   DO   OC

Intransitive verbs

Intransitive verbs (**IV**) take no objects or complements (need no extra information to complete their meaning). They may or may not be followed by modifiers.

> Money *talks*.
>   S   IV

> Money *talks* loudly.
>   S   IV

[In this sentence, we say that the adverb "loudly" modifies the verb "talks"; it does not complete the verb.]

B3. Subordinate word groups

Subordinate word groups cannot stand alone. They function only within sentences, usually as adjectives, adverbs, or nouns.

B3-a. Prepositional phrases

A prepositional phrase begins with a preposition such as *at, by, for, from, in, of, on, to,* or *with* and ends with a noun or a noun equivalent. The noun or noun equivalent is known as the object of the preposition.

Prepositional phrases nearly always function as adjectives or as adverbs. When functioning as an adjective, a prepositional phrase usually follows the noun or pronoun it modifies.

> Variety is the spice *of life.*
> [In this sentence, "of" is the preposition, "life" is the object of that preposition, and "of life" is the prepositional phrase that modifies the subject complement "spice."]

When functioning as an adverb, a prepositional phrase may or may not appear next to the verb it modifies.

> Do not judge a tree *by its bark.*
> ["By" is the preposition; "its" is a possessive pronoun; "bark" is the object of the preposition. Together, the three words make up a prepositional phrase that modifies the verb "judge."]

B3-b. Verbal phrases

A verbal is a verb form that does not function as the verb of a clause. Verbals include infinitives (the word *to* plus the base form of the verb), present participles (the *-ing* form of a verb), and past participles (the form of a verb usually ending in *-d, -ed, -n, -en,* or *-t* and making sense if preceded by the word *have*). Verbals can take objects, complements, and modifiers to form verbal phrases. These phrases are classified as participial, gerund, and infinitive.

Participial phrases

Participial phrases always function as adjectives. Their verbals are either present participles or past participles.

> *Being a philosopher*, I have a problem for every solution.
> [The participial phrase "being a philosopher" functions as an adjective modifying the subject of the sentence, "I."]

> Truth *kept in the dark* will never save the world.
> [The participial phrase "kept in the dark" functions as an adjective modifying the subject of the sentence, "truth."]

Gerund phrases

Gerund phrases always function as nouns—usually as subjects, subject complements, direct objects, or objects of the preposition. Their verbals are present participles (verb form ending in *-ing*).

> *Justifying the fault* doubles it.
>   S

> Kleptomaniacs can't help *helping themselves*.
>   DO

Infinitive phrases

Infinitive phrases, usually patterned as the preposition *to* plus the base form of the verb (*to call, to drink*), can function as adjectives, adverbs, or nouns. When standing as a noun, an infinitive phrase usually works as a subject, subject complement, or direct object.

> We do not have the right *to abandon the poor*.
> [The infinitive phrase "to abandon the poor" serves as an adjective modifying the noun "right."]

He cut off his nose *to spite his face.*
[The infinitive phrase "to spite his face" serves as an adverb modifying the verb "cut off."]

EXTRA INFORMATION AND EXERCISE
http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/verbs.htm#verbal

B3-c. Appositive phrases

Appositive phrases describe nouns or pronouns. In form they are nouns or noun equivalents.

Politicians, *acrobats at heart*, can sit on a fence and yet keep both ears to the ground.

EXTRA INFORMATION AND EXERCISE
http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/phrases.htm#appositive

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B3-d. Absolute phrases

An absolute phrase modifies a whole clause or sentence, not just one word. It consists of a noun or noun equivalent usually followed by a participial phrase.

His words dipped in honey, the politician mesmerized the crowd.

EXTRA INFORMATION AND EXERCISE
http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/phrases.htm#absolute

B3-e. Subordinate clauses

Subordinate clauses are patterned like sentences, having subjects and verbs and sometimes objects or complements, but they function within sentences as adjectives, adverbs, or nouns. They cannot stand alone as complete sentences.

Adjective clauses modify nouns or pronouns, usually answering the question Which one? or What kind of? They begin with a relative pronoun (*who, whom, whose, which,* or *that*) or a relative adverb (*when* or *where*).

The arrow *that has left the bow* never returns.

Adverb clauses modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs, usually answering one of these questions: When? Where? Why? How? Under what conditions? or To what degree? They begin with a subordinating conjunction (*after, although, as, as if, because, before, even though, if, in order that, rather than, since, so that, than, that, though, unless, until, when, where, whether, while*).

When the well is dry, *we know the worth of water.*

Noun clauses function as subjects, objects, or complements. They usually begin with one of the following words: how, that, which, who, whoever, whom, whomever, what, whatever, when, where, whether, whose, why.

Whoever gossips to you, will gossip of you.

EXTRA INFORMATION AND EXERCISE
http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/clauses.htm

GRAMMATICAL SENTENCES

G1. Subject-verb agreement

In the present tense, verbs agree with their subjects in number (singular or plural) and in person (first, second, or third). If the subject is third-person singular, use the *–s* form of the verb, such as *gives, has,* or *does.* For all other subjects use the base form of the verb, such as *give, have,* or *do.*

PRESENT-TENSE FORMS OF *GIVE* (A TYPICAL VERB)

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
FIRST PERSON	I give	we give
SECOND PERSON	you give	you give
THIRD PERSON	he/she/it gives	they give
	Alison gives	parents give

PRESENT-TENSE FORMS OF *HAVE*

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
FIRST PERSON	I have	we have
SECOND PERSON	you have	you have
THIRD PERSON	he/she/it has	they have

PRESENT-TENSE FORMS OF *DO*

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
FIRST PERSON	I do	we do
SECOND PERSON	you do	you do
THIRD PERSON	he/she/it does	they do

PRESENT-TENSE FORMS OF *BE*

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
FIRST PERSON	I am	we are
SECOND PERSON	you are	you are
THIRD PERSON	he/she/it is	they are

PAST-TENSE FORMS OF *BE*

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
FIRST PERSON	I was	we were
SECOND PERSON	you were	you were
THIRD PERSON	he/she/it was	they were

Speakers of standard English know by ear that *he gives, she has,* and *it doesn't* (not *he give, she have,* and *it don't*) are the standard forms. For such speakers, problems with subject-verb agreement arise only in certain tricky situations, which are detailed in this section. If you don't trust your ear, consult the models here when in doubt about the correct form.

G1-a. Make the verb agree with its subject, not with a word that comes between.

Word groups often come between the subject and the verb. Such word groups, usually modifying the subject, may contain a noun that at first appears to be the subject. By mentally stripping away such modifiers, you can isolate the noun that is in fact the subject.

> The *tulips* in the pot on the balcony *need* watering.
> [The verb "need" refers to "tulips," not to "pot" or "balcony."]
>
> High *levels* of air pollution *cause* damage to the respiratory tract.
> [The subject is "levels," not "pollution." Strip away the phrase "of air pollution" to hear the correct verb: "levels cause."]
>
> A good *set* of golf clubs *costs* about 800 dollars.
> [The subject is "set," not "clubs." Strip away the phrase "of golf clubs" to hear the correct verb: "set costs."]

Note: Phrases beginning with prepositions such as *in addition to, as well as, accompanied by, together with,* and *along with* do not make a singular subject plural.

> *The premier*, as well as the health minister, *was* photographed.
> [To emphasize that two people were photographed, the writer could use *and* instead of ", as well as": The premier and the health minister were photographed.]

G1-b. Treat most compound subjects connected by *and* as plural.

A subject with two or more parts is said to be compound. If the parts are connected by *and,* the subject is nearly always plural.

> *Leon <u>and</u> Jan* often *jog* together.

> *Jill's natural ability <u>and</u> her desire to help* others *have* led to a career in the ministry.

Exceptions:
When the parts of the subject form a single unit or when they refer to the same person or thing, treat the subject as singular.

> *<u>Strawberries and cream</u> was* a last-minute addition to the menu.

> Sue's *<u>friend and adviser</u> was* surprised by her decision.

When a compound subject is preceded by *each* or *every,* treat the subject as singular.

> *<u>Each tree, shrub, and vine</u>* **needs** to be sprayed.

> *<u>Every man, woman, and child</u>* **has** special gifts.

G1-c. With compound subjects connected by *or* or *nor,* make the verb agree with the part of the subject nearer to the verb.

> A driver's *license* or credit *<u>card</u>* **is** required.

> A driver's *license* or two credit *<u>cards</u>* **are** required.

> If a *relative* or *<u>neighbor</u>* **is** abusing a child, notify the police.

> Neither the *professor* nor her *<u>assistants</u>* **were** able to solve the mystery of the eerie glow in the laboratory.

G1-d. Treat most indefinite pronouns as singular.

Indefinite pronouns refer to non-specific persons or things. Even though the following indefinite pronouns may seem to have plural meanings, treat them as singular: *anybody, anyone, each, either, everybody, everyone, everything, neither, none, no one, someone, something.*

> *Everyone* on the team *supports* the coach.

Each of the flowers *has* been seeded.

Everybody who signed up for the ski trip *was* taking lessons.

The indefinite pronouns *none* and *neither* are considered singular when used alone.

Three rooms are available; *none* of them *has* a private bath.

Neither one *is* able to attend.

When these pronouns are followed by prepositional phrases with a plural meaning, however, usage varies. Some experts insist on treating the pronouns as singular, but many writers disagree. It is safer to treat them as singular.

None of these trades *requires* a university education.

Neither of those pejoratives *fits* Professor Brady.

A few indefinite pronouns (*all, any, some*) may be singular or plural depending on the noun or pronoun they refer to.

Some of the *lemonade has* disappeared.

Some of the *rocks were* slippery.

G1-e. Treat collective nouns as singular unless the meaning is clearly plural.

Collective nouns—for instance, *jury, committee, audience, crowd, team, pack, family,* and *couple* —name classes or groups. Collective nouns are usually treated as singular. They emphasize the group as a unit. Occasionally, when there is some reason to draw attention to the individual members of the group, a collective noun may be treated as plural.

SINGULAR   The *class respects* the teacher.

PLURAL   The *class are* debating among themselves.

To underscore the condition of individuality in the second sentence, many writers would add a clearly plural noun such as *members:* The *members of the class are* debating among themselves.

The Cub *pack meets* in our basement on Thursdays.
[The pack as a whole meets in the basement; there is no reason to draw attention to its individual members.]

A young *couple were* arguing about politics while holding hands.
[The meaning is clearly plural. Only individuals can argue and hold hands.]

Note: The phrase *the number* is treated as singular, *a number* as plural.

The number of school-age children *is* declining.

A number of children *are* attending the wedding.

Note: When units of measurement are used collectively, treat them as singular; when they refer to individual persons or things, treat them as plural.

Three-fourths of the pie *has* been eaten.

Three-fourths of the pies *were* eaten.

G1-f. Make the verb agree with its subject even when the subject follows the verb.

Verbs ordinarily follow subjects. When this normal order is reversed, it is easy to become confused. Sentences beginning with *there is* or *there are* (or *there was* or *there were*) are inverted; the subject follows the verb.

There *are* surprisingly few *children* in our neighborhood.

Occasionally you may decide to invert a sentence for variety or effect. When you do so, check to make sure that your subject and verb agree.

At the back of the room *are* a small aquarium and an enormous terrarium.
[The subject "aquarium and terrarium" is compound (plural), so "are" is the correct verb.]

G1-g. Make the verb agree with its subject, not with a subject complement.

One sentence pattern in English consists of a subject, a linking verb, and a subject complement: *Jack is an attorney.* Because the subject complement names or describes the subject, it is sometimes mistaken for the subject.

A tent and a sleeping bag *are* the required equipment.
[The phrase "tent and bag" is the (compound) subject, not "equipment."]

A major force in today's economy *is* women—as earners, consumers, and investors.

["Force" is the subject, not "women." If the correct sentence seems awkward, you can make "women" the subject: Women *are* a major force in today's economy—as earners, consumers, and investors.]

G1-h.   *Who, which,* and *that* take verbs that agree with their antecedents.

Like most pronouns, the relative pronouns *who, which,* and *that* have antecedents, nouns or pronouns to which they refer. Relative pronouns used as subjects of subordinate clauses take verbs that agree with their antecedents.

Take a *suit that travels* well.

Problems arise with the constructions *one of the* and *only one of the.* As a rule, treat *one of the* constructions as plural, *only one of the* constructions as singular.

Our ability to use language is one of the *things that set* us apart from animals.
[The antecedent of "that" is "things," not "one." Several things set us apart from animals.]

Carmen is the only *one* of the applicants *who has* the ability to step into this position.
[The antecedent of "who" is "one," not "applicants." Only one applicant has the ability to step into the position.]

G1-i.   Words such as *athletics, economics, mathematics, physics, measles,* and *news* are usually singular, despite their plural form.

Statistics *is* among the most difficult courses in our program.

Exception: When it describes separate items rather than a collective body of knowledge, the word *statistics* is plural: The *statistics* on school retention rates *are* impressive.

G1-j.   Titles of works and phrases used as if they were single words are singular.

Lost Cities describes the discoveries of many ancient civilizations.

Controlled substances is a euphemism for illegal drugs.

G2. Other problems with verbs

The verb is the heart of the sentence, so it is important to get it right. Section G1 dealt with the problem of subject-verb agreement. This section describes a number of other potential problems with verbs.

G2-a. Choose standard English forms of irregular verbs.

Except for the verb *be,* all verbs in English have five forms. The following list gives the five forms and provides a sample sentence in which each might appear.

BASE FORM	Usually I [walk/ride].
PAST TENSE	Yesterday I [walked/rode].
PAST PARTICIPLE [1]	I have [walked/ridden] many times before.
PRESENT PARTICIPLE [2]	I am [walking/riding] right now.
-S FORM	He/She/It [walks/rides].

[1] Past participle	First, a participle may be defined as a word having the characteristics of both a verb and an adjective: The dog is *running.* ("running" as a verb) / I saw the *running* dog. ("running" as an adjective). A participle always appears with a helping verb: I *am walking.* I *have walked.* I *will be walking.* I *would have walked.* Hence the term *participle;* the word is a *part* of the group of words that make up the whole verb. The *past* participle of irregular verbs differs from word to word and must be learned individually. The past participle is the form of the verb that always makes sense with the helping verb *have: have run, have gone, have sewn, have written, have torn, have seen, have done.*

[2] **Present participle**	English verbs also have a present participle form, obtained by adding *-ing* to the base form: *run – running; have – having; go – going; sew – sewing; write – writing; tear – tearing; see – seeing; do – doing.*

For regular verbs, such as *walk* or *dance,* the past-tense and past-participle forms are the same (ending in *-ed* or *-d*), so there is no danger of confusion. This is not true, however, for irregular verbs such as *ride.* Writers sometimes confuse the past-tense and past-participle forms of irregular verbs, producing non-standard sentences.

NON-STANDARD	Have you *rode* on the new subway?
STANDARD	Have you *ridden* on the new subway?

Choosing standard English forms

The past-tense form, which expresses action that occurred entirely in the past, never has a helping verb. The past participle is used with a helping verb—either with *has, have,* or *had* to form one of the perfect tenses or with *be, am, is, are, was, were, being,* or *been* to form the passive voice.

PAST TENSE	Last July, we *went* to Paris.
PAST PARTICIPLE	We have *gone* to Paris twice.

When you aren't sure which verb form to choose (*went* or *gone, began* or *begun,* and so on), consult the list of common irregular verbs shown below. Choose the past-tense form if the verb in your sentence doesn't have a helping verb; use the past-participle form if it does.

Yesterday we *saw* an unidentified flying object.
[not past participle *seen;* no helping verb is included]

The reality of the situation *sank* in.
[not past participle *sunk;* no helping verb is included]

The truck was *stolen* while the driver ate lunch.
[not past tense *stole;* helping verb "was" is included]

The teacher asked Dwayne if he had *done* his homework.
[not past tense *did;* helping verb "had" is included]

Common irregular verbs

When in doubt about the standard English forms of irregular verbs, consult the following list or look up the base form of the verb in the dictionary, which also lists any irregular forms. If no additional forms are listed in the dictionary, the verb is regular, not irregular.)

BASE FORM	PAST TENSE [these words do not work with the word *have* or with other helping verbs]	PAST PARTICIPLE [these words work with the word *have* or with other helping verbs]
arise	arose	arisen
awake	awoke, awaked	awaked, awoken
be	was, were	been
beat	beat	beaten, beat
become	became	become
begin	began	begun
bend	bent	bent
bite	bit	bitten, bit
blow	blew	blown
break	broke	broken
bring	brought	brought
build	built	built
burst	burst	burst
buy	bought	bought
catch	caught	caught
choose	chose	chosen
cling	clung	clung
come	came	come
cost	cost	cost
deal	dealt	dealt
dig	dug	dug
dive	dived, dove	dived
do	did	done
drag	dragged	dragged
draw	drew	drawn
dream	dreamed, dreamt	dreamed, dreamt
drink	drank	drunk
drive	drove	driven
eat	ate	eaten
fall	fell	fallen
fight	fought	fought
find	found	found

fly	flew	flown
forget	forgot	forgotten, forgot
freeze	froze	frozen
get	got	gotten, got
give	gave	given
go	went	gone
grow	grew	grown
hang (suspend)	hung	hung
hang (execute)	hanged	hanged
have	had	had
hear	heard	heard
hide	hid	hidden
hurt	hurt	hurt
keep	kept	kept
know	knew	known
lay (put)	laid	laid
lead	led	led
lend	lent	lent
let (allow)	let	let
lie (recline)	lay	lain
lose	lost	lost
make	made	made
prove	proved	proven, proven
read	read	read
ride	rode	ridden
ring	rang	rung
rise (get up)	rose	risen
run	ran	run
say	said	said
see	saw	seen
send	sent	sent
set (place)	set	set
shake	shook	shaken
shoot	shot	shot
shrink	shrank	shrunk, shrunken
sing	sang	sung
sink	sank	sunk
sit (be seated)	sat	sat
slay	slew	slain
sleep	slept	slept
speak	spoke	spoken
spin	spun	spun
spring	sprang	sprung

stand	stood	stood
steal	stole	stolen
sting	stung	stung
strike	struck	struck, stricken
swear	swore	sworn
swim	swam	swum
swing	swung	swung
take	took	taken
teach	taught	taught
throw	threw	thrown
wake	woke, waked	woken, waked
wear	wore	worn
wring	wrung	wrung
write	wrote	written

G2-b. Distinguish among the forms of *lie* and *lay.*

Writers and speakers often confuse the various forms of *lie* ("to recline or to rest on a surface") and *lay* ("to put or place something"). *Lie* is an intransitive verb; it does not take a direct object: *The tax forms lie on the table. Lay* is a transitive verb; it takes a direct object: *Please lay the tax forms on the table.*

BASE FORM	PAST TENSE	PAST PARTICIPLE	PRESENT PARTICIPLE
lie	lay	lain	lying
lay	laid	laid	laying

Sue was so exhausted that she *lay* down for a nap.
[The past-tense form of *lie* ("to recline") is *lay.*]

Mary *laid* the baby on my lap.
[The past-tense form of *lay* ("to place") is *laid*.]

My grandmother's letters were *lying* in the corner of the chest.
[The present participle of *lie* ("to rest on a surface") is *lying*.]

G2-f. Choose the appropriate verb tense.

Tenses indicate the time of an action in relation to the time of the speaking or writing about that action.

The most common problem with tenses—shifting from one tense to another—is discussed in Section E (Effective Sentences).

Survey of tenses

Tenses are classified as present, past, and future, with simple, perfect, and progressive forms for each.

The simple tenses indicate relatively simple time relations. The simple-present tense is used primarily for actions occurring at the time of the speaking or for actions occurring regularly. The simple-past tense is used for actions that have occurred. The simple-future tense is used for actions that will occur. In the following table, the simple tenses are given for the regular verb *walk,* the irregular verb *ride,* and the highly irregular verb *be.*

SIMPLE PRESENT

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
FIRST PERSON	I [walk/ride/am]	we [walk/ride/are]
SECOND PERSON	you [walk/ride/are]	you [walk/ride/are]
THIRD PERSON	he/she/it [walks/rides/is]	they [walk/ride/are]

SIMPLE PAST

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
FIRST PERSON	I [walked/rode/was]	we [walked/rode/were]
SECOND PERSON	you [walked/rode/were]	you [walked/rode/were]
THIRD PERSON	he/she/it [walked/rode/was]	they [walked/rode/were]

SIMPLE FUTURE
I, you, he/she/it, we, they [will walk/will ride/will be]

More complex time relations are indicated by the perfect tenses. A verb in one of the perfect tenses—a form of *have* plus the past participle—expresses an action that has just been completed, was completed in the past, or will be completed in the future.

PRESENT PERFECT
I, you, we, they [have walked/have ridden/have been]
he/she/it [has walked/has ridden/has been]

PAST PERFECT
I, you, he/she/it, we, they [had walked/had ridden/had been]

FUTURE PERFECT
I, you, he/she/it, we, they [will have walked/will have ridden/will have been]

The simple and perfect tenses also have progressive forms—that is, forms that describe actions in progress. A progressive verb consists of a form of *be* followed by a present participle.

PRESENT PROGRESSIVE
I [am walking/am riding/am being]
he/she/it [is walking/is riding/is being]
you, we, they [are walking/are riding/are being]

PAST PROGRESSIVE
I, he/she/it [was walking/was riding/was being]
you, we, they [were walking/were riding/were being]

FUTURE PROGRESSIVE
I, you, he/she/it, we, they [will be walking/will be riding/will be being]

PRESENT PERFECT PROGRESSIVE
I, you, we, they [have been walking/have been riding/have been being]
he/she/it [has been walking/has been riding/has been being]

PAST PERFECT PROGRESSIVE
I, you, he/she/it, we, they [had been walking/had been riding/had been being]

FUTURE PERFECT PROGRESSIVE
I, you, he/she/it, we, they [will have been walking/will have been riding/will have been being]

Special uses of the present tense

General truths or scientific principles should appear in the present tense, unless such principles have been disproved.

> Galileo taught that the earth revolves around the sun.
> [Since Galileo's teaching has not been discredited, the verb ("revolves") should indeed be in the present tense. In some contexts, it would even be correct to say, *Galileo teaches that the earth revolves around the sun.*]

> Ptolemy taught that the sun revolved around the earth.
> [Because Ptolemy's teaching has been discredited, the verb ("revolved") should be in the past tense.]

When writing about a work of literature (or any other kind of text, print or otherwise), you may be tempted to use the past tense. The convention (i.e., the traditional approach), however, is to speak of textual events and elements, or of a writer/creator's choices and effects, in present tense.

> In Masuji Ibuse's *Black Rain,* a child **reaches** for a pomegranate in his mother's garden, and a moment later he **is** dead, killed by the blast of the atomic bomb.

> Baron Bowan of Colwood **writes** that a metaphysician is "one who goes into a dark cellar at midnight without a light, looking for a black cat that is not there."

> In this case, Shakespeare **crafts** a scene in which the dialogue **is** lyrical, insightful, and moving.

> The film *Napoleon Dynamite* **has** a refreshingly low-budget appearance.

The past-perfect tense

The past-perfect tense consists of a past participle preceded by *had* (*had worked, had gone*). This tense is used for an action already completed by the time of another action or for an action already completed at a specific time.

Everyone *had spoken* by the time I arrived.

Everyone *had spoken* by 10:00 a.m.

Writers sometimes use the simple-past tense when they should use past perfect.

We built our cottage high on a pine knoll, several meters above an abandoned quarry that *had been flooded* in 1920 to create a lake.
[The building of the cottage and the flooding of the quarry both occurred in the past, but the flooding was completed (calling for the past-perfect tense) before the time of the building.]

By the time we arrived at the party, the guest of honor *had left*.
[Past perfect is needed because the action of leaving was completed at a specific time (i.e., "by the time we arrived").]

Writers sometimes *over*use the past-perfect. Do not use past perfect if multiple actions occurred at the same time.

When we arrived in Paris, Pauline ~~had~~ met us at the train station.

Sequence of tenses with infinitives and participles

An infinitive is the base form of a verb preceded by the word *to*. Use the present infinitive to show action at the same time as, or later than, the action of the main verb of the sentence.

The club had hoped *to ~~have~~ raised* a thousand dollars by April 1.
[The action expressed in the infinitive ("to raise") occurred later than the action of the sentence's main verb ("had hoped").]

Use the perfect form of an infinitive (*to have* followed by the past participle) for an action occurring earlier than that of the main verb of the sentence.

Dan would like *to have joined* the fire department, but he did not pass the physical.
[The liking occurs in the present; the joining would have occurred in the past. Therefore, it would be incorrect to say *Dan would like* to join *the fire department, but he did not pass the physical.*]

Like the tense of an infinitive, the tense of a participle is also governed by the tense of the sentence's main verb. Use the present participle (ending in *-ing*) for an action occurring at the same time as that of the sentence's main verb.

> Hiking the Bruce Trail in early spring, we spotted many wildflowers.
> ["Hiking" is the present participle. The sentence's verb is "spotted." The hiking and the spotting occurred at the same time.]

Use the past participle (such as *given* or *helped*) or the present perfect participle (*having* plus the past participle) for an action occurring before that of the sentence's main verb.

> Discovered off the coast of Newfoundland, the ship yielded many treasures.
> ["Discovered" is the past participle. The sentence's verb is "yielded." The discovering occurred before the yielding.]

> Having worked her way through school, Lee graduated debt-free.
> ["Having worked" is the present perfect participle. The sentence's verb is "graduated." The working occurred before the graduating.]

G2-g. Use the subjunctive mood in the few contexts that require it.

English sentences are expressed in three different moods: the *indicative,* used for facts, opinions, and questions; the *imperative,* used for commands or advice; and the *subjunctive,* used in certain contexts to express wishes, requests, or conditions contrary to fact. Of these moods, the subjunctive is most likely to cause problems for writers.

Forms of the subjunctive

In the subjunctive mood, present-tense verbs do not change form to indicate the number and person of the subject. Instead, the subjunctive uses the base form of the verb (*be, drive, employ*) with all subjects.

> It is important that you *be* [not *are*] prepared for the interview.

> We asked that she *drive* [not *drives*] slower.

Also, in the subjunctive mood, there is only one past-tense form of the verb *be: were* [never *was*].

> If I *were* [not *was*] you, I'd proceed more cautiously.

Uses of the subjunctive

The subjunctive mood appears in only a few contexts: in contrary-to-fact clauses beginning with *if* or expressing a wish; in *that* clauses following verbs such as *ask, insist, recommend, request,* and *suggest;* and in certain set expressions.

In contrary-to-fact clauses beginning with *if*: When a subordinate clause beginning with *if* expresses a condition contrary to fact, use the subjunctive mood.

> If I *were* [not *was*] a member of Parliament, I would vote for that bill.
>
> We could be less cautious if Jake *were* [not *was*] more trustworthy.
>
> [The verbs in the *if* clauses above express conditions that do not exist. The writer is *not* a member of Parliament, and Jake is *not* trustworthy.]

Do not use the subjunctive mood in *if* clauses expressing conditions that exist or may exist.

> If Marjorie *wins* [not *were to win*] the contest, she will leave for Barcelona in June. [Marjorie *may* win the contest.]

In contrary-to-fact clauses expressing a wish: In formal English the subjunctive mood is used in clauses expressing a wish or desire. In informal speech, however, the indicative is acceptable.

> FORMAL   I wish that Dr. Barlow *were* my professor.
>
> INFORMAL   I wish that Dr. Barlow *was* my professor.

In *that* clauses following verbs such as *ask, insist, recommend, request,* and *suggest*: Because requests have not yet become realities, they are expressed in the subjunctive mood.

> Professor Moore insists that her students *be* [not *are*] on time.
>
> We request that Lambert *file* [not *files*] the tax form soon.

In certain set expressions: The subjunctive was once more commonly used than it is now. Still, it remains in some common expressions such as *be that as it may* (and *that's as may be*), *as it were, come rain or shine, far be it from me,* and so on. In general a writer should avoid such expressions, partly because they are archaic, but more because they are clichés.

G2-h. Use the active voice unless you have a good reason for choosing the passive.

Transitive verbs (verbs that take a direct object) appear in either the active or the passive voice. In the active voice, the subject of the sentence is the actor; in the passive, the actor is shown as a receiver of action, or the presence of the actor is only implied. Although both voices are grammatically correct, the active voice is usually more effective because it is more economical and direct.

> The committee reached a decision.
> [This sentence is expressed in active voice. The committee is the actor and the subject of the sentence. The expression here is simple and forceful.]

> A decision was reached by the committee.
> [This sentence is expressed in passive voice. The committee is still the actor but is shown as receiving the action.]

> A decision was reached.
> [This sentence is expressed in passive voice. Here the actor is unknown. In context, presumably, the reader will know just which individual or group reached the decision; *out* of context, though, all we know is the implied presence of an actor.]

To transform a cumbersome passive-voice sentence into a clear active-voice sentence, make the actor the subject of the sentence.

> PASSIVE   For the opening number, a dance was choreographed by Mr. Martins.

> ACTIVE   For the opening number, Mr. Martins choreographed a dance.

The passive voice is sometimes appropriate—that is, if you wish to emphasize the receiver of the action or to minimize the importance of the actor. But for the same reason, it is sometimes *in*appropriate.

Consider this example:

Many First Nations people were forced to live on remote and infertile land.

If this passive-voice sentence were written in active voice with an identified actor, it might appear thus:

The government forced many First Nations people to live on remote and infertile land.

We could say that the passive-voice version of the statement is appropriate, even effective, because the sentence emphasizes the receiver of the action, the First Nations people. Conversely, we might argue that it is actually inappropriate because in not identifying the actor (the government), the sentence seems to say that no one was responsible for the mistreatment of First Nations people, that their being "forced to live on remote and infertile land" was something that somehow just happened.

EXTRA INFORMATION AND EXERCISE
http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/passive.htm

G3. Problems with pronouns

Pronouns are words that substitute for nouns. Four frequently encountered problems with pronouns are discussed in this section.

G3-a. Make pronouns and antecedents agree.

The antecedent of a pronoun is the word the pronoun refers to. A pronoun and its antecedent agree when they are both singular or both plural.

> SINGULAR   The *doctor* finished *her* rounds.
>
> PLURAL   The *doctors* finished *their* rounds.

Indefinite pronouns

Indefinite pronouns refer to non-specific persons or things. Even though the following indefinite pronouns may seem to have plural meanings, treat them as singular: *anybody, anyone, anything, each, either, everybody, everything, neither, nobody, none, no one, somebody, someone, something.*

> In this class *everyone* performs at *his or her* [not *their*] fitness level.

When a plural pronoun refers mistakenly to a singular indefinite pronoun, you will usually have three editing options:

1. Replace the plural pronoun with *he or she* (or *his or her*).

> When *someone* has been drinking, ~~they are~~ often likely to speed.
> When *someone* has been drinking, *he or she is* often likely to speed.

2. Make the antecedent plural.

> When ~~someone has~~ been drinking, *they are* often likely to speed.
> When *drivers* have been drinking, *they are* often likely to speed.

3. Rewrite the sentence so that no problem of agreement arises.

> ~~When someone~~ has been drinking~~, they are~~ often likely to speed.
> Someone who has been drinking is often likely to speed

Because the *he or she* construction is wordy, often the second or third editing strategy is more effective.

Note: The traditional use of *he* (or *his*) to refer to persons of either sex is now widely considered sexist.

Generic pronouns

A generic noun represents a typical member of a group, such as a typical student, or any member of a group, such as any lawyer. Although generic nouns may seem to have plural meanings, they are singular.

> Every **runner** must train vigorously if **he or she** *wants* [not **they** *want*] to excel.

When a plural pronoun refers mistakenly to a generic noun, you will usually have the same three editing options mentioned in the section on indefinite pronouns.

A medical *student* must study hard if ~~they want~~ to succeed.
A medical *student* must study hard if *he or she wants* to succeed.

~~A medical student~~ must study hard if *they want* to succeed.
Medical students must study hard if *they want* to succeed.

A medical student must study hard ~~if they want~~ to succeed.

Collective nouns

Collective nouns such as *jury, committee, audience, crowd, pack, family, team,* and *couple* name classes or groups. If the group functions as a unit, treat the noun as singular; if the members of the group function individually, treat the noun as plural.

AS A UNIT   The *committee* granted *its* permission to build.

AS INDIVIDUALS   The *committee* put *their* signatures on the document.

When treating a collective noun as a plural, many writers prefer to add a clearly plural antecedent. The above sentence, then, might be revised thus: *The committee members put their signatures on the document.*

To some extent, you can choose whether to treat a collective noun as a singular or plural depending on your meaning and preference. Make sure, however, that you are consistent.

The jury has reached ~~their~~ *its* decision.
[The writer selects the verb *has* to match the singular noun *jury,* so for consistency the pronoun must be *its*.]

Compound antecedents

Treat compound antecedents joined by *and* as plural.

Joanne and Kwaku moved to the mountains, where *they* built a log cabin.

With compound antecedents joined by *or* or *nor,* make the pronoun agree with the nearer antecedent.

Either *Bruce or **Edward*** should receive first prize for ***his*** sculpture.

Neither the *instructor nor her **students*** could find ***their*** way to the bookstore.

Note: If one of the antecedents is singular and the other plural, as in the second example, put the plural one last to avoid awkwardness.

Exception: If one antecedent is male and the other female, do not follow the traditional rule. The sentence *Either Bruce or Anita should receive the blue ribbon for her sculpture* is obviously incorrect. In a case like this, the best solution is to recast the sentence. For example: *The blue ribbon for best sculpture should go to either Bruce or Anita.*

G3-b. Make pronoun references clear.

Pronouns substitute for nouns; they are a kind of shorthand. In a sentence like *After Andrew intercepted the ball, he kicked it as hard as he could,* the pronouns *he* and *it* substitute for the nouns *Andrew* and *ball.* The word that a pronoun refers to is called its antecedent.

Ambiguous reference

Ambiguous reference occurs when the pronoun could refer to two possible antecedents.

> When Ming set the pitcher on the glass-topped table, it broke.
> We cannot tell whether the pronoun "it" refers to "pitcher" or to "table." If it was the pitcher that broke, the sentence could be revised in this way:
> When Ming set it on the glass-topped table, the pitcher broke.
> Alternately, if it was the table that broke, the sentence might be written so:
> When Ming set the pitcher on it, the glass-topped table broke.

> Tom told James that he had won the lottery.
> Who won the lottery—Tom or James? A revision like the following makes it clear.
> Tom told James, "You've won the lottery."

Implied reference

A pronoun must refer to a specific antecedent, not to a word that is only implied in the sentence.

After braiding Ann's hair, Pierrette decorated ~~them~~ with ribbons.

The pronoun "them" is meant to refer to Ann's braids (implied in the word "braiding"), but the word *braids* does not appear in the sentence. The sentence could be revised in this way:

After braiding Ann's hair, Pierrette decorated the braids with ribbons.

Modifiers, such as possessives, cannot serve as antecedents. A modifier may strongly imply the noun that the pronoun might logically refer to, but it is not itself that noun.

Because of ~~Paul Robeson's~~ strong views on fascism, ~~he~~ was labeled a Communist.

The pronoun "he" cannot logically refer to the possessive *Robeson's*. The sentence could be thus revised:

Because of *his* strong views on fascism, *Paul Robeson* was labeled a Communist.

Broad reference of *this, that, which,* and *it*

For clarity, the pronouns *this, that, which,* and *it* should be made to refer to specific antecedents rather than to whole ideas or sentences. When a pronoun's reference is too broad, either replace the pronoun with a noun or supply an antecedent to which the pronoun clearly refers.

More and more, especially in large cities, we are finding ourselves subjected to nearly intolerable levels of noise. Absurdly, however, we continue to accept ~~this~~ without complaint.

[Here the pronoun "this" refers to an overly broad patch of information. To more clearly indicate that "this" is meant to refer to the antecedent "noise," the writer could say instead, "… we continue to accept *this condition* without complaint."]

Some readers argue that Romeo and Juliet are too young to have acquired much wisdom, ~~which~~ accounts for the young lovers' rash actions.

[Here too, the pronoun has an antecedent that is too general. To clarify, the writer might say, "… to have acquired much wisdom, *a fact that accounts* for the young lovers' rash actions."]

Indefinite reference of *they, it,* or *you*

The pronoun *they* should refer to a specific antecedent. Do not use *they* to refer indefinitely to persons who have not been specifically mentioned.

Sometimes a list of ways to save energy is included with the gas bill. For example, ~~they suggest~~ setting a moderate temperature for the water heater.

Revise as:
Sometimes a list of ways to save energy is included with the gas bill. For example, *the gas company suggests* setting a moderate temperature for the water heater.

The pronoun *it* should not be used indefinitely in constructions such as "In the article it says …"

~~In the~~ encyclopedia ~~it~~ states that male moths can smell female moths from several kilometers away.
Revise as:
The encyclopedia states that male moths can smell female moths from several kilometers away.

The second-person pronoun *you* is appropriate when the writer is addressing the reader directly and when the writing context allows for some informality. In more formal contexts, however, the indefinite *you* (meaning "anyone in general") is inappropriate.

In Chad, ~~you don't~~ need much property to be considered well-off.
Revise as:
In Chad, *one does not* need much property to be considered well-off.
If the pronoun *one* seems too stilted (stiffly formal), the writer might recast the sentence:
In Chad, *a person does not* need much property to be considered well-off.

G3-c. Use personal pronouns in the proper case.

The case forms of the personal pronouns in the following chart change according to their grammatical functions in sentences. Pronouns serving as subjects or subject complements appear in the *subjective* case; those working as objects appear in the *objective* case; and those functioning as possessives appear in the *possessive* case.

SUBJECTIVE CASE	OBJECTIVE CASE	POSSESSIVE CASE
I	me	my
we	us	our
you	you	your
he/she/it	him/her/it	his/her/its
they	them	their

This section explains the difference between subjective and objective cases. Then it alerts you to certain structures that may tempt you to choose the wrong pronoun. Finally, it describes a special use of possessive-case pronouns.

Subjective case

When a pronoun functions as a subject or a subject complement, it must be in the subjective case (see above).

SUBJECT   Sylvia and *he* won the award.

SUBJECT COMPLEMENT   The award winners were Sylvia and *he.*

Subject complements—words following linking verbs that complete the meaning of the subject —often cause problems for writers, since we rarely hear the correct form in casual speech.

Sandra confessed that the artist was ~~her~~.
The pronoun *she* should follow the linking verb "was" to complete the meaning of the subject "artist." The sentence should be written this way:
Sandra confessed that the artist was *she.*
If the clause *the artist was she* seems too stilted, the writer might recast the sentence:
Sandra confessed that she was the artist.

Objective case

When a pronoun functions as a direct object, an indirect object, or the object of a preposition, it must be in the objective case (see above).

DIRECT OBJECT   Bruce found Tony and brought *him* home.

INDIRECT OBJECT   Simone gave *me* a surprise party.

OBJECT OF A PREPOSITION   Jessica wondered if the call was for *her.*

Compound word groups

When a subject or an object appears as part of a compound structure, you may occasionally become confused. To test for the correct pronoun, mentally strip away all of the compound word group except for the pronoun in question.

Everyone laughed when Ellen explained that her brother and *she* [not *her*] had seen the Loch Ness monster and fed it sandwiches.
[The phrase "her brother and she" is the subject of the verb "had seen." Strip away "her brother and" from the subject in order to hear, "Ellen explained that **she** had seen the Loch Ness monster." Plainly, it would be incorrect to say *Ellen explained that her had seen the Loch Ness monster.*]

The most traumatic experience for her father and *me* [not *I*] occurred long after her operation.
[The pronoun "me" is the object of the preposition "for." We would not say *the most traumatic experience for I.*]

When in doubt about the correct pronoun, *I* or *me*, some writers and speakers try to avoid the issue by using the reflexive pronoun *myself.* This choice, however, is incorrect.

The Egyptian cab driver gave my husband and *me* [not *myself*] some good advice on traveling in North Africa.

The CEO and *I* [not *myself*] toured the proposed hotel sites.

The levying of such a tax would be an insult to both my constituents and *me* [not *myself*].

Many executives, politicians, and other puffed-up persons seem to think that *myself* as a substitute for *I* and *me* is not only correct but a sign of refinement too. It is neither.

Appositives

Appositives are noun phrases that rename nouns or pronouns. A pronoun used as an appositive serves the same function as the noun or pronoun it renames.

The winners of the art competition, Patricia and *I* [not *me*], will spend a month studying fresco paintings in Florence.
[The appositive "Patricia and I" renames the subject "winners."]

The reporter interviewed only two witnesses, the shopkeeper and *me* [not *I*].
[The appositive "the shopkeeper and me" renames the direct object "witnesses."]

In cases like these, the principle of stripping away parts to get at the right-sounding word is useful. In the first example, if you delete the subject and let the complement stand alone as the subject—further, if you delete "Patricia and"—you are left with "I will spend a month studying fresco paintings in Florence." This sentence is obviously preferable to *Me will spend a month studying fresco paintings in Florence.* In the second example, removing "two witnesses, the

shopkeeper and" leaves you with "The reporter interviewed only me," which sounds better than *The reporter interviewed only I.*

We or *us* before a noun

When deciding whether *we* or *us* should precede a noun, choose the pronoun that would be appropriate if the noun were omitted.

> *We* [not *us*] tenants would rather fight than move.
> [*Us would rather fight than move* is obviously wrong.]

> Management is shortchanging *us* [not *we*] tenants.
> [*Management is shortchanging we* is wrong too.]

Comparisons with *than* or *as*

Sentence parts, usually verbs, are often omitted in comparisons beginning with *than* or *as.* To test for the correct pronoun, mentally complete the sentence.

> My husband is six years older than *I* [not *me*].
> ["I" is the subject of the verb "am," which in this sentence is not shown but is still understood as present. If the correct English sounds too formal, add the actual verb: *My husband is six years older than I am.*]

> We respected no other candidate as much as *her* [not *she*].
> [The pronoun "her" is the direct object of an understood verb: *We respected no other candidate as much as* (we respected) *her.*]

Subjects of infinitives

An infinitive is the preposition *to* followed by the base form of a verb. Subjects of infinitives are an exception to the rule that subjects must be in the subjective case. Whenever an infinitive has a subject, the subject must be in the objective case.

> We expected Chris and *him* [not *he*] to win the doubles championship.
> ["Chris and him" is the subject of the infinitive "to win."]

Note that if this sentence had no infinitive phrase standing as the object of "Chris and him," the correct pronoun would be *he: We expected that Chris and he would win the doubles championship.*

Possessive case to modify a gerund

If a pronoun modifies a gerund or gerund phrase, it should appear in the possessive case (see above). A gerund is a verb form ending in *-ing* that functions as a noun.

> The chances of *your* [not *you*] being hit by lightning are about two million to one.
> [The pronoun "your" modifies the gerund phrase "being hit by lightning."]

Nouns as well as pronouns may modify gerunds. To form the possessive case of a noun, use an apostrophe and an *s* (*a victim's suffering*) or just an apostrophe (*these victims' suffering*).

> We had to pay a 50-dollar fine for *Brenda's* [not *Brenda*] driving without a permit.
> [The possessive noun "Brenda's" modifies the gerund phrase "driving without a permit."]

EXTRA INFORMATION AND EXERCISE
http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/cases.htm

G3-d. Use *who* and *whom* in the proper case.

Who, a subjective-case pronoun, can be used only for subjects and subject complements. *Whom,* an objective-case pronoun, can be used only for objects.

In subordinate clauses

The case of a relative pronoun in a subordinate clause is determined by its function *within the subordinate clause.*

> When medicine is scarce and expensive, physicians must give it to *whoever* [not *whomever*] has the best chance of surviving.
> [The writer has selected the pronoun "whoever," thinking, perhaps, that it is the object of the preposition "to." However, the object of the preposition is the entire subordinate clause "whoever has the best chance of surviving." The verb of that clause is "has," and its subject should be "whoever."]

When it functions as on object in a subordinate clause, *whom* appears out of order, before both the subject and the verb. To choose the correct pronoun, you can mentally restructure the clause.

> You will work with your senior engineers, *whom* [not *who*] you will meet later.
> ["Whom" is the direct object of the verb "will meet" in the subordinate clause. This becomes clear if you mentally restructure the clause: *you will meet whom.*]

> The tutor *whom* [not *who*] I was assigned to was very supportive.
> ["Whom" is the object of the preposition "to"—which becomes clear in a re-phrased version of the sentence, *The tutor **to whom** I was assigned was very supportive.* If the correct English sounds too formal, drop "whom: *The tutor I was assigned to was very supportive.*]

Ignore inserted expressions such as *they know* or *I think* when determining the case of a relative pronoun.

> All of the school bullies want to take on a big guy *who* [not *whom*] they know will not hurt them.
> ["Who" is the subject of "will hurt," not the object of "know.]

In questions

The case of an interrogative pronoun is determined by its function within the question

> *Who* [not *whom*] is responsible for this dastardly deed?
> ["Who" is the subject of the verb "is"?]

When *whom* appears as an object in a question, it appears out of order, before both the subject and the verb. To choose the correct pronoun, you can mentally restructure the question?

> *Whom* [not *who*] did the committee select?
> ["Whom" is the direct object of the verb "did select": *The committee did select whom?*]

EXTRA INFORMATION AND EXERCISE
http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/pronouns.htm#who

G4. Adjectives and adverbs

Adjectives modify nouns or pronouns. Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs. Many adverbs are formed by adding *-ly* to adjectives (*formal – formally*). But don't assume that all

words ending in *-ly* are adverbs or that all adverbs end in *–ly.* Some adjectives end in *-ly* (*lovely, friendly*) and some adverbs don't (*always, here, there*). When in doubt, consult a dictionary.

G4-a.   Use adverbs, not adjectives, to modify verbs, adjectives, and adverbs

When adverbs modify verbs (or verbals), they usually answer one of these questions: When? Where? How? Why? Under what conditions? How often? To what degree?

The incorrect use of adjectives in place of adverbs to modify verbs occurs primarily in casual speech.

> The manager must see that the office runs *smoothly* [not *smooth*] and *efficiently* [not *efficient*].

The incorrect use of the adjective *good* in place of the adverb *well* is especially common in casual speech.

> The team played *well* [not *good*].

Note: The word *well* is an adjective when it means "healthy" (*I'm well, thank you*), "satisfactory" (*All is well*), or "fortunate" (*It's just as well*).

Adjectives are sometimes used incorrectly to modify adverbs or other adjectives.

> For a man 90 years old, Jean-Pierre plays the fiddle *really* [not *real*] well.

G4-b.   Use adjectives, not adverbs, as subject complements.

Adjectives normally precede nouns, but they can also function as subject complements following linking verbs. When an adjective functions as a subject complement, it describes the subject.

> Love is *blind.*

Problems can arise with verbs such as *smell, taste, look,* and *feel,* which may or may not be linking verbs. If the word following one of these verbs describes the subject, use an adjective. If it modifies the verb, use an adverb.

ADJECTIVE	The detective looked *cautious.*
ADVERB	The detective looked *cautiously* for the fingerprints.

Linking verbs suggest states of being, not actions. For example, to look cautious suggests the state of being cautious. To look cautiously, on the other hand, is to perform an action in a cautious way. The verbs *smell, taste, look,* and *feel,* which suggest states of being, should be described by adjectives, not adverbs.

> The lilacs smell very *sweet* [not *sweetly*] this year.

> The milk tastes *sour* [not *sourly*].

> Lori looked *good* [not *well*] in her new raincoat.

> I felt *bad* [not *badly*] about the insult she had suffered.

Note: It is correct to say that *Lori looks good,* if you want to describe her pleasing appearance. If, however, you want to indicate Lori's positive state of being (perhaps her emotional strength or her physical health) you would say *Lori looks well.*

G4-c. Use comparatives and superlatives with care.

Most adjectives and adverbs have three forms: the positive, the comparative, and the superlative.

POSITIVE	COMPARATIVE	SUPERLATIVE
soft	softer	softest
fast	faster	fastest
careful	more careful	most careful
bad	worse	worst
good	better	best

Comparative versus superlative

Use the comparative to compare two things, the superlative to compare three or more.

> Which of these two brands of toothpaste is *better* [not *best*]?

> Though Shaw and Singh are impressive, Spitzberg is the *most* [not *more*] qualified of the three candidates.

Double comparatives or superlatives

Do not use double comparatives or superlatives. When you have added *-er* or *-est* to an adjective, do not also use *more* or *most*.

> Of all the Benson children, Paul is ~~most~~ happiest about the move.
> Or:
> Of all the Benson children, Paul is most happy about the move.
>
> That is the ~~most~~ vilest joke I have ever heard.
> Or:
> That is the most vile joke I have ever heard.

Absolute concepts

Do not use comparatives or superlatives with absolute concepts (conditions for which degrees, greater or lesser, cannot be shown). Absolutes include adjectives such as *unique* and *perfect*. Something is either unique or usual, perfect or imperfect; there are no degrees between the poles.

> That's the most ~~unique~~ wedding gown I've seen this year.
> Instead:
> That's the most bizarre/spectacular/beautiful/hideous/outrageous/… wedding gown I've seen this year.
>
> The painting would have been more ~~priceless~~ had it been signed.
> Instead:
> The painting would have been more valuable/impressive/notable/ … had it been signed.

G4-d. Avoid double negatives.

Standard English allows two negatives only if a positive meaning is intended: *The singer was not unhappy with her performance* (i.e. she was happy). Double negatives intended to indicate negation are illogical. Therefore, negative modifiers such as *never, no,* and *not* shouldn't be paired with other negative modifiers or with negative words such as *neither, none, no one, nobody,* and *nothing.* Words such as *hardly, barely,* and *scarcely* are also considered negatives in standard English.

> Management isn't doing *anything* [not *nothing*] to see that conditions improve.
> Or:
> Management *is doing nothing* to see that conditions improve.
>
> George won't *ever* [not *never*] forget that day.
> Or:

George *will never* forget that day.

Lewis is so weak he *can* [not *can't*] hardly climb the stairs.

G5. Sentence fragments

A sentence fragment is a word group that pretends to be a sentence. Some fragments are clauses that contain a subject and a verb but begin with a subordinating word. Others are phrases that lack a subject, a verb, or both. Sentence fragments are easy to spot when they appear out of context, like this one:

On the old wooden stool in the corner of my grandmother's kitchen.

But when they appear next to related sentences, they are harder to see.

That morning I sat in my usual spot. On the old wooden stool in the corner of my grandmother's kitchen.

To be a sentence, a word group must consist of at least one independent clause. An independent clause has a subject and a verb, and it stands alone or could stand alone.

You can repair most fragments in one of two ways. You can pull the fragment into a nearby sentence (making sure to punctuate the new sentence properly). Or you can turn the fragment into a complete sentence. To repair the sample sentence, you would do well to combine it with the sentence that precedes it, like this:

That morning I sat in my usual spot, on the old wooden stool in the corner of my grandmother's kitchen.

G5-a. Attach fragmented subordinate clauses or turn them into sentences.

A subordinate clause is patterned like a sentence, with both a subject and a verb, but it begins with a word used in such a way that tells readers it cannot stand alone—a word such as *after, although, because, before, if, though, unless, until, when, where, who, which,* and *that.* Most often a fragmented subordinate clause begs to be pulled into a nearby sentence.

With machetes, the explorers cut their way through the tall grass to the edge of the canyon. Where they began to lay out their tapes for the survey.
Revise as:

With machetes, the explorers cut their way through the tall grass to the edge of the canyon, where they began to lay out their tapes for the survey.

If a fragmented clause cannot be attached to a nearby sentence or if you feel that doing so would be awkward, try turning it into a sentence. The simplest way to make a subordinate clause a sentence is to delete the word or words that mark it as a subordinate.

Violence has produced a great deal of apprehension among children and parents. So that self-preservation, in fact, has become their main aim.
Revise as:
Violence has produced a great deal of apprehension among children and parents. Self-preservation, in fact, has become their main aim.

G5-b. Attach fragmented phrases or turn them into sentences.

Like subordinate clauses, phrases function within sentences as adjectives, as adverbs, or as nouns. They cannot stand alone. Fragmented phrases are often prepositional or verbal phrases. Sometimes they are appositives, words or word groups that rename nouns or pronouns.

On Sundays Wallace read the newspaper's employment sections scrupulously. Scrutinizing every position that held for him even the remotest possibility.
["Scrutinizing every position that held for him even the remotest possibility" is a verbal phrase modifying "Wallace."]
Revise as:
On Sundays Wallace read the newspaper's employment sections scrupulously, scrutinizing every position that held for him even the remotest possibility.

Maria suffers from agoraphobia. A fear of open spaces.
["A fear of open spaces" is an appositive phrase that renames the noun "agoraphobia."]
Revise as:
Maria suffers from agoraphobia, a fear of open spaces.

If a fragmented phrase cannot be pulled smoothly into a nearby sentence, turn the fragment into a sentence. You may need to add a subject, a verb, or both.

In the study-skills workshop, we learned the value of discipline and hard work. Also how to organize our time, take meaningful notes, interpret assignments, pinpoint trouble spots, and seek help.
[The word group beginning "Also how to organize" is a fragment, and a long one at that. Attaching it to the preceding sentence would result in a fairly unwieldy sentence; it would be better, therefore, to make the fragment its own sentence.]
Revise as:

> In the study-skills workshop, we learned the value of discipline and hard work. We also learned how to organize our time, take meaningful notes, interpret assignments, pinpoint trouble spots, and seek help.

G5-c. Attach other fragmented word groups or turn them into sentences.

Other word groups that are commonly fragmented include parts of compound predicates, lists, and examples introduced by *such as, for example,* or similar expressions.

Parts of compound predicates

A predicate consists of a verb and its objects, complements, and modifiers. A compound predicate includes two or more predicates joined by a coordinating conjunction such as *and, but,* or *or.* Because the parts of a compound predicate share the same subject, they should appear in the same sentence.

> Aspiring bodybuilders must first recognize their strengths and weaknesses. And then decide what they want to achieve.
> Revise as:
> Aspiring bodybuilders must first recognize their strengths and weaknesses and then decide what they want to achieve.

Lists

When a list is mistakenly fragmented, it can often be attached to nearby sentence with a colon or a dash.

> Some say that Canada has three national sports. Hockey, hockey, and hockey.
> Revise as:
> Some say that Canada has three national sports: hockey, hockey, and hockey.
> Or:
> Some say that Canada has three national sports—hockey, hockey, and hockey.

Examples introduced by *such as, for example,* or similar expressions

Expressions that introduce examples or explanations can lead to unintentional fragments. Although you may begin a sentence with some of the following words or phrases, make sure that what you have written is a sentence, not a fragment.

also
especially
in addition to
namely
that is
and
for example
like
or
but
for instance
mainly
such as

Sometimes fragmented examples can be attached to the preceding sentence.

The West has produced some of our greatest twentieth-century writers. Such as Ethel Wilson, W. O. Mitchell, Rudy Wiebe, Daphne Marlatt, and Robert Kroetsch.
Revise as:
The West has produced some of our greatest twentieth-century writers, such as Ethel Wilson, W. O. Mitchell, Rudy Wiebe, Daphne Marlatt, and Robert Kroetsch.

At times, however, it may be necessary to turn the fragment into a sentence.

If Eric doesn't get his way, he goes into a fit of rage. For example, lying on the floor screaming or opening the cabinet doors and then slamming them shut.
Revise as:
If Eric doesn't get his way, he goes into a fit of rage. For example, he lies on the floor screaming or opens the cabinet doors and then slams them shut.
[In this case, the writer has revised by adding a subject ("he") and substituting verbs for the verbals "lying," "opening," and "slamming."]

G5-d. Exception: Fragments may be used for special purposes.

Skilled writers sometimes use sentence fragments deliberately.

FOR EMPHASIS
Guilt, guilt, and more guilt. But for the children, even more than for the parents, it is guilt without final cause and therefore guilt without final atonement or expiation.

TO ANSWER A QUESTION
Are these new drug tests reliable? No, not in the opinion of most experts.

AS A TRANSITION
And now the opposing argument.

IN EXCLAMATION
Not again!

In assignments or exam compositions, you may want to be cautious about using deliberate fragments. Some markers may take your style choices for ineptitude.

G6. Comma splices and fused sentences

Comma-spliced and fused sentences are independent clauses that have been joined incorrectly. An independent clause is a word group within a sentence that can stand as a sentence on its own. When two independent clauses appear in one sentence, they must be joined in one of these ways:

—with a comma and a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet*)

—with a semi-colon

When a writer puts no mark of punctuation and no coordinating conjunction between independent clauses, the result is a fused sentence.

> Gestures are a useful means of communication for everyone they are essential for the hearing-impaired.
> [Note that this faulty construction is made of two unconnected independent clauses: *Gestures are a useful means of communication* / *they are essential for the hearing-impaired.*]

A more common error is the comma splice—independent clauses joined by a comma but lacking a coordinating conjunction.

> Gestures are a useful means of communication for everyone, they are essential for the hearing-impaired.

[Again, here are two independent clauses, this time connected but insufficiently: *Gestures are a useful means of communication for everyone , / they are essential for the hearing-impaired.*]

In other comma splices, the comma is accompanied by a joining word that is not a coordinating conjunction. There are only seven coordinating conjunctions in English: *and, but, or, nor, for, so, and yet.* The comma splice above could be repaired by the insertion of a sensible coordinating conjunction after the comma: *Gestures are a useful means of communication for everyone , **but** they are essential for the hearing-impaired.*

Comma splices cannot be repaired with conjunctive adverbs in the same way that they are repaired with coordinating conjunctions. Conjunctive adverbs are words that do double duty in that they modify verbs and show sensible transitions from thought to thought. Certain transitional phrases serve the same function.

however	therefore	moreover	furthermore
indeed	hence	consequently	besides
finally	next	otherwise	similarly
still	then	thus	also
now	besides	in fact	for example
as a result	of course	in addition	in other words

A comma splice (or fused sentence) repaired with a conjunctive adverb or transitional phrase requires also a semi-colon before the transition and a comma after it.

COMMA SPLICE
We should leave for the restaurant by four o'clock , otherwise we'll have to stand in line.
Revise as:
We should leave for the restaurant by four o'clock *; **otherwise ,** we'll have to stand in line.*

COMMA SPLICE
John is strikingly handsome , in addition he is fabulously wealthy.
Revise as:
John is strikingly handsome *; **in addition ,** he is fabulously wealthy.*

To correct a fused or comma-spliced sentence, use one of the following methods:

1.   Use a comma followed by a coordinating conjunction.

Gestures are a useful means of communication for everyone , they are essential for the hearing impaired.
Revise as:

Gestures are a useful means of communication for everyone *, but* they are essential for the hearing impaired.

2.   Use a semi-colon, with or without a conjunctive adverb or transitional phrase (depending on context and preference).

Gestures are a useful means of communication for everyone , they are essential for the hearing impaired.
Revise as:
Gestures are a useful means of communication for everyone *;* they are essential for the hearing impaired.
Or:
Gestures are a useful means of communication for everyone *; however ,* they are essential for the hearing impaired.

3.   Make the clauses into separate sentences.

Gestures are a useful means of communication for everyone , they are essential for the hearing impaired.
Revise as:
Gestures are a useful means of communication for everyone *. They* are essential for the hearing impaired.

4.   Restructure the faulty sentence, perhaps by subordinating one of the clauses

Gestures are a useful means of communication for everyone , they are essential for the hearing impaired.
Revise as:
Although gestures are a useful means of communication for everyone, they are essential for the hearing impaired.
Or:
While they are essential for the hearing impaired, gestures are a useful means of communication for everyone.
[Notice, incidentally, that this second revision changes significantly the emphasis of the communication. This sentence prepares the reader for a discussion that will be quite different from the discussion that the preceding sentence does.]

EXTRA INFORMATION AND EXERCISE

EFFECTIVE SENTENCES

E1. Parallelism

If two or more ideas are parallel, they should be expressed in parallel grammatical form. Single words should be balanced with single words, phrases with phrases, clauses with clauses.

A kiss can be <u>a comma</u>, <u>a question mark</u>, or <u>an exclamation point</u>.

This novel is not <u>to be tossed lightly aside</u>, but <u>to be hurled with great force</u>.

<u>Whatever is right can never be impossible</u>; <u>whatever is wrong can never be eternal</u>.

E1-a. Balance parallel ideas in a series.

Readers expect items in a series to appear in parallel grammatical form. When one or more of the items violates readers' expectations, a sentence will be needlessly awkward.

Abused children commonly exhibit one or more of the following symptoms: <u>withdrawal</u>, <u>rebelliousness</u>, <u>restlessness</u>, and they are depressed.
Revise as:
Abused children commonly exhibit one or more of the following symptoms: withdrawal, rebelliousness, restlessness, and <u>depression</u>.

Ellen is responsible for <u>stocking merchandise</u>, <u>writing orders for delivery</u>, and sales of computers.
Revise as:
Ellen is responsible for stocking merchandise, writing orders for delivery, and <u>selling computers</u>.

After assuring us that he was sober, Sam <u>drove down the middle of the road</u>, <u>ran one red light</u>, and two stop signs.
[Note that this sentence not only lacks parallelism but is grammatically flawed too.]
Revise as:
After assuring us that he was sober, Sam drove down the middle of the road, ran one red light, and <u>went through two stop signs</u>.

E1-b. Balance parallel ideas presented as pairs.

When pairing ideas, underscore their connection by expressing them in similar grammatical form. Paired ideas are usually connected in one of three ways: 1) with a coordinating conjunction such as *and, but,* or *or;* 2) with a pair of correlative conjunctions such as *either…or* or *not only… but also;* 3) with a word introducing a comparison, usually than or as.

Parallel ideas linked with coordinating conjunctions

At George Vanier School, vandalism can result in <u>suspension</u> or even being expelled from school.
Revise as:
At George Vanier School, vandalism can result in suspension or even <u>expulsion</u> from school.

Many economists propose <u>reducing property taxes</u> for homeowners and that the government should extend financial aid in the form of tax credits to renters.
Revise as:
Many economists propose reducing property taxes for homeowners and <u>extending financial aid</u> in the form of tax credits to renters.

Parallel ideas linked with correlative conjunctions

The shutters were <u>not only too long</u> but also were too wide.
[The words "too long" follow "not only"; therefore, "too wide" should follow "but also." Repeating "were" (unnecessarily) causes an unbalanced effect.]
Revise as:
The shutters were not only too long <u>but also too wide</u>.

I was advised <u>either to change my flight</u> or take the train.
["To change my flight," which follows "either," should be balanced with "to take the train" after "or."]
Revise as:
I was advised either to change my flight <u>or to take the train</u>.

Comparisons linked with *than* or *as*

It is easier <u>to speak in abstractions</u> than grounding one's thoughts in reality.
["To speak in abstractions" is not balanced with "grounding one's thoughts in reality."]
Revise as:
It is easier to speak in abstractions than <u>to ground one's thoughts in reality</u>.

Mother could not persuade me that <u>giving</u> is as much a joy as to receive.

["Giving" is not balanced with "to receive."]

Revise as:

Mother could not persuade me that giving is as much a joy as <u>receiving</u>.

E2. Needed words

Do not omit words required for grammatical or logical completeness. Readers need to see at a glance how the parts of a sentence are connected.

E2-a. Add words needed to complete compound structures.

In compound structures, words are often omitted for economy: ***Chantal is a woman who says what she means and*** [*who*] ***means what she says.*** Such omissions are acceptable as long as the omitted word is common to both parts of the compound structure. If the shorter version defies grammatical correctness because an omitted word is not common to both parts of the compound structure, the word must be put back in.

Some of the regulars are acquaintances whom we see at work or live in our community.

[The subordinate clause "whom we see at work" is correct, but "whom … live in our community" is not.]

Revise as:

Some of the regulars are acquaintances whom we see at work or **who** live in our community.

SETI (the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence) has and will continue to excite interest among space buffs.

[The phrase "will continue to excite" makes sense, but "has … excite" does not.]

Revise as:

SETI (the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence) has **excited** and will continue to excite interest among space buffs.

Many native peoples still believe and live by ancient laws.

[The phrase "live by" is acceptable usage, but "believe … by" is not.]

Revise as:
Many native peoples still believe **in** and live by ancient laws.

E2-b. Add the word *that* if there is a danger of misreading without it.

If there is no danger of misreading, the word *that* may sometimes be omitted when it introduces a subordinate clause: ***The value of a theory is the number of phenomena*** [*that*] ***it will explain.*** Occasionally, however, a sentence might be misread without *that.*

> From the family room Sarah saw her favorite tree, which she had climbed when she was a child, was gone.
> [Sarah didn't see the tree; rather, she saw that the tree was gone.]
> Revise as:
> From the family room Sarah saw **that** her favorite tree, which she had climbed when she was a child, was gone.

E2-c. Add words needed to make comparisons logical and complete.

Comparisons should be made between like items. To compare unlike items is illogical and distracting.

> Saul preferred the restaurants in Saskatoon to Regina.
> [As it stands, this sentence speaks of a comparison between restaurants and Regina. It is meant to compare restaurants with restaurants.]
> Revise as:
> Saul preferred the restaurants in Saskatoon to **those in** Regina.
>
> Some say that Ella Fitzgerald's renditions of Cole Porter's songs are better than any other singer.
> [The renditions cannot be logically compared to a singer. The sentence is meant to speak of a comparison between renditions and renditions.]
> Revise as:
> Some say that Ella Fitzgerald's renditions of Cole Porter's songs are better than any other singer's.
> [Note that the revision uses the possessive "singer's," with the word "renditions" being implied.]

Sometimes the word *other* must be inserted to make a comparison logical.

> Jupiter is larger than any planet in our solar system.

[This sentence seems to say that Jupiter (which is itself a planet in our solar system) is even larger than itself.]
Revise as:
Jupiter is larger than any **other** planet in our solar system.

Sometimes the word *as* must be inserted to make a comparison grammatically correct.

Our nursing graduates are as skilled, if not more skilled than, those of any other university.
[The construction "as skilled … than" is faulty. As well, if you remove the phrase "if not more skilled than," you are left with "Our graduates are <u>as skilled those</u> of any other university," which makes no sense.]
Revise as:
Our nursing graduates are as skilled **as**, if not more skilled than, those of any other university.

Comparisons must be complete enough for readers to understand what things are being compared.

Brand X is a lighter beer.
[Lighter than what beer?]
Revise as:
Brand X is a lighter beer than Brand Y.

Comparisons must be unambiguous.

Mr. Kelly helped me more than Sam.
[Notice that this sentence can be read in two ways.]
Revise—according to intended meaning—as:
Mr. Kelly helped me more than he helped Sam.
Or
Mr. Kelly helped me more than Sam did.

E3. Problems with modifiers

Modifiers—whether single words, phrases, or clauses—should point clearly to the words they are intended to modify. As a general rule, keep related words close together.

E3-a. Put limiting modifiers in front of the words they are meant to modify.

A limiting modifiers such as *only, even, almost, nearly,* or *just* should appear in front of a word only if it modifies that word. Notice how the meaning of the sentence *He threw the ball* changes when the limiting modifier *even* is inserted at different spots:

> Even he threw the ball.
>
> He even threw the ball.
>
> He threw even the ball.

Note how the revisions below clarify meaning.

> Lasers **only destroy** the target, leaving the surrounding healthy tissue intact.
> Revise as:
> Lasers destroy **only the target**, leaving the surrounding healthy tissue intact.
>
> Our team didn't **even score** once.
> Revise as:
> Our team didn't score **even once**.

The limiting modifier *not* is frequently misplaced, suggesting a meaning the writer does not intend.

> All wicker is not antique.
> [Well, *some* wicker is antique.]
> Revise as:
> Not all wicker is antique.

E3-b. Place phrases and clauses so that readers can see at a glance what they modify.

Although phrases and clauses can appear at some distance from the words they modify, they should be placed in ways that make intended meanings clear. When phrases or clauses are oddly placed, absurd misreadings can result.

> MISPLACED
> The ambassador returned to the clinic where he underwent heart surgery in 1992 in a limousine sent by the Prime Minister's Office.
> REVISED

Traveling in a limousine sent by the Prime Minister's Office, the ambassador returned to the clinic where he underwent heart surgery in 1992.

MISPLACED
There are many pictures of comedians who have performed at Gavin's on the walls.
REVISED
On the walls are many pictures of comedians who have performed at Gavin's.

MISPLACED
The robber is described as a man 185 centimeters tall with a mustache weighing 70 kilos.
REVISED
The robber is described as a 70-kilo, 185-centimeter-tall man with a mustache.

Occasionally the placement of a modifier leads to an ambiguity, in which case more than one revision will be possible, depending on the writer's intended meaning

AMBIGUOUS
The exchange students we met for coffee occasionally questioned us about our latest slang.
CLEAR
The exchange students we occasionally met for coffee questioned us about our latest slang.
CLEAR
The exchange students we met for coffee occasionally questioned us about our latest slang.

E3-c. Move awkwardly placed modifiers.

As a rule, a sentence should move from subject to verb to object, without lengthy detours along the way. When a long adverbial element separates a subject from its verb, a verb from its object, or a helping verb from its main verb, the result is usually awkward.

My brother, after doctors told him that he would never walk again, initiated an intensive program of rehabilitation.
[Separating the subject "brother" from the verb "initiated" with the long adverb clause produces an awkward message.]
Revise as:
After doctors told him that he would never walk again, my brother initiated an intensive program of rehabilitation.

E3-d. Do not split infinitives needlessly.

An infinitive consists of *to* plus a verb: *to think, to breathe, to move.* When a modifier appears between its two parts, the infinitive is said to be split: *to carefully think, to deeply breathe, to quickly move.* If a split infinitive is obviously awkward, it should be revised.

Patients should try <u>to</u> *if possible* <u>avoid</u> going up and down stairs.
Revise as:
If possible, patients should try <u>to avoid</u> going up and down stairs.
Or
Patients should, *if possible,* try <u>to avoid</u> going up and down stairs.

The candidate decided <u>to</u> *formally* <u>launch</u> her campaign.
Revise as:
The candidate decided <u>to launch</u> her campaign *formally*.

When a split infinitive sounds more natural and less awkward than an alternate version, it is acceptable to leave the phrasing as it stands. For instance, *We decided to actually enforce the law* is a natural-sounding construction, while a version such as *We decided actually to enforce the law* is not.

E3-e. Repair dangling modifiers.

A dangling modifier fails to refer logically to any word in the sentence. It is usually a word group (such as a verbal phrase) that suggests but does not name an actor. When a sentence opens with a modifier of this sort, readers expect the subject of the next clause to name the actor. If it doesn't, the modifier dangles.

Deciding to join the agency, the recruiter enthusiastically shook Joe's hand.

[This seems to say that the recruiter decided to join the agency; rather, it was Joe who decided. The participial phrase "deciding to join the agency" must be closer to the noun "Joe."]
Revise as:
Deciding to join the agency, Joe found himself shaking the enthusiastic recruiter's hand.

Upon seeing the barricade, our car screeched to a halt.
[The introductory phrase seems to refer to "car." But a car, of course, can't see a barricade; its driver does.]
Revise as:
Upon seeing the barricade, the driver of our car screeched to a halt.

Even after completing seminary training, women's access to the pulpit has often been denied.
[This sentence appears to indicate rightly that the introductory phrase refers to women; in fact, though, as written, the phrase refers not to women but to "women's access to the pulpit."]
Revise as:
Even after completing seminary training, women have often been denied access to the pulpit.

To please the children, some fireworks were set off a day early.
Revise as:
To please the children, the organizers set off some fireworks a day early.

On entering the doctor's office, a skeleton caught my attention.
Revise as:
On entering the doctor's office, I noticed a skeleton.
Or
As I entered the doctor's office, a skeleton caught my attention.

E4. Shifts

E4-a. Make the point of view consistent.

The point of view of a piece of writing is the perspective from which it is written—first person (*I, we*), second person (*you*), or third person (*he/she/it, they*). The first-person point of view, which emphasizes the speaker, is a good choice for content based mainly on personal experience. Second-person address works well for giving advice or instruction. The third-person vantage is appropriate for formal and semi-formal texts. Consistency in point of view is important, considering that un-signaled shifts from one vantage to another can be confusing; sometimes the reader must wonder just who is speaking and who is being addressed.

One week our class met in a junkyard to practise rescuing a victim trapped in a wrecked car. We learned to dismantle the car with the essential tools. You were graded on your speed and your skill in extricating the victim.

[In the first two sentences, the writer speaks in first person but in the third sentence switches to second-person address. Second person is inappropriate because the writer's material is not really suited to direct address; rather, he or she is focused more on personal experience, and so should stick to first person.]

Revise as:

One week our class met in a junkyard to practise rescuing a victim trapped in a wrecked car. We learned to dismantle the car with the essential tools. *We* were graded on *our* speed and *our* skill in extricating the victim.

Everyone should purchase a lift ticket unless you plan to spend most of your time walking or crawling up a steep hill.

[Here, second person is an appropriate point of view, as the content is concerned with giving advice. Therefore the opening pronoun, a third-person reference, is out of place.]

Revise as:

You should purchase a lift ticket unless you plan to spend most of your time walking or crawling up a steep hill.

Shifts from third-person singular to third-person plural are common and annoying.

A police officer is often criticized for being there when they aren't needed and not being there when they are needed.

Revise as:

Police officers are often criticized for being there when they aren't needed and not being there when they are needed.

E4-b. Maintain consistent verb tenses.

Consistent verb tenses establish logically the time(s) of the actions being described. When a passage begins in one tense and then shifts without reason to another, readers become confused and irked.

> There was no way I could fight the current and win. Just as I was losing hope, a stranger jumps off a passing boat and swims toward me.
> Revise as:
> There was no way I could fight the current and win. Just as I was losing hope, a stranger **jumped** off a passing boat and **swam** toward me.

Writers often shift verb tenses carelessly when writing about literature. The critical convention (traditional approach) is to speak of events and conditions in a work, or of a writer's choices, as though they are happening right now rather than in the past. Use past tense only if the event or condition to which you are referring is in past tense for the character(s).

> The captain was willing to assume that his crew was capable of achieving the task that was assigned.
> Revise as:
> The captain **is** willing to assume that his crew **is** capable of achieving the task that **has been** assigned.

> In his novella *Heart of Darkness,* Conrad was attempting to deal with universal human conditions through the depiction of particular experiences.
> Revise as:
> In his novella *Heart of Darkness,* Conrad **attempts** to deal with universal human conditions through the depiction of particular experiences.

> Lawrence showed the stone angel as a marker indicating the site where Hagar's mother is buried, but it was also a metaphor that stood for Hagar herself.
> Revise as:
> Lawrence **shows** the stone angel as a marker indicating the site where Hagar's mother is buried, but it **is** also a metaphor **standing** for Hagar herself.

E4-c. Make verbs consistent in mood and voice.

Unnecessary shifts in the mood of a verb can be distracting. There are three moods in English: the indicative, used for facts, opinions, and questions; the imperative, for requests or advice; and the subjunctive, used for wishes or conditions contrary to fact.

The following passage shifts jarringly from the indicative to the imperative mood.

> The officers advised against allowing access to our homes without proper identification. Also, alert neighbors to vacation schedules.
> Revise as:
> The officers advised against allowing access to our homes without proper identification. They also suggested that we alert neighbors to vacation schedules.

The voice of a verb may be either active (with the subject doing the action) or passive (with the subject receiving the action).

> When the tickets are ready, the travel agent notifies the client. Each ticket is then listed on a daily register, and a copy of the itinerary is filed.
> [The writer begins in the active voice ("agent notifies"), then switches unaccountably to the passive ("ticket is then listed … copy of the itinerary is filed"). Because active voice is generally clearer and more direct than is passive, the writer should make all of the verbs active.]
> Revise as:
> When the tickets are ready, the travel agent notifies the client, lists each ticket on a daily register, and files a copy of the itinerary.

EXTRA INFORMATION AND EXERCISE
http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/verbs.htm#mood

E4-d. Avoid sudden shifts from indirect to direct questions or quotations.

An indirect question reports a question without asking it. It is not punctuated with a question mark because the sentence in which it appears is a declarative sentence: *We asked whether we could take a swim.* A direct question does indeed ask a question (and must, of course, be punctuated accordingly): *May we take a swim?* Shifts from indirect to direct questions are illogical and jarring.

I wonder whether the sister knew of the murder, and if so, did she report it to the police.
Revise as:
I wonder whether the sister knew of the murder, and if so, whether she reported it to the police.
[The revision *reports* rather than asks both questions—that is, expresses indirect questions.]
Revise alternately as:
Did the sister know of the murder, and if so, did she report it to the police?
[This revision *asks* rather than reports both questions.]

An indirect quotation reports someone's message without repeating that message word for word: *Anna said that she is a Virgo.* A direct quotation presents someone's exact words, words that must be set inside quotation marks: *Anna said, "I'm a Virgo."* Un-signaled shifts from indirect to direct quotations are also jarring.

Mother said that she would be late for dinner and please do not leave for choir practice until Dad comes home.
Revise as:
Mother said that she would be late for dinner and asked me not to leave for choir practice until Dad came home.
[The revision summarizes the two parts of Mother's message. Neither part quotes her words.]
Revise alternately as:
Mother said, "I'll be late for dinner. Please don't leave for choir practice until Dad comes home."
[This revision quotes all of Mother's message verbatim.]

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EXTRA INFORMATION AND EXERCISE
http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/verbs.htm#mood

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E5. Mixed constructions

A mixed construction contains elements that do not fit sensibly together. The mismatch may be a matter of grammar or of logic.

E5-a. Untangle the grammatical structure.

Once you begin composing a sentence, your choices are limited by the range of grammatical patterns in English. You cannot begin with one grammatical plan and switch without warning to another.

MIXED

For most drivers who have a blood alcohol level of .05 percent double their risk of causing an accident.

REVISED FOR CONSISTENCY

For most drivers who have a blood alcohol level of .05 percent, the risk of causing an accident is doubled.

OR

Most drivers who have a blood alcohol level of .05 percent double their risk of causing an accident.

MIXED

Although I feel that Mr. Carlson is an excellent counselor, but a few changes in his approach would benefit both him and his clients.

REVISED FOR CONSISTENCY

Although I feel that Mr. Carlson is an excellent counselor, a few changes in his approach would benefit both him and his clients.

OR

Mr. Carlson is an excellent counselor, but a few changes in his approach would benefit both him and his clients.

MIXED

In the whole-word method, children learn to recognize entire words rather than by the phonics method, in which they learn to sound out letters and groups of letters.

REVISED FOR CONSISTENCY

The whole-word method teaches children to recognize entire words, while the phonics method teaches them to sound out letters and groups of letters.

OR

In the whole-word method, children learn to recognize entire words, while in the phonics method, they learn to sound out letters and groups of letters.

E5-b. Straighten out the logical connections.

The subject and the predicate should make sense together. When they don't, the error is known as *faulty predication.*

FAULTY PREDICATION

Reluctantly we decided that Tiffany's welfare would not be safe living with her mother.

REVISED FOR CORRECTNESS
Reluctantly we decided that Tiffany would not be safe living with her mother.
OR
Reluctantly we decided that Tiffany's welfare would be jeopardized if she continued living with her mother.

FAULTY PREDICATION
Under the revised plan, the provinces, who now receive transfer payments from the federal government, will be reduced.
REVISED FOR CORRECTNESS
Under the revised plan, the provinces, who now receive transfer payments from the federal government, will see their funding reduced.
OR
Under the revised plan, the transfer payments from the federal government to the provinces will be reduced.

An appositive and the noun to which it refers should be logically equivalent. When they are not, the error is known as *faulty apposition.*

FAULTY APPOSITION
The tax accountant, a lucrative field, requires intelligence, patience, and attention to detail.
REVISED FOR CORRECTNESS
Tax accounting, a lucrative field, requires intelligence, patience, and attention to detail.
REVISED FOR CORRECTNESS
The tax accountant, a person in a lucrative field, must be intelligent, patient, and attentive to detail.

E5-c.   Avoid *is when, is where, reason…is because,* and *reason why* constructions.

In formal English (and even in casual but nevertheless thoughtful English) constructions that include the phrases *is when, is where, reason…is because,* and *reason why* are illogical and grammatically faulty.

Anorexia nervosa is where people diet to the point of starvation.
[*Anorexia nervosa* is a disorder, not a place.]
Revise as:
Anorexia nervosa **is a disorder suffered by people who** diet to the point of starvation.

A simile is when a writer compares one thing to another thing, using the word *like* or *as.*
Revise as:

A simile *is a comparison of* one thing to another thing, using the word *like* or *as*.

The <u>reason</u> I missed the party <u>is because</u> my motorcycle broke down.
Revise as:
The *reason* I missed the party *is that* my motorcycle broke down.
Or more economically:
I missed the party because my motorcycle broke down.

I love you. That's the <u>reason why</u> I brought you these flowers and chocolates.
Revise as:
I love you. That's the *reason* I brought you these flowers and chocolates.
Revise as:
I love you. That's *why* I brought you these flowers and chocolates.

E6. Coordination and subordination

When combining ideas in one sentence, use coordination to create equal emphasis and use subordination to create unequal emphasis.

Coordination

Coordination draws equal attention to two or more ideas. To coordinate words or phrases, join them with a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet*). To coordinate independent clauses (word groups that can stand alone as sentences), join them with a comma and a coordinating conjunction, or join them with a semi-colon and no coordinating conjunction (the semi-colon, though, is often accompanied by a conjunctive adverb).

Grandmother lost her sight*, but* her hearing sharpened.

Grandmother lost her sight*; however,* her hearing sharpened.

Subordination

To give unequal emphasis to two or more ideas, express the major idea in an independent clause and place minor ideas in subordinate clauses or phrases. Subordinate clauses, which cannot stand alone, typically begin with one of the following words.

after	that	which
although	though	while
as	unless	who
because	until	whom
before	when	whose
if	where	
since	whether	

Deciding which idea to emphasize is not simply a matter of right and wrong. Consider the two ideas about Grandmother's sight and hearing. If your purpose is to stress your grandmother's acute hearing rather than her blindness, subordinate the idea concerning her blindness.

> *As Grandmother lost her sight,* her hearing sharpened.
> [The clause "as Grandmother lost her sight," having a subject and a predicate but being unable to stand as a sentence on its own, is subordinate. "Her hearing improved" is an independent clause, as it *can* stand alone.]

To focus on Grandmother's blindness, subordinate the idea about her hearing.

> *Though her hearing sharpened,* Grandmother gradually lost her sight.

EXTRA INFORMATION AND EXERCISE
http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/conjunctions.htm#subordinating_conjunctions

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E6-a. Combine choppy sentences.

Short sentences demand attention, so they should be used mainly for emphasis. But too many short sentences, one after the other, cause choppiness (a stuttering, staccato effect)—one form of incoherence. If an idea is not important enough to merit its own sentence, try combining it with a nearby sentence.

CHOPPY

The huts vary in height. They measure from three to five feet in diameter. They have no modern conveniences.

COHERENT

The huts, which vary in height and are from three to five feet in diameter, have no modern conveniences.

[Three sentences have become one, with minor ideas expressed in a subordinate clause beginning with "which."]

CHOPPY

Agnes was another student I worked with. She was a hyperactive child.

COHERENT

Agnes, another student I worked with, was a hyperactive child.

[A minor idea is now expressed in an appositive phrase describing Agnes.]

CHOPPY

My sister owes much of her recovery to a bodybuilding program. She began the program three years ago.

COHERENT

My sister owes much of her recovery to a bodybuilding program that she began three years ago.

[A minor idea is now expressed in an adjective clause beginning with "that."]

CHOPPY

My son asked his great-grandmother if she had been a slave. She became very angry.

COHERENT

When my son asked his great-grandmother if she had been a slave, she became very angry.

[A minor idea is now expressed in an adverb clause beginning with "when."]

CHOPPY

Sister Margaret was enveloped in a black habit. Only her face and hands were visible. She was an imposing figure.

COHERENT

Enveloped in a black habit with only her hands and face visible, Sister Margaret was an imposing figure.

[Two minor ideas are now expressed in one participial phrase beginning with "enveloped" and leading into the independent clause "Sister Margaret was an imposing figure."]

Although subordination is ordinarily the most effective technique for combining short, choppy sentences, *co*ordination is appropriate when the ideas are equally important.

CHOPPY
The hospital decides when patients will sleep and wake. It dictates what and when they will eat. It tells them when they may be with family and friends.
COHERENT
The hospital decides when patients will sleep and wake, dictates what and when they will eat, and tells them when they may be with family and friends.
[Three sentences have become one, with equivalent ideas expressed in a coordinate series.]

E6-b. Avoid ineffective coordination.

Coordinate structures are appropriate when you intend to draw the reader's attention equally to two or more ideas: *Gregory praises loudly, and he criticizes softly.* If one idea is more important than another, or if a coordinating conjunction does not clearly signal the relation between ideas, you should subordinate the lesser idea.

INEFFECTIVE COORDINATION
We keep our use of insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides to a minimum, and we are concerned about the environment.
Revise as:
We keep our use of insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides to a minimum because we are concerned about the environment.
[The revision puts the less important idea in an adverb clause beginning with the subordinating conjunction "because." Notice that "because" signals the cause-effect relation between the two ideas, whereas the coordinating conjunction "and" does not.]

INEFFECTIVE COORDINATION
My uncle noticed the frightened look on my face and told me that the dentures in the glass were not real teeth.
Revise as:
My uncle, noticing the frightened look on my face, told me that the dentures in the glass were not real teeth.
[The less important idea has been made a participial phrase modifying the noun "uncle."]

INEFFECTIVE COORDINATION

Four hours went by, and a rescue truck finally arrived, but by that time we had been evacuated by a helicopter.
Revise as:
After four hours, a rescue truck finally arrived, but by that time we had been evacuated by a helicopter.
[Three coordinated independent clauses were excessive. The least important of them has become a prepositional phrase.]

E6-c. Do not subordinate major ideas.

If a sentence buries its major idea in a subordinate construction, readers are not likely to give it enough attention. Express the major idea in an independent clause and subordinate the minor ideas.

INAPPROPRIATE SUBORDINATION
I was driving home from my new job, heading down Queen Street, when my car suddenly overheated.
Revise as:
As I was driving home from my new job, heading down Queen Street, my car suddenly overheated.
[The revision puts the major idea—that the car overheated—in the independent clause and subordinates the other information.]

E6-d. Do not subordinate excessively.

In attempting to avoid choppiness, writers sometimes move to the opposite extreme, putting more subordinate ideas into a sentence than its structure can bear. Sentences collapsing under their own weight can sometimes be restructured. More often, however, they should be divided.

EXCESSIVE SUBORDINATION
Our job is to stay behind the stacker and the tie machine and watch to see if the newspapers jam, in which case we pull the bundles off and stack them on a skid, because otherwise they would back up in the stacker.
Revise as:
Our job is to stay behind the stacker and the tie machine and watch to see if the newspapers jam. If they do, we pull the bundles off and stack them on a skid, because otherwise they would back up in the stacker.

E7. Sentence variety

When a rough draft is filled with too many same-sounding sentences, try to inject some variety—as long as you can do so without sacrificing clarity or coherence.

E7-a. Use a variety of strategies.

A writer should not rely too heavily on simple and compound sentences, as the effect tends to be both monotonous and choppy. But too many complex or compound-complex sentences can be equally monotonous and cause muddiness. If your tendency is to one or the other extreme, try to achieve a better mix of sentence types.

> **For information on the sentence types referred to in the note above, go the file "Grammar-Punctuation" and see #5 – Four Sentence Structures: Simple, Compound, Complex, and Compound-Complex.**

> **EXTRA INFORMATION AND EXERCISE**
> http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/sentences.htm#sentence_types

E7-b. Use a variety of sentence openings.

Most sentences in English begin with the subject, move to the verb, and continue to an object, with modifiers tucked in along the way or put at the end. For the most part, such sentences are fine, but too many of them in a row can prove monotonous.

An adverbial modifier, often being easily movable, can usually be inserted ahead of the subject. An adverbial modifier might be a single word, a phrase, or a clause.

> A few drops of sap eventually began to trickle into the pail.
> Revise as:
> Eventually a few drops of sap began to trickle into the pail.
>
> A pair of black ducks flew over the lake just as the sun was coming up.
> Revise as:
> Just as the sun was coming up, a pair of black ducks flew over the lake.

As well, adjectival and participial modifiers can often be moved to the beginnings of sentences without loss of clarity.

> Francois, dejected and withdrawn, nearly gave up his search for a job.
> Revise as:

Dejected and withdrawn, Francois nearly gave up his search for a job.

Fatima and I, anticipating a peaceful evening, sat down at the campfire to brew a cup of coffee.
Revise as:
Anticipating a peaceful evening, Fatima and I sat down at the campfire to brew a cup of coffee.

E7-c.   Try inverting sentences occasionally.

A sentence is inverted if it does not follow the normal subject-verb pattern. Many inversions sound archaic or otherwise artificial and should be avoided. But if an inversion sounds natural, it can provide a refreshing touch of variety.

A refrigerated case of delectable cheeses is opposite the produce section.
Revise as:
Opposite the produce section is a refrigerated case of delectable cheeses.

Huge lavender hearts outlined in bright white lights were set at the two top corners of the stage.
Revise as:
Set at the two top corners of the stage were huge lavender hearts outlined in bright white lights.

WORD CHOICE

W1. Glossary of usage

This glossary includes words commonly confused and misused. As well, it includes non-standard words, colloquialisms and jargon.

In addition to this glossary, the section "Notorious Confusables" in the Dr. Darling website is helpful in sorting out certain ambiguities of English diction and phrasing.
http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/notorious/notorious_frames.htm

As well, the section "Plague Words and Phrases" is useful.
http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/plague.htm

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a, an
Use *an* before a vowel sound, *a* before a consonant sound: *an apple, a peach.* Problems sometimes arise with words beginning with *h.* If the *h* is silent, the word begins with a vowel sound, so use *an: an hour; an heir, an honest politician.* If the *h* is pronounced, the word begins with a consonant sound; in this case, most North American writers will use *a: a hospital, a haven, a harried husband.*

accept, except
Accept is a verb meaning "to receive." *Except* is usually a preposition meaning "excluding." *I will accept all of the packages except that one.* The word *except* can also be used as a verb meaning "to exclude." *Please except that item from the list.*

adapt, adopt
Adapt is a verb meaning "to adjust or become accustomed" and is usually followed by *to. Adopt* is a verb meaning "to take as one's own." *Our family adopted a Vietnamese orphan, who quickly adapted to his new surroundings.*

adverse, averse
Adverse is an adjective meaning "unfavorable." *Averse* is an adjective meaning "opposed" or "reluctant" and is usually followed by *to. I am averse to your proposal because it could have an adverse effect on the economy.*

advice, advise

Advice is a noun. *Advise* is a verb. *We advise you to take her advice.*

affect, effect
Affect is usually a verb meaning "to influence." *Effect* is usually a noun meaning "result." *The drug did not affect the disease, and it had several adverse side effects.* The word *effect* can also be used as a verb meaning "to bring about." *Only the Prime Minister can effect such a dramatic change.*

aggravate
Aggravate is a verb meaning "to make worse or more troublesome." *Overgrazing aggravated the soil erosion.* In formal writing, avoid the colloquial use of *aggravated* meaning "to annoy or irritate." *Her babbling and cackling annoyed* [not *aggravated*] *me.*

agree to, agree with
Agree to means "to give consent to." *Agree with* means "to be in accord with" or "to come to an understanding with." *He agrees with me about the need for change but won't agree to my plan.*

ain't
Ain't is non-standard. Use *am not, are not* (*aren't*), or *is not* (*isn't*).

all ready, already
All ready means "completely prepared." *Already* means "previously." *Susan was all ready for the concert, but her friends had already left.*

all together, altogether
All together means "everyone gathered." *Altogether* means "entirely." *We were not altogether certain that we could bring the family all together for the reunion.*

allude
To *allude* to something is to make an indirect reference to it. Do not use *allude* to mean "to refer directly." *In his lecture the critic referred* [not *alluded*] *to several characters in the plays of Shakespeare.*

allusion, illusion
An *allusion* is an indirect reference. An *illusion* is a deceptive image or a false conception. *Did you catch my allusion to* Hamlet*? Mirrors give the room an illusion of depth.*

a lot
A lot is written as two words. *Alot* is not a word. *We have had a lot of rain.*

a.m., p.m.

Use these abbreviations with numerals—as in 6 a.m. or 11 p.m.—not as substitutes for the nouns *morning* and *evening*. *I worked until late in the evening* [not *in the p.m.*] *to be ready for the presentation.*

among, between
Ordinarily, use *among* with three or more entities; use *between* with two. *The prize was divided among the five contestants. You have a choice between beef and chicken.*

amoral, immoral
Amoral is an adjective meaning "neither moral nor immoral" or "not caring about moral judgments." *Immoral* means "morally wrong." *Until recently, most business courses were taught from an amoral perspective. Murder is immoral.*

amount, number
Use *amount* with quantities that cannot be counted; use *number* with those that can. *This recipe calls for a large amount of sugar. We have a large number of toads in the garden.*

angry at , angry with
To write that one is *angry at* another person is non-standard. Use *angry with* instead. *I am angry with* [not *angry at*] *my supervisor.*

anxious
Anxious is an adjective meaning "worried" or "apprehensive." Do not use *anxious* to mean "eager." *We are eager* [not *anxious*] *to see your new house.*

anyone, any one
Anyone, an indefinite pronoun, means "any person at all." *Any one,* the adjective *any* followed by the pronoun *one,* refers to a particular person or thing in a group. *Anyone at least 21 years old can rent any one of the cars in the lot.*

anyplace
Anyplace is informal for *anywhere*. Avoid *anyplace* in formal writing.

anyways
Anyways is non-standard. Use *anyway* instead.

as
As is sometimes used to mean "because." But do not use it if there is any chance of ambiguity. *We canceled the picnic because* [not *as*] *the storm clouds were approaching.* Here "as" could mean that the picnic was canceled *when* the storm clouds approached—not the intended meaning.

as, like

Like is a preposition, not a subordinating conjunction. It should be followed only by a noun or noun phrase. *As* is a subordinating conjunction that introduces a subordinate clause. *You don't know her as* [not *like*] *I do. He looks as if* [not *like*] *he hasn't slept.* As well, do not use *like* where you mean to indicate a hypothetical condition; use the phrase *as if* or *as though* instead. *It is as though* [not *like*] *the stars above the young captain are not only alive but are also focused on and judging him.*

awhile, a while
Awhile is an adverb; it can modify a verb. *Stay awhile.* But it cannot be the object of a preposition such as *for.* The two-word form *a while* is a noun preceded by an article and therefore can be the object of a preposition. *Stay for a while.*

bad, badly
Bad is an adjective, *badly* an adverb. [See G4.] *They felt bad about being early and ruining the surprise. He plays the tuba badly.*

being as, being that
Being as and *being that* are non-standard expressions. Use *because* or *since* instead. *Because* [not *being as* or *being that*] *I slept late, I had to skip breakfast.*

beside, besides
Beside is a preposition meaning "at the side of" or "next to." *Lennie Gallant sat beside me on the airplane. Besides* is a preposition meaning "except" or "in addition to." *No one besides Lennie can have that ice cream. I'm not hungry, and besides, I don't even like ice cream.*

bring, take
Use *bring* when something is being brought toward you; use *take* when it is being moved away. *You don't bring me flowers anymore. Please take these flowers to Mr. Scott.*

can, may
Can is reserved for ability, *may* for permission. *Can you lift that box on your own? May I have another chocolate?*

capital, capitol
Capital refers to a city, *capitol* (in U.S. usage) to a building where lawmakers meet. *Capital* also refers to financial resources. *The capitol has undergone renovations on the second floor. Residents of the provincial capital were shocked to learn of the Premier's plans. You will need much capital to get this project started.*

censor, censure, censer
Censor is a verb meaning "to remove or suppress material considered objectionable." *Censor* is also a noun that refers to a person who censors. *Censure* can be used as a verb meaning "to criticize severely" or as a noun meaning "severe criticism." *The library's new policy of censoring*

controversial books has been censured by the media. The censor delivered her censure of the author's work. A *censer* is a container in which incense is burned.

cite, site

Cite is a verb meaning "to quote as an authority or an example." *Site* is a noun meaning "a particular place." *He cited the zoning law in his argument against the proposed site of the gas station.*

climactic, climatic

Climactic is an adjective derived from the noun *climax,* the point of greatest intensity in a progression of events. *Climatic* is an adjective derived from *climate;* it refers to weather conditions. *The climactic period in the dinosaurs' reign was reached just before severe climatic conditions brought on an ice age.*

coarse, course

Coarse is an adjective meaning "vulgar" or "crude." *Ellen's behavior was coarse and mean-spirited.* As well, *coarse* means "of rough texture." *The designer has called for a coarse fabric in the making of the leggings. Course* is usually a noun meaning a playing field or a unit of study. *To get there you must follow the north course. Physics 30 is my toughest course this semester.*

compare to, compare with

Compare to means "to represent as similar." *She compared him to her brother. Compare with* means "to examine ways in which things are similar." *The study compared the language ability of apes with that of dolphins.*

complement, compliment

Complement means "to go along or suit well with" or "to complete." It can be used as a noun or a verb. *That blouse complements your eyes. The song they have chosen is the perfect complement for their presentation's theme. Compliment,* either a noun or a verb, refers to flattery. *Please take my compliments to the chef for this excellent meal.*

conscience, conscious

Conscience is a noun referring to one's moral orientation. *Conscious* is an adjective meaning "aware." *Your own conscience must be the arbiter in this dilemma. She is not conscious of the damage she has done.*

continual, continuous

Continual is an adjective meaning "repeated regularly and frequently." *Lou-Ann grew weary of the continual phone calls. Continuous* means prolonged without interruption. *The broken siren made a continuous wail.*

could care less

Could care less is a non-standard expression and is usually used illogically besides. To say that you could care less means that you are capable of caring less than you currently do; therefore, you must care somewhat. However, the user of this expression normally means that he cares not at all about something—indeed, that it would be impossible for him to care less. *As for your concern about my style of dress, I couldn't* [not *could*] *care less.*

could of, would of, should of
Could of, would of, and *should of* are non-standard for *could've, would've,* and *should've,* the contracted forms of *could have, would have,* and *should have. We could've* [not *could of*] *taken the whole lot had we waited five minutes longer.* [See also *may of, might of, must of.*]

council/councilor, counsel/counselor
A *council* is a deliberative body, a group of people concerned with making decisions; a *councilor* is a member of such a body. The verb *counsel* means "to advise"; a *counselor* is one who counsels. *Counsel* can also be used as a noun referring to a one's lawyer. *The councilors met to draft the council's position paper. The counselor in the guidance office counseled the student carefully.*

criteria
Criteria is the plural of *criterion. The criteria for the scholarship are grades, leadership, and community involvement. The one criterion for the job is a willingness to work hard.*

different than, different from
Prefer *different from. Different from* is usually considered non-standard. *Your sense of humor is obviously different from Jim's.*

differ, defer
Differ is a verb meaning "to be different." *Defer* is a verb meaning "to yield" or "to show courtesy or respect." *In the choosing of wines we usually differ, but when it comes to choosing cheeses, I will gladly defer to you.*

differ from, differ with
Differ from means "to be unlike." *Differ with* means "to disagree." *Heloise differed with me about the wording of the editorial. My approach to the problem differed from hers*

disinterested, uninterested
Disinterested is an adjective meaning "impartial or objective"—that is, of having no particular bias in a matter of contention. *Uninterested* means "not interested"—that is, of being bored by something that might otherwise cause excitement. *We sought the advice of a disinterested counselor to help us solve our problem. He was uninterested in anyone's opinion but his own.*

due to

Due to is an adjective phrase and should not be used as a preposition meaning "because of." *The trip was canceled because of* [not *due to*] *poor road conditions. Due to* is acceptable as the introduction to a subject complement following a form of the verb *be. His success is due to hard work.* Think of *due to* as a synonym for *the result of.* You can say *His success is **the result of*** [in place of *due to*] *hard work*; however, you cannot say *The trip was canceled **the result of*** [in place of *because of*] *poor road conditions.*

e.g. and i.e.
The abbreviation *e.g.* is Latin for *exempli gratia,* and it is used in place of the English phrase *for example* (indeed, in formal writing you should use *for example* instead of *e.g.*) Use *e.g.* (in most informal contexts or in some parenthetical insertions) to introduce a set of examples. *We're taking everything we'll need for a picnic—e.g. sandwiches, pop, an umbrella, a red-and-white checkered cloth, and bug spray.* The abbreviation *i.e.* is Latin for *id est,* and it is used in place of the English phrase *that is* or *that is to say.* Note that *i.e.* differs from *e.g.* It is used to introduce an element of clarification or emphasis. *The keepers of the peace—i.e. the cops—warned us to turn down our stereo.*

elicit, illicit
Elicit is a verb meaning "to bring out" or "to evoke." *Illicit* is an adjective meaning "illegal." *The reporter was unable to elicit a response from the police about illicit drug traffic.*

emigrate from, immigrate to
Emigrate is a verb meaning "to leave one's country or region to settle in another." *Immigrate* is a verb meaning "to enter another country for the purpose of settling there." *His grandparents emigrated from Ireland in 1904. His grandparents immigrated to Canada in 1904.*

eminent, imminent, immanent
Eminent is an adjective meaning "outstanding" or "distinguished in authority or attainments." *Our host then introduced the eminent philosopher and social activist Dr. Mary Kleinman. Imminent* is an adjective meaning "about to happen." *Tyler was eager to go for a morning run even though a thunder storm was imminent. Immanent* is an adjective meaning "existing within," "intrinsic," or "inherent" (often associated with a belief about the presence of a god or gods in all times, places, and entities). *Many religious people speak of the pervasiveness of divinity and claim that this immanent force informs our morality; many atheists, in contrast, say that morality is immanent in us only by virtue of societal tradition and the habit of obedience.*

enthused
Enthused should not be used as a substitute for the adjective *enthusiastic. The children were enthusiastic* [not *enthused*] *about going to the circus.*

-ess
Many writers consider the *-ess* suffix, used to denote a female practitioner (e.g. *poetesa, actress, Jewess, authoress*), to be sexist and demeaning.

etc.

Avoid ending a list with *etcetera* or *etc.* Ending with an example is much more emphatic, and readers will often recognize that a list of examples is not meant to be exhaustive. When you don't wish to end with an example, use *and so on* instead of *etc.*

everyone, every one

Everyone is an indefinite pronoun. *Every one,* the adjective *every* followed by the pronoun *one,* means "each individual or thing. *Every one* is usually followed by *of. Everyone wanted to go. Every one of the missing books was found.* [Incidentally, note that the phrase "every one" makes "books," the subject of the sentence, singular. Thus, the correct phrasing in the verb of the sentence should indeed be "was found," not "were found."]

expect

Avoid the colloquial use of *expect* meaning "to believe, think, or suppose." *I think* [not *expect*] *it will rain tonight.*

explicit, implicit

Explicit is an adjective meaning "expressed directly" or "clearly defined; *implicit* means "implied." *I gave him explicit instructions to stay out of the water. Father's silence was his implicit consent.*

farther, further

Farther is used in reference to distances. *Halifax is farther from Toronto than I'd supposed. Further* is used in reference to quantity or degree. *You extended the curfew further than you should have.*

fewer, less

Fewer is an adjective used in reference to countable items. *Less* refers to uncountable quantities. *Fewer people are living in the town now. Please put less sugar in my tea.*

finalize

Finalize is jargon meaning "to make final or complete." Use ordinary English instead. *The architect prepared final drawings* [not *finalized the drawings*].

firstly

Firstly sounds pretentious, and it leads to the ungainly series *secondly, thirdly, fourthly,* and so on. Instead, use *first, second, third, fourth,* and so on.

get

Get has many colloquial uses. But it should not be used in formal writing to mean the following: "to evoke an emotional response" (*That music always gets to me*); "to annoy" (*After a while his sulking got to me*); "to take revenge on" (*I got back at her by leaving the room*); "to become" (*If*

you eat those berries you'll get sick); "to begin" (*Let's get going*). As well, avoid *have got to* in place of *must*. *I must* [not *have got to*] *clean the house before our guests arrive.*

good, well

Good is an adjective, *well* an adverb. *I am a good basketball player. I play basketball well. Yesterday I was ill, but today I'm well.* In response to *How are you today?* a good speaker—that is, one who speaks well—says *I'm well, thank you*, not *Good, thanks.*

hanged, hung

Hanged is the past-tense and past-participle form of *hang* when it means "to execute." *The prisoner was hanged on October 7.* But *hung* is the past-tense and past-participle form of the verb *hang* when it means "to fasten or suspend." *The stockings were hung by the chimney with care.*

hardly

Avoid phrases such as *can't hardly* and *not hardly,* which are double negatives. *Benjamin can hardly* [not *can't hardly*] *contain his excitement.*

has got, have got

Got is unnecessary and awkward in the constructions *has got* and *have got. We have* [not *have got*] *three days to prepare for the opening. Science has* [not *has got*] *a potential cure for this disease.*

hisself

Hisself is non-standard. Use *himself* instead.

hopefully

Hopefully is an adverb meaning "in a hopeful manner." *Esperanza looked hopefully to the future.* Do not use *hopefully* in such a way that you'd be creating a dangling modifier, as in *Hopefully, your daughter will soon recover.* Here, you would need to indicate who is doing the hoping (it's not "your daughter"). Say instead *I hope your daughter will recover soon.*

if, whether

Use *if* to express conditions, *whether* to express alternatives. *If* [not *whether*] *you go on a trip, whether* [not *if*] *to Goose Bay or Victoria, remember to bring traveler's cheques.*

implement

Implement, the verb, is a pompous way of saying *do, carry out,* or *accomplish. We carried out* [not *implemented*] *the doctor's orders with some reluctance. Implement,* the noun, is a pompous version of *tool, machine,* or *device. Please hand me that tool* [not *implement*].

imply, infer

Imply is a verb meaning "to suggest or to say indirectly." *Infer* is a verb meaning "to draw a conclusion." The two verbs cannot be used interchangeably. *Celine implied* [not *inferred*] *that she knew much about computers, but her interviewer inferred* [not *implied*] *that she knew little.*

in, into
In is a preposition indicating a location or condition; *into* is also a preposition but one that indicates movement to a location or a change in condition. *They found the lost letters in a box after moving into the house.*

individual
Individual is a pretentious substitute for *person,* and *individuals* is a pretentious substitute for *people. This man* [not *individual*] *then invited six people* [not *individuals*] *from the audience to join him on stage.* Strictly, the word *individual* should be used only as an adjective.

ingenious, ingenuous
Ingenious is an adjective meaning "especially clever." *Sarah's solution to the problems was ingenious. Ingenuous* is an adjective meaning "naive" or "frank." *For a successful and* **ingenious** *manager, Bertram is surprisingly* **ingenuous.**

in regards to
In regards to is a non-standard hybrid of *in regard to* and *as regards,* and all three phrases, the two standard ones and the non-standard one, are pompous. Instead, say *regarding, about,* or *as for. As for* [not *in regards to/in regard to/as regards*] *the contract, please ignore the first clause.*

irregardless
Irregardless is non-standard. Use *regardless* instead.

is when, is where
Is when and *is where* are illogical, non-standard phrases sometimes used in definitions. *A run-off election is a second election held to break a tie* [not *is when/is where a second election is held to break a tie*]. [See E5-c.]

its, it's
Its is a possessive pronoun. *It's* is a contraction of *it is. The dog wagged its tail whenever its owner smiled. It's a perfect day for a stroll by the river.*

kind, kinds
Kind is singular and should be treated so, just as *kinds* is plural and should be treated so. Therefore: *This kind of carving is rare* and *These kinds of carving are rare* [not *these kind*].

kind of, sort of
Do not use the non-standard phrases *kind of* or *sort of* to substitute for *somewhat, rather, a little,* or *a bit. The movie was a bit* [not *kind of*] *boring.*

lead, led

Lead—when it rhymes with *deed*—is a verb. Its past-tense and past-participle form is *led. Lead* —when it rhymes with *dead*—is a noun (the metal).

liable

Liable is an adjective meaning "responsible" or "obligated." Do not use *liable* as a substitute for *likely. You're likely* [not *liable*] *to trip if you don't tie your shoelaces.*

lie, lay

Lie is an intransitive verb meaning "to recline or rest on a surface." Its principal parts are *lie, lay, lain. Lay* is a transitive verb meaning "to put or place." Its principal parts are *lay, laid, lain.* [See G2-b.]

loose, lose

Loose is an adjective meaning "not securely fastened." *Loose* rhymes with *moose. Lose* is a verb meaning "to misplace" or "to not win." *Lose* rhymes with *booze.*

lots, lots of, a lot

Lots, lots of, and *a lot* are colloquialisms and should be avoided in formal texts. Instead, choose substitutes such as *much, many,* and *several.*

mankind

Avoid the sexist noun *mankind* when you mean to refer to humans generally. Choose substitutes such as *humankind, humanity, humans, the human race,* or simply *people.*

maybe, may be

Maybe is an adverb meaning "possibly." *May be* is a verb phrase. *Maybe the sun will shine tomorrow. Tomorrow may be a brighter day.*

may of, might of, must of

May of, might of, and *must of* are non-standard for *may've, might've,* and *must've,* the contracted forms of *may have, might have,* and *must have. We may've* [not *may of*] *had too many cookies.*

media, medium

Media is the plural form of *media. Of all the media that cover the Olympics, the medium of television most effectively captures its sense of spectacle.*

most

Most is a non-standard substitute for the adverb *almost. Almost* [not *most*] *everyone attended the reception.*

myself

Myself is a reflexive or intensive pronoun. [See B1-b.] Reflexive: *I cut myself.* Intensive: *I myself will drive you.* Do not use *myself* in place of *I* or *me. Marcus and I* [not *myself*] *will take care of the invitations. Deliver the completed invitations to Mary and me* [not *myself*]. [See G3-c.]

off of
Off is sufficient. Omit the *of. The ball rolled off* [not *off of*] *the table.*

OK, O.K., okay
All three spellings are acceptable, but none of these colloquialisms should be used in formal texts.

parameters
Parameter is a mathematical term that has become bureaucratic jargon for "fixed limit," "boundary," or "guideline." Use ordinary English instead. *The committee was asked to work within strict limits* [not *parameters*].

passed, past
Passed is the past tense of the verb *pass. Past* is often a preposition meaning "belonging to a former time" or "beyond a time or place." *Truda passed me another piece of cake, even though the time was well past midnight.*

percent, per cent, percentage
Percent (also spelled *per cent*) is always used with a specific number. *Percentage* is used with descriptive terms such as *large* or *small. The candidate won 80 percent of the popular vote. An insignificant percentage of votes was registered.* [Incidentally, note that the verb "was registered" refers to "percentage," not to "votes"; therefore, the phrasing should indeed be "percentage of votes was registered," not "percentage of votes were registered."] [Note: When including percentages in formal texts, do not use the percent symbol (%); rather, write out the word. *The candidate won 80 percent* (not *80%*) *of the popular vote.*]

phenomena
Phenomena is the plural of *phenomenon. In that mysterious house, many strange phenomena occur continually, but last night's phenomenon was the strangest of all.*

plus
Plus should not be used to join independent clauses. *This raincoat is dirty; as well* [not *plus*]*, it has a hole in the front.*

practice, practise
Practice is a noun meaning "custom," "business," or "action performed repeatedly to develop expertise." *Practise* is a verb. *I wanted to practise pitching, but the practice was canceled.*

principal, principle

Principal is a noun meaning "head administrator (usually of a school)" or "a sum of borrowed money." It is also an adjective meaning "main" or "most important." *Principle* is a noun meaning "a basic truth, guideline, or law." *Mr. Davidson is our school's principal. We have three principal reasons for making this change. Allan believes passionately in the principle of gender equality.*

quote, quotation
Quote is a verb. *Quotation* is a noun. Avoid using *quote* when referring to a passage from a text. *Her quotations* [not *quotes*] *from Shakespeare intrigued us.*

reason is because, reason why
The construction *reason is because* is non-standard. *The reason I left early is that* [not *is because*] *I was nearly falling asleep standing up.* The phrase *reason why* is redundant. *The reason* [not *reason why*] *she broke up with him is clear to everyone but him.* [See E5-c.]

relation, relationship
Relation describes a connection between things. *She studied the relation between poverty and infant mortality. Relationship* describes a connection between people. *Our business relationship has cooled over the years.*

respectfully, respectively
Respectfully means "showing or marked by respect." *He respectfully submitted his opinion to the judge. Respectively* means "each in the order given." *Casper, Bruno, and Betty were a butcher, a baker, and a candlestick maker, respectively.*

set, sit
Set is a transitive verb meaning "to put" or "to place." *Sit* is an intransitive verb meaning "to be seated." *He set the cat in the corner basket. The cat will sit in the corner basket.*

shall, will
A somewhat archaic-sounding word, *shall* was once used as the helping verb with the first-person pronouns *I* and *me. I shall. We shall.* The helping verb *will* was used in second- and third-person constructions. *You will. He/She/It will. They will.* Today, however, *will* is generally accepted even with the pronouns *I* and *we.* The word *shall* tends these days to appear in polite questions (*Shall I find you a pillow?*) and in legal texts where duty or obligation is indicated (*The applicant shall file form 1080 by December 31*).

since
Do not use *since* to mean "because" if there is a chance of misreading. *Since we won the game, we have been celebrating with pizza and pop.* Here, *since* could mean "because" or "from the time that."

sometime, some time, sometimes

Sometime is an adverb meaning "at an indefinite or unstated time." *Some time* is the adjective *some* modifying the noun *time* and is written as two words meaning "an unspecified period of time." *Sometimes* is an adverb meaning "at times" or "now and then." *I'll see you sometime soon. I haven't lived there for some time. I call him sometimes.*

suppose to, use to
Suppose to and *use to* are non-standard for *supposed to* and *used to.* *We used to* [not *use to*] *travel to Saskatchewan often. Brynne is supposed to* [not *suppose to*] *bring her guitar.*

sure and
Sure and is non-standard for *sure to.* *The seasoned traveler told us to be sure to* [not *sure and*] *avoid drinking the water.* [See *try and* also.]

than, then
Than is a conjunction used in comparisons; *then* is an adverb denoting time. *You brought more sandwiches than* [not *then*] *I could eat. Sigmund laughed, and then* [not *than*] *we recognized him.*

that, which
Reserve *that* for restrictive elements, *which* for non-restrictive elements. *On the day that* [not *which*] *you walked out of my life, I sat down and cried. On the day that you left me, which* [not *that*] *was the blackest of days, I sat down and cried.*
[See also http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/notorious/that.htm]

A **restrictive element** is a part of a sentence that contains information strictly necessary to the meaning of the sentence. The restrictive element often provides information that helps differentiate the specific subject from other possible subjects. It is not set off from the rest of the sentence by punctuation.

- The boy **with freckles** works at the supermarket.
- The instructor **who taught me to drive** has a perfect driving record.
- Singer-songwriters **like Joni Mitchell** don't come along every day.

A **non-restrictive element** is descriptive, but it is not absolutely essential to the meaning of the sentence. No crucial information is lost if it is removed. A non-restrictive element often describes or re-names a subject. It is set off from the rest of the sentence by commas, dashes, or parentheses.

- James**, who has freckles,** works at the supermarket.
- That instructor—**incidentally, the one who taught me to drive**—has a perfect driving record.
- A truly brilliant singer-songwriter **(Joni Mitchell, for example)** doesn't come along every day.

Note that in each of these three examples, if you take out the non-restrictive passage, you still have a complete, correct sentence.

- James works at the supermarket.
- That instructor has a perfect driving record.
- A truly brilliant singer-songwriter doesn't come along every day.

theirselves
Theirselves is non-standard for *themselves. The two men were able to push the Ford out of the way themselves* [not *theirselves*].

there, their, they're
There is an adverb specifying place; it is also an expletive. [See B2-a.] Adverb: *Sylvia was standing there stunned.* Expletive: *There are two plums left. Their* is a possessive pronoun. *There is* a contraction of *they are. Simone and Jane finally washed their car. They're later than usual today.*

try and
Try and is non-standard for *try to. The coach insisted that we try to* [not *try and*] *increase of speed.* [See *sure and* also.]

to, too, two
To is a preposition. *Too* is an adverb. *Two* is a number. **Too** *many of your shots slice* **to** *the left, but the last* **two** *were right on the mark.*

unique
Avoid expressions such as *more unique, most unique,* or *less unique.* Something is either unique or it isn't. It is illogical to suggest degrees of uniqueness. [See G4-c.]

usage
The noun *usage,* being pretentious, should not be substituted for *use* when the meaning is "employment of." *The use* [not *usage*] *of computers dramatically increased the company's profits.*

utilize
The verb *utilize,* as pretentious as *usage,* should not be substituted for *use* when the meaning is "to employ." *I used* [not *utilized*] *the best workers to get the job done fast.*

ways
Ways is non-standard when used as a substitute for "distance." *The city is a long way* [not *ways*] *from here.*

weather, whether

The noun *weather* refers to the state of the atmosphere. *Whether* is a conjunction referring to a choice between alternatives. *We wondered whether the weather would clear up in time for our picnic.*

while

Avoid using *while* to mean "although" or "whereas" if there is any chance of ambiguity. *Although* [not *while*] *Gloria lost money in the slot machine, Mike won it at roulette.*

which

Do not use *which* to refer to persons. Use *who* instead. *That,* though generally used to refer to things, may be used to refer to a group or class of people. *Fans wondered how an old man who* [not *that* or *which*] *walked with a limp could play football. The team that* [not *which*] *wins this game will go on to the playoffs.*

who, whom

Who is used for subjects and subject complements. *Whom* is used for objects. [See G3-d.]

who's, whose

Who's is a contraction of *who is*. *Whose* is a possessive pronoun. *Who's ready for more popcorn? Whose popcorn is this?*

your, you're

Your is a possessive pronoun. *You're* is a contraction of *you are*. *Is that your new motorcycle? You're on the list of finalists.*

W2. Wordy sentences

Long sentences are not necessarily wordy, nor are short sentences always concise. A sentence is wordy if its meaning can be conveyed in fewer words than it now uses.

In addition to the information in this section on wordy sentences, the section "Writing Concise Sentences" in the Dr. Darling website has several good tips on making your sentences more robust and fluid.

http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/concise.htm

W2-a. Eliminate redundancies.

Redundancies such as *continue on, cooperate together, close proximity, basic essentials,* and *true fact* are common cases of wordiness.

> Chinese Canadians were portrayed and stereotyped as lazy even though they were essential to the labor force in the West.

> Toma is now employed at a private rehabilitation center working as a registered physical therapist.
> Revise as:
> Toma works at a private rehabilitation center as a registered physical therapist.

> Sylvia very hurriedly scribbled her name, address, and phone number on the back of a greasy napkin.
> [Notice that the modifying phrase "very hurriedly" is redundant. Considering that Sylvia was scribbling and doing so on a greasy napkin, she must have been in a hurry.]

W2-b. Avoid unnecessary repetition of words.

Although words may be repeated deliberately, for effect, repetitions will seem awkward if they are clearly unnecessary. When a more concise version is possible, choose it.

> Our fifth patient is ~~a~~ mentally ill ~~patient~~.

> The best teacher helps a student to become a better student both academically and emotionally.
> Revise as:
> The best teacher helps a student to grow both academically and emotionally.

W2-c. Cut empty or inflated phrases.

An empty phrase can be cut with little or no loss of meaning. Common examples are introductory word groups that apologize or hedge: *in my opinion, I think that, it seems that, one must admit that,* and so on.

> In my opinion, our policy on environmental issues is misguided.
> Revise as:
> Our policy on environmental issues is misguided.

Inflated phrases should be pared down.

INFLATED	CONCISE
along the lines of	like
as a matter of fact	in fact
at all times	always
at the present time	now, currently
at this point in time	now, currently
because of the fact that	because
by means of	by
due to the fact that	because
for the purpose of	for
for the reason that	because
have the ability to	be able to, can
in the nature of	like
in order to	to
in spite of the fact that	although, though
in the event that	if
in the final analysis	finally
in the neighborhood of	about, around
until such time as	until

W2-d. Simplify the structure.

If the structure of a sentence is needlessly indirect, try simplifying it. Look for opportunities to strengthen the verb.

> The financial analyst claimed that because of volatile market conditions she could not make an estimate of the company's future profits.
> Revise as:
> The financial analyst claimed that because of volatile market conditions she could not estimate the company's future profits.
> [The verb "estimate" is more concise and robust than is the wordy "make an estimate of."]

Unnecessary use of *is, are, was,* and *were* often force you to use excess words.

> The administrative secretary is responsible for the monitoring and balancing of the budgets for travel, contract services, and personnel.
> Revise as:
> The administrative secretary monitors and balances the budgets for travel, contract services, and personnel.

The expletive constructions *there is* and *there are* (or *there was* and *there were*) also generate excess words. The same is true of expletive constructions beginning with *it.*

> There is another videotape that tells the story of Charles Darwin and introduces the theory of evolution.
> Revise as:
> Another videotape tells the story of Charles Darwin and introduces the theory of evolution.
>
> It is important that hikers remain inside the park boundaries.
> Revise as:
> Hikers must remain inside the park boundaries.

Verbs in the passive voice may be needlessly indirect. The active voice is often more concise and forceful.

> Too often, athletes with marginal academic ability have been recruited by our coaches.
> Revise as:
> Too often, our coaches have recruited athletes with marginal academic ability.

W2-e. Reduce clauses to phrases, phrases to single words.

Word groups functioning as modifiers can often be made more compact. Look for opportunities to reduce clauses to phrases or phrases to single words.

> We took a side trip to Orillia, which was the home of Stephen Leacock.
> Revise as:
> We took a side trip to Orillia, the home of Stephen Leacock.
>
> Susan's stylish pants, made of leather, were too warm for the summer day.
> Revise as:
> Susan's stylish leather pants were too warm for the summer day.

W3. Appropriate language

Language is appropriate when it suits your subject and audience, conforms to the standards of correct expression, and blends naturally with your own voice.

W3-a. Stay away from jargon.

Jargon is specialized language used among members of a trade, profession, or group. Use jargon only when you are sure that your readers will be familiar with it and when you are sure that plain English won't do just as well (which is almost never).

> For years the indigenous body politic of South Africa attempted to negotiate legal enfranchisement without positive result.
> Revise as:
> For years the natives of South Africa sought in vain for the right to vote.

Broadly, jargon is defined as puffed-language designed more to impress than to communicate. Common examples from business, government, education, and the military are shown in the following left-hand list, with plain-English translations on the right.

ameliorate	improve
commence	begin
components	parts
endeavor	try
enhance	improve
exit	leave
facilitate	help
finalize	finish
impact on	affect
indicator	sign
optimal	best
paradigm	pattern
parameters	limits
peruse	read
plethora	large number
prior to	before
utilize	use
viable	workable

Sentences filled with jargon are annoyingly hard to read.

> All employees functioning in the capacity of work-study students are required to give evidence of current enrolment.
> Revise as:

Mayor Summers will commence his term of office by ameliorating living conditions in economically deprived zones.
Revise as:
Mayor Summers will begin his term by improving living conditions in poor neighborhoods.

W3-b. Avoid pretentious language and most euphemisms.

Hoping, perhaps, to sound profound or poetic, some writers embroider their messages with big words, unwieldy phrases, and heavy-handed style choices. But such language is often ineptly handled, laughably pretentious, and thoroughly unclear.

When our progenitors reach their silver-haired and golden years, we not infrequently entomb them in homes for senescent individuals, as it were they were already among the deceased.
Revise as:
When our parents grow old, we often bury them in old-age homes, as if they were already dead.

Euphemisms, soft-sounding substitutions for words or phrases that may be thought harsh, are sometimes appropriate. Speaking of someone's death, especially to one who was close to that person, your word *died* is perhaps too abrupt and suggests insensitivity. In such a case, saying *passed away* might be better. More often, however, euphemisms are needlessly evasive, even deceitful, or pretentious. Here are some irritating euphemisms and their plain-English equivalents.

casualties	deaths
adult entertainment	pornography
pre-owned automobile	used car
economically deprived	poor
selected out	fired
negative savings	debts
strategic withdrawal	retreat
revenue enhancers	taxes
chemical dependency	addiction
incendiary device	bomb
correctional facility	jail

W3-c. In most contexts, avoid slang, regional expressions, and non-standard English.

Slang is an informal and sometimes private vocabulary that expresses the solidarity of groups such as teens, rock stars, and football fans. It is subject to more rapid change than standard English. For example, the slang that teenagers use to express approval changes every few years; *cool, groovy, neat, wicked, awesome,* and *fresh* have replaced one another within the last three decades. Sometimes slang becomes so widespread that it is eventually accepted as standard vocabulary. *Jazz,* for example, started as slang but is now generally accepted to describe a style of music.

> If we don't start studying for the final, a whole semester's work is going down the tubes.
> Revise as:
> If we don't start studying for the final, a whole semester's work will be wasted.

Regional expressions are common to groups in certain geographical areas. For example, in Newfoundland, you'll hear foggy weather described as *caplin weather.* Regionalisms have the same limitations that slang expressions have and are therefore inappropriate in many texts.

> John was four blocks from the house before he remembered to cut the headlights on.
> Revise as:
> John was four blocks from the house before he remembered to turn on the headlights.

> I'm not ~~for~~ sure, but I think the dance has been postponed.

W3-d. Choose an appropriate level of formality.

In deciding on a level of formality, consider both your subject and your audience. Does the subject demand a dignified treatment, or is a relaxed tone more suitable? Will readers be put off if you assume too close a relationship with them, or might you alienate them by seeming too distant?

For most academic and professional writing, some degree of formality is appropriate. In applying for a job, for example, it is a mistake to sound too breezy and informal.

> I'd like to get that receptionist's job you've got in the *Herald.*
> Revise as:
> I would like to apply for the receptionist's position listed in the Calgary *Herald.*

W3-e. Avoid sexist language.

Sexist language is language that stereotypes or demeans men or women—usually women. Some sexist language reflects genuine contempt for women: referring to a woman as a "broad," for example, or calling a lawyer a "lady lawyer," or saying in an advertisement, "If this car were a chick, it would get its butt pinched."

Other forms of sexist language, while they may not suggest conscious sexism, reflect stereotypical thinking: referring automatically to nurses as women and doctors as men, using different conventions when naming or identifying women and men (Mr. vs. Miss/Mrs.), or assuming that all of one's readers are men.

> After the nursing student graduates, she must face a difficult examination.
> Revise as:
> After the nursing student graduates, he or she must face a difficult examination.
>
> Running for city council are John Stein, an attorney, and Mrs. Jane Klein, a professor of English and mother of three.
> Revise as:
> Running for city council are John Stein, an attorney, and Jane Klein, a professor of English.
>
> If you are a senior government official, your wife is expected to put up with an endless round of official banquets and receptions.
> Revise as:
> If you are a senior government official, your spouse is expected to put up with an endless round of official banquets and receptions.

Still other forms of sexist language result from outmoded traditions. The pronouns *he, him,* and *his,* for instance, were traditionally used to refer to persons of either sex—for example, *A journalist is stimulated by **his** deadline.* Today, however, such usage is widely viewed as sexist because it excludes women and encourages sex-role stereotyping—the view that men are somehow more suited than are women to be, say, journalists, doctors, lawyers, or scientists.

One option, of course, is to substitute a pair of pronouns: *A journalist is stimulated by **his or her** deadline.* This strategy is fine in measured doses, but it become awkward and distracting if overused in a text. Sometimes, the better choice is to cast statements in plural: *Journalists are stimulated by **their** deadlines.* Another strategy is to revise the sentence in a way that skirts the problem: *A journalist is stimulated by deadlines.*

Like the generic personal pronouns *he, him,* and *his,* the nouns *man* and *men* were once commonly used as suffixes or prefixes in words meant to refer to persons of either sex. Current usage, however, demands gender-neutral terms instead.

> alderman   city council member, councilor

chairman	chair person, moderator, chair, head
clergyman	member of the clergy, minister, pastor
fireman	firefighter
foreman	supervisor
mailman	mail/letter carrier
mankind	humans, people
manpower	personnel
policeman	police officer
salesman	salesperson, salesclerk
to man	to operate, to staff
weatherman	weather forecaster, meteorologist
workman	worker, laborer

De-sexing the English Language

Casey Miller and Kate Swift

On the television screen, a teacher of first-graders who has just won a national award is describing her way of teaching. "You take each child where you find him," she says. "You watch to see what he's interested in, and then you build on his interests."

A five-year-old looking at the program asks her mother, "Do only boys go to that school?"

"No," her mother begins, "she's talking about girls, too, but—"

But what? The teacher being interviewed on television is speaking correct English. What can the mother tell her daughter about why a child, in any generalization, is always *he* rather than *she*? How does a five-year-old comprehend the generic personal pronoun?

The effect on personality development of this one part of speech was recognized by thoughtful people long before the present assault on the English language by the forces of feminism. Fifteen years ago, Lynn T. White, then president of Mills College, wrote:

> The grammar of English dictates that when a referent is either of indeterminate sex or both sexes, it shall be considered masculine. The penetration of this habit of language into the minds of little girls as they grow up to be women is more profound than most people, including most women, have recognized: for it implies that personality is really a male attribute, and that women are a human sub-species. . . . It would be a miracle if a girl-baby, learning to use the symbols of our tongue, could escape some wound to her self-respect: whereas a boy-baby's ego is bolstered by the pattern of our language.

Now that our language has begun to respond to the justice of feminism, many people are apparently trying to kick the habit of using *he* when they mean anyone, male or female. In fact, there is mounting evidence that a major renovation to the language is in progress with respect to the pronoun. It is especially noticeable in the speeches of politicians up for election: "And as for every citizen who pays taxes, I say that he or she deserves an accounting!" A variation on the tandem form is also cropping up in print, like the copy on a coupon that offers the bearer a 20 percent saving on "the cost of his/her meal." A writer in the New York newspaper *The Village Voice* adopts the same form, to comment that "every artist of major status is actually a school in him/herself."

Adding the feminine pronoun to the masculine whenever the generic form is called for may be politically smart and morally right, but the result is often awkward.

Some of the devices used to get around the problem are even less acceptable, at least to grammarians. It is one thing for a student to announce in assembly that "anybody can join the choir as long as they can carry a tune," but when this patchwork solution begins to appear in print, the language is in trouble. In blatant defiance of every teacher of freshman English, a full-page advertisement in *The New York Times* for its college and school subscription service begins with this headline: "If someone you know is attending one of these colleges, here's something they should know that can save them money." Although the grammatical inconsistency of the Time's claim offends the ear—especially since "they" in the headline can refer only to "colleges"—the alternatives would present insurmountable problems for the writer. For example, the sentence might read, "If someone you know . . . here's something he or she should know that can save him or her money." Or, to keep the plural subject in the second clause, the writer might have begun, "If several people you know are attending one or more or these colleges . . . ." But by that time will the reader still care?

In the long run, the problem of the generic personal pronoun is a problem of the status of women. But it is more immediately a matter of common sense and clear communication. Absurd examples of the burdens now placed on masculine pronouns pop up everywhere. "The next time you meet a handicapped person, don't make up your mind about him in advance," admonishes a radio public service announcement. A medical school bulletin, apparently caught by surprise, reports that a certain scholarship given annually "to a student of unquestioned ability and character who has completed his first year" was awarded to one Barbara Kinder.

Since there is no way in English to solve problems like these with felicity and grace, it is becoming obvious that what we need is a new singular personal pronoun that is truly generic: a common gender pronoun. Several have been proposed, but so far none appears to have the transparently logical relationship to existing nouns that is necessary if a new word is to gain acceptance.

Perhaps a clue to the solution is to be found in people's persistent use of *they* as a singular pronoun. In the plural forms, both genders are included in one word: *they* can refer to males or females or a mixed group. So, why not derive the needed singular common-gender pronouns from the plural? *They*, *their*, and *them* suggest *tey*, *ter*, and *tem*. With its inflected forms pronounced to rhyme with the existing plural forms, the new word would join the family of third-person pronouns, as shown here:

		SINGULAR	PLURAL
	Distinct gender	**Common gender**	**Common gender**
Nominative:	*he* and *she*	*tey*	*they*
Possessive:	*his* and *her* (*hers*)	*ter* (*ters*)	*their* (*theirs*)
Objective:	*him* and *her*	*tem*	*them*

Someone will probably object to the idea of a common-gender pronoun in the mistaken belief that it is a neuter form and therefore underrates sexual differences. The opposite is true. Once *tey* or a similar word is adopted, *he* can become exclusively masculine, just as *she* is now exclusively feminine. The new pronoun will thus accentuate the significant and valuable differences between females and males—those of reproductive function and form— while affirming the essential unity and equality of the two sexes within the species.

Language constantly evolves in response to need. It is groping today for ways to accommodate the new recognition of women as full-fledged members of the human race. If the new pronoun helps anyone toward that end, tey should be free to adopt it. If anyone objects, it is certainly ter right—but in that case let tem come up with a better solution.

W4. Exact language

Two reference works will help you find words to express your meaning exactly: a good dictionary and a book of synonyms and antonyms such as *Roget's Thesaurus.* Two good online resources (each of which has both dictionary and thesaurus functions) are the following:

Dictionary.com – http://dictionary.reference.com/

Merriam-Webster Online – http://www.m-w.com/netdict.htm

W4-a. Select words with appropriate connotations.

In addition to their denotations (dictionary definitions), words have connotations, emotional colorings that affect how readers respond to them. The word *steel,* for example, denotes "made of or resembling commercial iron that contains carbon," but it also calls up a cluster of images associated with steel, such as the sensations of touching it. These associations give the word its connotations of coldness, smoothness, and inflexibility. For some, steel also connotes a kind of hard-edged, fashionable cynicism and intellectual rigor (as suggested in the cliché "mind like a steel trap").

If, in the process of writing, you find that the connotation of a word seems inappropriate for your subject matter, purpose, or audience, you should change the word. When a more appropriate word does not come to mind, consult a dictionary or thesaurus.

The dress I wore was cheap and comfortable.
[The adjective "cheap" connotes something of inferior quality.]
Revise as:
The dress I wore was inexpensive and comfortable.

As I covered the boats with marsh grass, the perspiration I'd worked up evaporated in the wind, making the cold morning air even colder.
[The word "perspiration" is too dainty for this context.]
Revise as:
As I covered the boats with marsh grass, the sweat I'd worked up evaporated in the wind, making the cold morning air even colder.

W4-b. Prefer specific, concrete nouns.

Unlike general nouns, which refer to broad classes of things, specific nouns point to definite and particular items. *Film,* for instance, names a general class, *science fiction film* names a narrower class, and *Star Wars* is more specific still.

Unlike abstract nouns, which refer to qualities and ideas (*justice, beauty, realism, dignity*), concrete nouns point to immediate, often sensate experience and to physical objects (*steeple, asphalt, lilac, stone, garlic*).

Specific, concrete nouns express meaning more vividly than do general or abstract ones. Although general and abstract language is obviously often necessary to convey your meanings, try whenever you can to use specific, concrete alternatives.

> The Prime Minister spoke about the challenges of the future: problems concerning the environment and world peace.
> Revise as:
> The Prime Minister spoke about the challenges of the future: problems of famine, pollution, dwindling resources, and arms control.

Nouns such as *thing, area, factor,* and *individual* are especially dull and imprecise

> A career in transportation management offers many things.
> Revise as:
> A career in transportation management offers many challenges.

> Try pairing a trainee with an individual with technical experience.
> Revise as:
> Try pairing a trainee with an experienced technician.

W4-c. Prefer active verbs.

Active verbs express meaning more emphatically and vigorously than do their weaker counterparts—forms of the verb *be* or verbs in the passive voice. *Be* verbs (*be, am, is, are, was, were, being, been*) lack vigor because they convey no action. Verbs in the passive voice lack strength because their subjects receive the action instead of doing it. Therefore, although *be* verbs and passive verbs have legitimate uses, you should use active verbs whenever possible.

> *BE* VERB
> A surge of power *was* responsible for the destruction of the coolant pumps.

> PASSIVE VOICE
> The coolant pumps *were destroyed* by a surge of power.

ACTIVE VOICE
A surge of power *destroyed* the coolant pumps.

When to replace *be* verbs

Not every *be* verb needs replacing. The forms of *be* work well when you want to link a subject to a noun that clearly renames it or to an adjective that describes it: *History is a bucket of ashes. Scoundrels are always sociable.* [See B2-b.] And when used as helping verbs before present participles (*is flying, are disappearing*) to express ongoing action, *be* verbs are fine: *Derrick was ploughing the field when his wife went into labor.* [See G2-f.]

If using a *be* verb makes a sentence needlessly wordy, consider replacing it. Often a phrase following the verb will contain a word (such as *destruction*) that suggests a more vigorous, active alternative (*destroyed*).

Burying nuclear waste in Antarctica would be in violation of an international treaty.
Revise as:
Burying nuclear waste in Antarctica would violate an international treaty.

Escaping into a world of drugs, I was rebellious about every rule set down by my parents.
Revise as:
Escaping into a world of drugs, I rebelled against every rule set down by my parents.

When to replace passive verbs

In the active voice, the subject of the sentence does the action; in the passive voice, the subject receives the action.

ACTIVE
Hernando *caught* the fly ball.

ACTIVE
The fly ball *was caught* by Hernando.

In passive sentences, the actor (in this case, Hernando) often disappears from the sentence: *The fly ball was caught.* But in most cases, you should emphasize the actor, so you need the active voice. To replace a passive verb with an active alternative, make the actor the subject of the sentence.

The transformer was struck by lightning, plunging us into darkness.
Revise as:

Lightning struck the transformer, plunging us into darkness.

The passive voice is appropriate when you wish to emphasize the receiver of the action or to minimize the importance of the actor. For example, in the sentence about the fly ball, you would choose the active voice if you wanted to emphasize the actor, Hernando: *Hernando caught the fly ball.* But if you wanted to emphasize to emphasize the ball's being caught, you would choose the passive: *The fly ball was caught by Hernando.*

W4-d. Do not misuse words.

If a word is not in your active vocabulary, you may find yourself misusing it, sometimes with embarrassing consequences. When in doubt, check the dictionary.

Liu Kwan began his career as a lawyer, but now he is a real estate *mongrel*.
Revise as:
Liu Kwan began his career as a lawyer, but now he is a real estate ***mogul***.

Drugs have so *diffused* our culture that they touch all segments of society.
Revise as:
Drugs have so ***permeated*** our culture that they touch all segments of society.

One form of word misuse is the malapropism, a term derived from the French *mal a propos,* "ill to purpose," and defined as the incorrect use of a word by substituting a similar-sounding word with a different meaning. The most famous maker of malapropisms, Mrs. Malaprop herself, is a character in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's eighteenth-century comedy of manners *The Rivals.* Here are some examples from her lines in the play.

"She's as headstrong as an *allegory* on the banks of the Nile." [alligator]

"Promise to forget this fellow—to *illiterate* him, I say, quite, from your memory." [obliterate]

"He is the very *pineapple* of politeness." [pinnacle]

"I have since laid Sir Anthony's *preposition* before her." [proposition]

W4-e. Use standard idioms.

An idiom is a speech form or an expression that is peculiar to itself and cannot be understood from the individual meanings of its elements. The expression *to keep tabs on,* for example, is idiomatic.

People whose first language is English don't have as many problems with English idiomatic expressions as do those who have learned English as a second language. These non-native speakers are more likely to fall into a particular form of idiom misuse—that of the hybrid cliché, an illogical blending two common expressions.

You've buttered your bread, and now you must sleep in it.

He's barking up the wrong goose chase.

Another form of idiom misuse, one that presents problems for both native and non-native English speakers, involves unconventional use of prepositions.

NON-STANDARD IDIOMS	STANDARD IDIOMS
abide with	abide by
according with	according to
angry at	angry with
capable to	capable of
comply to	comply with
desirous to	desirous of
different than	different from
intend on doing	intend to do
off of	off
plan on doing	plan to do
preferable than	preferable to
prior than	prior to
superior than	superior to
sure and	sure to
try and	try to
type of a	type of

W4-f. Avoid clichés.

The pioneer who first announced that he had "slept like a log" probably amused his friends with a fresh, vivid image. Today, however, that image is no longer fresh, having been thoroughly overused. It is a cliché.

Avoid clichés like the plague.

beat about the bush
blind as a bat
busy as a bee
cool as a cucumber
crystal clear
dead as a doornail
out of the frying pan, into the fire
light as a feather
like a bull in a china shop
playing with fire
nutty as a fruitcake
selling like hotcakes
starting at the bottom of the ladder
water over the dam / under the bridge
white as a sheet / ghost

In particular, avoid clashing clichés.

This new rat poison is a life saver.
Being a mime is easier said than done.
Pause to consider: He who hesitates is lost.
He had a gut feeling that it was all in his head.
When all's said and done, civilization will still go on.

The cure for clichés is simple: Don't use them. Or, use them, but add unexpected twists. One woman, for example, who had written that she had butterflies in her stomach, revised her cliché like this:

I had butterflies in my stomach—a horde of them, all wearing horseshoes.

W4-g. Use figures of speech with care.

A figure of speech is an expression that uses words imaginatively (rather than literally) to make abstract ideas concrete. Sometimes writers use figures of speech carelessly, not taking time to consider the metaphors they are mixing.

Crossing the prairie in his new Corvette, my father flew under a full head of steam.
Revise as:
Crossing the prairie in his new Corvette, my father flew at jet speed.

Our office had decided to put all controversial issues on the back burner in a holding pattern.

Revise as:

Our office had decided to put all controversial issues on the back burner.

[Notice, however, that this revision, though it eliminates the problem of a mixed metaphor, still uses a tired old cliché ("on the back burner"). Another revision would see this cliché eliminated too.]