

The Subtle Art of the Grammarian Workshop Handout

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The key to being an excellent Ah Counter/Grammarian is being specific in your feedback.

- Identify "acceptable" mistakes. These are common mistakes you hear in society.
 - Subject/verb agreement:
 - **People in the stadium sat together with their family.**
"People" is plural. Families must also be plural.
 - "S/he sez...". Should be s/he said.
 - **There's** and **Here's** used indiscriminately. If the noun is plural, use "are".
 - "There's bananas on the table" → There're bananas...
 - "Here's the instructions".... → Here are...
 - "Fewer" versus "less". You can count "fewer": Fewer cars; less traffic.
- Evaluating foreign language speakers
Correcting them isn't rude – it's why they joined Toastmasters.

Pronunciation: Encourage them to SLOW DOWN, and consider getting an accent coach. Simply advising them to "enunciate" won't help because enunciation depends on them knowing the correct pronunciation in the first place.

Common errors by region:

- India. "Guess-ture" instead of "gesture". Point out the root word: (Hint: it's not "Guess").
- Eastern Europe. Pronouncing W as V.
Excellent English speakers of those areas do the opposite: Change a correct V to a W.
- Indic areas: "She wears short, short skirts". This is dialectical, not a Xerox mistake.
- Middle Eastern languages: Omitting articles, "A" and "The".

A grab-bag of mistakes:

- Idioms
- Using the wrong preposition.
- Mixed metaphors.

These are the hardest areas of a new language to master. Even conjugating verbs is easier.

- Effective "Ah Counting" - more than just Ahhs and Umms.
 - Give the exact number: 16 Ahhs, 2 Xeroxes, 3 false starts, etc.
 - Include non-language fillers, like tongue-clicks.
 - Creative fillers: Phrases like "kind of thing", "whatchamacallit"

Authorities on Grammar & Usage

- Use the [Oxford English Dictionary](#) whenever possible.
 - American dictionaries are no longer written as authorities.
They simply document current usage. "Irregardless" is now in the dictionary, although the editors of the Merriam & Webster's have videos on why you should not use it.
- [Webster's 9th Collegiate Dictionary](#) published in 1988 is also good.
- A good dictionary will have the etiology (origins of words).
- [William Strunk & E. B. White's Elements of Style](#) for grammar and usage.