



Professional Basic English Fall 2021, Lecture 2

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Elements of style in English

- Adopted from *Strung & White: Elements of Style, 4th Edition*
- Elementary rules of usage
 - Possession; use of commas, colons and dashes; proper number and case
- Elementary principles of composition
 - Paragraphs, sentences, appropriate words
- Form in scientific writing
- Commonly misused words and phrases



Possessive of nouns

- Formed by adding 's
 - *Charles's friend, the witch's malice*
 - If the word is plural, just add the apostrophe (*The Simpsons' house*)
- Sometimes better to replace with *of*
 - *Quality of service* (rather than *service's quality*), *Temple of Isis*
- No apostrophe (') in pronominal possessives (*hers, its, theirs, yours, ours*)
 - However, "*one's rights*"; "*somebody else's responsibility*"
 - Note that "*it's*" is "*it is*"; possessive is "*its*"



Basic usage of dots and commas

- Dot (period) separates two sentences
 - *This is a sentence. This is another sentence.*
- Sentence can have one clause or several clauses, and clauses are usually separated by commas (but not always)
 - *This sentence has two clauses, as you can see.*
- Do not break sentences in two (do not use periods for commas)
 - *This is one sentence. Although it has two clauses.*
 - *This is one sentence, although it has two clauses.*



Use of comma

- Serial comma: use after each term (except the last)
 - *We have red, green, and blue lights.*
- Enclose parenthetical expressions between commas
 - *The best time to visit Scandinavia, unless you like snow, is in summer.*
 - *Thursday, September 20, 2018.*
 - May be omitted if the interruption is slight (one word, such as *however*)
 - No comma in restrictive clauses: “*People who live in Nice are nice.*” (restrictive) vs. “*All the people, especially the old, are nice.*” (non-restrictive)
 - *Partly by luck, partly by hard work, he was successful.*



Use of comma (2)

- Use a comma before a conjunction introducing an independent clause
 - *The situation is bad, but it will improve.*
 - Use comma for two-part sentences bound with *as, for, or, nor* or *while*
 - Use comma if both clauses have the same subject and connective is *but*
 - When the connective is *and*, the comma often omitted if the clauses are closely related
- Do not use comma if clauses are not joined by a conjunction
 - Use semicolon instead, or write them as two sentences
 - Exception: when clauses are very short and alike in form (e.g. “*Here today, gone tomorrow.*”)



Use of colon and dash

- Use a colon after an independent clause to introduce a list of particulars, an appositive, an amplification, or an illustrative quotation
 - *We need three tools: a hammer, a knife, and a screwdriver.*
 - *He lives alone: there is no other human being anywhere near.*
- Use a dash to set off an abrupt break or interruption and to announce a long appositive or summary
 - Dash is stronger than a comma, less formal than a colon, and more relaxed than parentheses
 - *His first thought – if he had any thought at all – was to get out immediately.*
 - Use dash sparingly



Classroom task 1a

- Select the correct or the most appropriate sentence (A or B) for each item in the assignment:
 - a) We have read, discussed, and rephrased every sentence.
 - b) We have read, discussed and rephrased every sentence.



Classroom task 1b

- Select the correct or the most appropriate sentence (A or B) for each item in the assignment:
 - a) My brother, John, who is a painter likes bright colors.
 - b) My brother John, who is a painter, likes bright colors.



Classroom task 1c

- Select the correct or the most appropriate sentence (A or B) for each item in the assignment:
 - a) They don't like us. Because they think we are strange.
 - b) They don't like us, because they think we are strange.



Classroom task 1d

- Select the correct or the most appropriate sentence (A or B) for each item in the assignment:
 - a) A good essay contains three parts: introduction, discussion, and summary.
 - b) A good essay contains three parts; introduction, discussion, and summary.



Classroom task 1e

- Select the correct or the most appropriate sentence (A or B) for each item in the assignment:
 - a) I am not sure what to say; I am very confused.
 - b) I am not sure what to say - I am very confused.



Classroom task 1f

- Select the correct or the most appropriate sentence (A or B) for each item in the assignment:
 - a) My parents's childhood was tough.
 - b) My parents' childhood was tough.



Use the proper case of pronoun

- Personal pronouns (+*who*) change form as used as subject or object
 - *The culprit was he.*
 - *Will James or she be hired? vs. Will they hire James or her?*
 - *Sandy writes better than I.*
- Avoid misunderstandings by supplying words
 - *Polly loves cake more than **she loves** me (vs. Polly loves cake more than I)*
- Gerund (a verb form which functions as a noun) usually requires the possessive case
 - *Mother objected to our driving on the icy road*



Use of the proper number

- The number of the subject determines the number of the verb
 - *The bittersweet flavor of youth – its trials, its joys, and its adventures – **is** not soon forgotten*
 - Note: *One of the ablest scientists who **have** attacked this problem*
 - Use singular after *either, everyone, everybody, neither, nobody, someone*
 - With *none*, use the singular verb when the word means “no one” or “not one”
 - Note: *None are so fallible as those who are sure they’re right*
 - A compound subject formed with *and* almost always requires plural verb
 - Exceptions are clichés, such as “*bread and butter*”



Use of the proper number (2)

- Singular subject remains singular, even if other nouns are connected to it by *with*, *as well as*, *in addition to*, *except*, *together with*, and *no less than*
- A linking verb agrees with the number of its subject
 - *What is wanted is a few more pairs of hands*
 - *The trouble with truth is its many varieties*
- Some nouns appear as plural but are in fact singular
 - *Politics is... headquarters is... (but quarters are)*
- No general rule: idioms have to be learned



Participial phrases

- A participial phrase at the beginning of a sentence must refer to the grammatical subject
 - “*Walking slowly down the road, he saw a woman*”: “walking” refers to the subject of the sentence, not the woman
 - “*He saw a woman walking slowly down the road*”: “walking” refers to the woman
- Possibility of amusing mistakes
 - *Being in a bad condition, I was able to buy the house very cheap*



Classroom task 2a

- Select the correct or the most appropriate sentence (A or B):
 - a) An important thing to do, among many others, is good preparation.
 - b) An important thing to do, among many others, are good preparation.



Classroom task 2b

- Select the correct or the most appropriate sentence (A or B):
 - a) One of the persons who have been there, recommends going there.
 - b) One of the persons who has been there, recommends going there.



Classroom task 2c

- Select the correct or the most appropriate sentence (A or B):
 - a) Everyone has a right to be happy.
 - b) Everyone have a right to be happy.



Classroom task 2d

- Select the correct or the most appropriate sentence (A or B):
 - a) Classical mechanics is an important part of physics.
 - b) Classical mechanics are important parts of physics.



Classroom task 2e

- Select the correct or the most appropriate sentence (A or B):
 - a) Tomorrow there will be only you and me.
 - b) Tomorrow there will be only you and I.



Classroom task 2f

- Select the correct or the most appropriate sentence (A or B):
 - a) I'm happy about your practicing English.
 - b) I'm happy about you practicing English.



Summary

- Basic rules of grammar and style
 - Forming possession of nouns
 - Proper use of dots, commas, colons, semicolons, and dashes
 - Choosing the proper case of pronoun
 - Choosing the proper number of verb
 - Be careful with participial phrases; use additional words to clarify if needed