Contents

Standard English

In Writing Task 2, you read about the idea of Standard English (SE). SE is the "code" in which academic and formal business communication is written. I use the word "code"; however, the correct linguistic term is register, which Halliday defined as "the clustering of semantic features according to situation type" (Halliday, 1978, p. 68). What this means is that writing in a certain register is characterized by certain linguistic features. For example, in formal language, the following linguistic features would not be used.

- Contractions: *I'm writing to you because we can't find your application.*
- Slang: *Your application was awesome*
- Opening sentences with certain words: *Like I said; But …*
- Incomplete sentences: *A poor application.*

Whereas in informal speech, one would use

- Contractions: *We're going to the movies*
- Active voice: *The cat tore up the cushion*
- Clichés: *The man in the alley scared me out of my wits*

The reading was intended to show that, although our language has multiple registers and evolves as different cultural groups adapt the language, Standard English is the appropriate register in formal situations such as business and academic writing.

Why Learn Grammar

Reading 2 also put the argument that there are two good reasons to learn not just about grammar, but also about the "rules" of grammar in Standard English. The first reason is that all dialects share common characteristics in lexis (nouns, verbs, prepositions etc) and in grammar (phrases and clauses). The second reason is that learning the Standard English used by professionals and academics allows you to enter the discursive site as a competent participant.

The reading asked you a number of questions, which we can briefly discuss as a class.

Questions

1. How would you describe your position on the EIL chart?
2. Do you think that your position presents any problems in terms of using Standard English?
3. Do you think that universities should require students to enrol in courses such as this in order to acquire a capability in certain academic and business genres?

Clause Structure of Sentences: A Revision

SIMPLE SENTENCE (1 Main Clause)

The courses of a number of the ephemeral creeks have been significantly altered.

A simple contains **one verb**.

The joint venture participants integrated the mining operations in both lease areas.

It may be in **Subject Verb Object** arrangement.

The committee advises the government.

It may be in the form of **Subject Verb Complement**.

The ABC is a statutory body.

It may contain an **indirect object**.

The Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry referred the matter to the CMC.

Methane traps twenty times more heat in the atmosphere than carbon dioxide.

COMPLEX SENTENCE (Main Clause + Subordinate Clause)

A complex sentence contains a main (or independent) clause plus one or more subordinate clauses. A main clause will make sense by itself as a sentence. A subordinate clause does not. However, a main clause cannot stand by itself when there is a subordinate noun clause in the sentence.

The courses of a number of the ephemeral creeks, which traverse the existing mining area from south to north, have been significantly altered. [Adjectival]

COMPLEX SENTENCE (Main Clause + > 1 Subordinate Clause)

The courses of a number of the ephemeral creeks, which traverse the existing mining area from south to north, have been significantly altered because mining activities included *route diversion and damming. [Adverbial Cl of Reason]*

A COMPLEX SENTENCE WITH AN ADJECTIVAL CLAUSE

The whole catchment area, which had preceding heavy spring rains, received a post-cyclonic deluge for four days.

A COMPLEX SENTENCE WITH AN ADVERBIAL CLAUSE

Although the integrated photovoltaic systems is a promising technology for domestic energy, the proportion of solar power production to conventional electricity generation methods is still relatively small.

A COMPLEX SENTENCE WITH A NOUN CLAUSE

The CEO stated that Boral would rationalise its portfolio to core essentials.

That the Australian car industry would end was evident in the new Treasurer's statements.

COMPLEX-COMPOUND SENTENCE (>1 Main Clause + n Subordinate Clauses): use of coordinating conjunctions such as 'and'.

*The courses of a number of the ephemeral creeks, which traverse the existing mining area from south to north, have been significantly altered because mining activities included route diversion and damming, **and** this affects local agricultural production.*

*The Joint Venture participants, who own the Millward mine, entered into an agreement with the Lower Bromley mining company to integrate transport operations, **and,** later offered to buy their lease areas because it would create economies of scale.*

Arranging Sentence Structure for Clarity

The way that we arrange the components of a sentence affects its readability. Each sentence has a core component: **complex sentences** contain extra subordinating information; **compound sentences** contain an extra core component (coordinating); and some sentences, **complex-compound**, do both.

As a writer, we can arrange the placement of the core material within a sentence so that it is clear to a reader. The three structures are

- Left branching
- Right branching
- Nested

The examples below are taken from real documents in law, engineering, and academic genres.

LEFT BRANCHING

Left branching structures leave the crucial bit at the end:

Law

In appropriate circumstances, where that is warranted and necessary, then **the Tribunal may make such an order**.

Engineering

In the case of the Fleet simulations, **the same metallurgical performance** as the theoretical performance predicted from the mineralogical analysis **was achieved.**

Academic

Further, because Indonesia had been colonised by the Dutch for 350 years until 1949, **western models of education and management exist concurrently with traditional feudalistic social structures in society** (Tornquist, 2007).

RIGHT BRANCHING

Right branching structures put the crucial bit at the start:

Law

Refusal of the application is preferable because Dr Ready has now made a further application for registration as a medical specialist.

Engineering

Removal of the steam and organics is not immediate, since the gases must flow through the packed carbon bed.

Academic

Relational models of procedural justice suggest that the fairness of the decision-making procedures in a group affect psychological engagement in that group <u>because</u> people use information regarding the fairness of the interactions between individual group members and group representatives to infer the quality of their social relationships within the group and evaluate their standing and value as group members

NESTED

Nested structures start with the main point, provide an interlude and then conclude the point at the end of the sentence.

> Law
>
> **I therefore consider that the comments** of the Deputy President In C v Medical Board of Australia when awarding costs upon the striking out of a claim under section 47 of the QCAT Act **are apposite to this matter.**
>
> *Engineering*
>
> **The flow sheet** derived from the optimisation testwork program **is the 'base' case standard flow sheet.**
>
> *Academic*
>
> **An organisation**, from a discourse point of view, **is comprised of different viewpoints that are formed by its members via social interaction and manifested though language.**

SO WHICH IS BEST?

Right branching is preferable for lay readers because it doesn't require them to hold subordinate information in their head until they get to the essential information. The least preferable for cognition is the nested structure because the subject is separated from its verb by a group of intervening words. The maximum number of **embedded clauses** that people can tolerate is three (Karlsson (2007) in Hiltunen, 2012, p. 45).

A Few Useful Grammatical Rules

Most people correctly apply grammar most of the time. However, invariably a writer is uncertain about a rule. Let's assume that people get grammar right about 85% of the time. This means that the rules present a problem in only 15% of writing situations. These rules cover those situations. They are organised according problems with

- Verbs
- Sentence Structure
- Modifiers
- Pronouns

Grammar rules relating to verb problems

Rule 1: Ensure subject-verb agreement

Subjects and verbs must agree in person and number. Generally, people get this right: we rarely hear someone say *I are happy* or *They is silly*. To understand the convention, a writer needs to know about the three persons and two numbers in English.

Person: The three persons are [examples are only in nominative case]:

- First: *I, we*
- *Se*cond: *you*
- Third person: *he, she, it, they*.

Number: The two numbers are **singular** or **plural**.

Below are 10 situations where writers should be careful to use number and person correctly.

a **And *joining singular subjects creates a plural subject needing a plural verb***

Jan *and* Mary *are* excellent park rangers.

b **Or *joining singular subjects creates a singular subject***

Jan *or* Mary *is* to be relocated to the Grampians National Park.

Or or *nor* that joins subjects of varied number take the case of the nearer part:

Either the joist *or* the bearers *are* to be reinforced.

The word *bearers* is closer to the verb, so the verb becomes plural.

c ***The headword in an extended subject determines the number of the subject***

The *list* of duties *is* posted on the notice board.

The headword *list* is singular, so it takes the singular verb *is*.

The *priorities* in this division *are* with the client.

The headword *priorities* is plural, which requires the plural verb *are*.

d **One, each, either, neither, everyone, everybody, no one, someone, somebody, anything *are all singular***

Neither of them *is* eligible.

Each of the tendons *passes* to the deltoid muscle.

Everybody is asleep.

e **Either…or *and* Neither…nor *joining singular subjects are singular***

Either Tran *or* Jiang Li *is* to lead the research team.

f ***Collective nouns are singular, unless they are represented as individual parts***

The school of fish *is* large.

Manchester United looks like the team to beat.

In these examples, *The school* and *Manchester United* both operate as a single entity.

The team were fighting among themselves after their loss.

In this example, *The team* is not operating as a collective entity, so the noun is treated as plural.

g ***Some plural-sounding nouns are singular:*** **news*, mathematics*, physics*, politics*, measles**

Politics is not a sport for the faint hearted.

h ***When the subject is attached to another set of words by*** **as well as*, in addition to*, *and*** **including*, the number of the verb is taken from the original subject***

Our *house*, as well as all our *personal effects*, was destroyed by the fire.

The singular subject, *house* takes the singular verb.

i ***The word*** **number** ***as a subject is plural when it means more than one, and singular when it means a specific number***

The number is issued by the dispenser on the counter.
A number of angry people are waiting outside the bankrupt company demanding their money back.

In other words, *The number* requires a singular verb, but *A number* requires a plural verb.

j ***A verb agrees with its subject, not its predicate noun.***

The worst *place* to visit *is* the gambling casinos.

The word *place* is the subject, so the verb is singular, despite the predicate noun, *casinos,* being plural.

Rule 2: Use the right mood and tense with verbs

Mood shows the writer's state of mind when making a statement. Mood may be *indicative*, *imperative* or *subjunctive*.

Indicative: Generally states a fact (declarative) or asks a question (interrogative).

Tuna swim in the ocean. (Declarative)

Do tuna swim in the ocean? (Interogative Yes/No)

Which fish swim in the ocean? (Interogative Wh-?)

Imperative: A command.

Run.
Let's run.
Go away.

Subjunctive: Indicates conditions contrary to fact, an improbability, and wishes that are contrary to fact.

If I were Prime Minister, I'd raise taxes. [contrary to fact]

I wish I could do more to help. [wish]

If I were to win the lottery, I'd be able to clear up my mortgage. [improbable]

Grammatical mood may not always effectively indicate the speaker's state of mind. For example, we usually say *Sit down* as a politeness gesture, not as a command (e.g., with a dog or a naughty child). As well, a declarative statement can be presented as an interrogative if the tone of voice suggests incredulity or disapproval (e.g., *You left the public service to join the circus?*).

Below is a guideline for using mood correctly with verbs.

a Use subjunctive mood when stating a wish, an improbability, or something contrary to fact.

Avoid such statements as:

I wish I was able to run a marathon.

He looks as if he is guilty.

The correct statements are:

I wish I were able to run a marathon.

He looks as if he were guilty.

Tense

The three primary **tenses** (*past, present, future*) build into many more tenses. The primary tenses can be modified by whether the action is simple (*simple past, present, or future*), continuous (*continuous* or *progressive*) and whether it is a completed action (*perfect*). Some variations include

	Past	**Present**	**Future**
Simple P,P, or F	*She played.* Verb + *d|ed*	*She plays.* Verb + *s* (for singular)	*She will play.* *Will* + verb.
P,P, or F Progressive	Ongoing action in the past. *They were playing in bands in the 1970s.* *Was / were* + *ing*	Continuous present: action occurring at the moment of speaking. *I am assisting Hali at the cake stall*. *Am, is*, or *are* + *ing*	Ongoing action in the future. *They will be gathering dust samples from Mars.* *Will be* + *ing*
P, P, or F Perfect	Action occurred in past before some other action in the past. *The law was passed before the Senate had reviewed it*. *Had* + past participle	Continuing action begun in past. *I have phoned my mother every day since I left*. *Have|has* + past participle	Future action that will be completed before another future action. *They will have replenished their supplies before setting off for Windorah.* *Will have* + past participle
P, P, or F	Ongoing action	Ongoing action	Ongoing action that

Perfect Progressive	begun in the past before another action in the past. *They had been fishing on the jetty for several hours before anyone caught a decent sized whiting.* *Had been + ing*	begun in the past but continuing into the present. *The bureau has been monitoring the terrorist organisation for several months.* *Have/has been + ing*	will be completed in the future before another action in the future. *The submarine will have been operating for ten days before it rises near the ice caps.* *Will have been + ing*

Table 1: Verb tenses

Below are five guidelines for using tense correctly.

a ***Use correct types of tense***

Simple past, past perfect, and continuous present tenses are commonly misapplied.

He stated [past] that the machine had been operating [continuous past perfect] well prior to the overhaul, but is now breaking [continuous present] down regularly.

b ***Use the correct form of irregular verbs.***

Regular verbs form the past tense and past participle simply by adding *d* (*adore-d*) or *ed* (e.g., *audit-ed*) to the verb. However, about 200 English verbs are irregular, which means that they form past tense and past participle differently (Fowler & Aaron, 1998, p. 209-211).

c ***Usually use a possessive pronoun or a noun before a gerund (present participle used as a noun).***

Do not say:

Everyone knew it was *him* complaining that caused the uproar.

The correct version uses the possessive pronoun:

Everyone knew it was *his* complaining that caused the uproar.

Grammar rules relating to sentence problems

Rule 3: Avoid fused or run-on sentences

A fused or run-on sentence occurs when no punctuation or co-ordinating conjunction appears between two independent clauses. Fused sentences most often occur when 'the subject of the second clause repeats or refers to the subject of the first clause' (Fowler & Aaron, 1998, p. 209-211). The following fused sentence should be separated so that a new sentence begins with *occasionally.*

> *Drugs such as salbutamol and turbutaline may be given orally or by injection to open up the breathing tube occasionally it is necessary to hospitalise the patient so that intravenous fluids and humidification can be provided*.

In the example below, the fused sentence could be corrected by inserting a co-ordinating conjunction.

Fused: *Greenhouse gases are emissions that contribute to the warming of the Earth's atmosphere they trap the sun's heat.*

Corrected: *Greenhouse gases are emissions that contribute to the warming of the Earth's atmosphere, as they trap the sun's heat.*

Rule 4: Avoid comma splices

In a comma splice, a comma does the work required of a full stop. They most commonly occur when the second clause begins with a conjunctive adverb (e.g., *however*) or other transitional device (e.g., *that is*; *for example*). In the sentence below, the comma should be replaced by a full-stop (period) or semi-colon.

Comma splice:

> *Harry Potter is a publishing phenomenon, he has made J.K. Rowling very wealthy.*

Revised sentence with semi-colon:

> *Harry Potter is a publishing phenomenon; he has made J.K. Rowling very wealthy.*

Revised sentence with full stop:

> *Harry Potter is a publishing phenomenon. He has made J.K. Rowling very wealthy.*

Alternatively, a co-ordinating conjunction could be used to separate the two clauses:

> *Harry Potter is a publishing phenomenon, and he has made J.K. Rowling very wealthy.*

A simple test to detect sentence fragments is

a Is there a verb?

b Does the verb have a subject?

c If (a) and (b) are affirmative, is the clause a main clause [sentence] or a subordinate clause [sentence fragment]?

Rule 5: Avoid sentence fragments

A sentence fragment lacks a verb or subject or, having a verb, fails to complete a unit of thought. The most common problems are:

a Where a subordinate clause is used without a main clause

In the following sentence, *said* is a verb, but expresses an incomplete thought because no main clause is attached to this subordinate clause [adverbial clause of reason].

> Because I said so.

Similarly, the second sentence in the following statement is only a subordinate clause [also adverbial clause of reason] as it is an incomplete unit of thought.

> The wastewater treatment plant is overloaded. Because roof runoff as well as meatworks effluent are flowing into it.

b Where a participle or a prepositional phrase is used without a main clause

In the following sentence, *leading* is a present participle, not a verb.

Fragment: Ricky Ponting leading from the front with a century.

Revised: Ricky Ponting, leading from the front with a century, helped the Australians to win.

Grammar rules relating to modifiers

Modifiers are adjectival and adverbial words, phrases, and clauses. They need to be near the item that they are modifying.

Rule 6: Avoid dangling modifiers

A dangling modifier does not sensibly modify anything in its sentence. Below, the (infinite) action at the sentence beginning has been detached from the real actor.

> *Flying over the mountain, the sheep dotted the green countryside.*

The opening participial phrase, *Flying over the mountain,* is doing adverbial work telling us when the sheep were seen to be dotting the landscape. This is best explained by the notion of ***the absent***

actor. This means that, where there is an infinite verb (as in a participle), there can be no subject who is doing the action of the participle. In this instance, the sheep cannot be the actor(s) because this would render the sentence silly.

Consider how the following sentences are semantically rather foolish because of the dangling modifier at the start of the sentence.

> *Shortly before starting the game, the streaker ran onto the field.*
>
> *While extracting the tooth, the patient was unable to respond to the dentist's questions.*
>
> *Having given birth, the veterinarian should ensure that the cow and calf are isolated from the herd.*

Be careful when beginning sentences with **infinites**. While **finite verbs** have a subject (e.g., *I am driving to Townsville*), **infinite verbs** have no subject (e.g*., Driving to Townsville, I hit a kangaroo; To drive to Townsville would be folly)*.
Infinites include:

- past participles (-*en,-ed*)
- present participles(-*ing*)
- infinitives (to + verb)
- gerunds (the act of + *-ing*)

Gerunds are part-verb, part-noun. They are formed by taking the participle form of verb and using it as a noun:

> Skilful *driving* is necessary if you are to do this.
>
> *Swimming* is excellent exercise.

Ambiguity with the absent actor occurs when the writer implies an actor, but does not make it evident to the reader. For example, who is the implied actor in the following infinite openings?

> When *paying* your rates, the council officer should issue a receipt.
>
> *Driven* almost mad, the crying baby was placed back in her cot by her father.
>
> *Ignoring* the warning, the toaster short-circuited.
>
> *To arrange* good seating, fast action is required.

Rule 7: Place the modifier next to the modified (misplaced modifiers)

Below are three guidelines for placing modifiers correctly in a sentence.

a ***Place limiting modifiers correctly***

Limiting modifiers such as *almost*, *even*, *just*, *only*, *merely*, and *simply* must be adjacent to the item being modified.

Only is very commonly misplaced. Consider how the meaning below is altered by where *only* is placed.

Only I wanted to view the art.

I wanted to view the art only.

In the sentence below, *only* has been placed incorrectly:

Only the honey mouse, or Tarsipes, is found in the Albany region of Western Australia where it lives among the Melaleucas.

In this sentence, *only* is correctly placed, next to the item it is modifying:

The honey mouse, or Tarsipes, is found only in the Albany region of Western Australia where it lives among the Melaleucas.

Other limiting modifiers can be confusingly located:

I found just a few cracks in the hull. (The limiting modifier refers to *a few cracks*)

I just found a few cracks in the hull. (The limiting modifier refers to *found*)

I found a few cracks in just the hull. (The limiting modifier refers to *the hull*)

b ***Place the modifier near the item it modifies***

The *modifier* (adjective, adverb, adjectival phrase or clause, adverbial phrase or clause) should be near the *noun* or *pronoun* (for adjectival functions) or *verb* (for adverbial functions) that it modifies.

In the following sentence, the words in italics are not next to the words they are meant to modify.

The mother gave the medicine to her son whom she loved in small doses.

The adjectival clause, *whom she loved,* is in the correct position next to the noun, *son.* However, the adverbial phrase, *in small doses,* is meant to qualify the verb *gave,* not *loved.*

Consequently, the wrong idea entirely is conveyed to the reader. What problems are evident in the following sentences?

He became an orphan when his parents died at the age of two.

We hope that this present is a token of our esteem, although it is small.

We gathered the balloons for the boy blown away by the wind.

His shoe was caught in the gutter that he polished last night.

The mural will be purchased by the director, considered ugly by many.

c ***Avoid squinting modifiers***

Squinting modifiers are placed in a sentence so that they could modify words or phrases on either side of the modifier. The modifier should be relocated to eliminate the ambiguity.

People who visit the back streets frequently are attacked by drug addicts.

Here, the word *frequently* could apply to the adjectival clause *who visit the back streets.* However, it could also apply to the frequency of the attacks on the other side of the sentence.

Rule 8: Adjectives should not be confused with adverbs

Adjectives modify nouns. For example:

The *opal* ear-rings complemented her *blue* eyes.

Adverbs modify:

- Verbs: Leisel Jones swam brilliantly. (*Brilliantly* modifies the verb *swam*)
- Adjectives: A very relaxed Leisel Jones swam brilliantly. (*Very* modifies the adjective *relaxed*).
- Adverbs: A very relaxed Leisel Jones swam quite brilliantly. (*Quite* modifies the adverb *brilliantly*)

However, these simple rules seem to be broken quite regularly. The following are incorrect:

She writes good.

She played a real good game.

He acted real serious when the auditors arrived.

She acted rude towards the parking attendant.

However, after some intransitive verbs such as *smell*, *taste*, *feel*, *sound*, *look*, *appear*, and *become*, an adjective is used if describing the subject.

His dog looked cold in the bath. [not *coldly*]

She appeared awkward in stiletto shoes. [not *awkwardly*]

The muffin smells nice and tastes good. [not *nicely* and *well*]

An adverb is used if describing the verb's action:

The dog looked coldly at the intruder before biting him. [the manner in which the dog looked]
She appeared on stage awkwardly in stiletto shoes. [the manner in which she appeared]
I can smell nicely and taste well now that I'm cured. [the manner in which I can smell and taste].

Rule 9: Use fewer and less correctly

Fewer and l*ess* are adjectives, modifying nouns. *Fewer* modifies **count nouns** and l*ess* modifies **non-count nouns**. In the following, *scones* is a count-noun and *flour* is a non-count noun:

To make *fewer* scones, use *less* flour.

Rule 10: Use the correct form of adverbs and adjectives

Adjectives and adverbs have three degrees: positive, comparative, and superlative.

- The *positive degree* describes a verb or noun, but does not compare.
- The *comparative degree* compares to one other.
- The *superlative* compares to more than two.

A common error is to use the superlative instead of the comparative:

Ms Chang was the best of the two speakers. [Incorrect: should be *better*]

In most instances, the comparative is created by placing *more* before the adjective:

Yamba is more beautiful than Grafton.

or by placing *more* before the adverb:

Because The Greens campaigned more effectively in this election, they have increased their vote by 3%.

The superlative is created by placing *most* before the adjective:

> *Tiger Sharks, White Pointers and Bull Sharks are the most voracious sharks in Australian waters.*

or by placing *most* before the adverb:

> *Of all nature series, David Attenborough's 'Life on Earth' contributed most effectively to public interest in nature*.

However, some adjectives and adverbs become irregular in the comparative and irregular form. These include:

Positive	Comparative	Superlative
Adjectives:		
good	better	best
bad	worse	worst
some, many, much	more	most
Adverbs:		
well	better	best
badly	worse	worst

Table 2: Adjectives and adverbs that become irregular in the comparative and irregular form.

Grammar rules related to pronouns

Pronouns cause a number of grammatical problems for many people. To use pronouns properly, it is important to be familiar with them as a part of speech (see Lecture 3). The most common problems are caused by confusion about the case (nominative, objective, and possessive), although unclear references also cause problems. The six grammar rules relating to pronouns are:

- Use objective case when pronoun used after a verb or preposition
- Use the correct pronoun in elliptical clauses
- Use who and whom correctly
- Use that and which correctly
- Avoid unclear pronoun reference

- Use *that* to avoid unclear object of preceding verb

These six rules are explained in more detailed below.

Rule 11: Use objective case when a pronoun is used after a verb or preposition

Are *her, I,* and *he* used correctly in the following sentences?

> *Her and I decided to enrol in a Business degree.*
>
> *The prize money was divided between he and I because the judges could not decide who was better.*

The correct form should be:

> *She and I decided to enrol in a Business degree.*
>
> *The prize money was divided between him and me because the judges could not decide who was better.*

But why is this so? It is because the pronouns have grammatical case. Case is determined by the pronoun's relation to the verb or if it indicates ownership (possession). In answer to the question *Who decided to enrol?*, the pronouns must be in the subjective case because they are the subject of the verb.

> ***She and I*** [nominative case of the pronoun] *decided to enrol in a Business degree.*

In the other sentence, the case of *him* and *me* is objective because they follow the preposition *between.*

> *The prize money was divided between* ***him and me*** [objective case of the pronoun] *because the judges could not decide who was better*.

To clarify further, pronouns are determined by their three cases:

- **nominative case** is the subject
- **objective case** is the direct or indirect object
- **possessive case** indicates ownership

Pronouns are also determined by their three persons:

- **first person** (*I, We*)
- **second person** (*You*)

- **third person** (*He, She, It, They*) [each of these is in the nominative case]

Finally, pronouns are also determined by their two numbers**, singular** and **plural**.

Person	Subjective case		Objective case		Possessive case	
	singular	**plural**	**singular**	**plural**	**singular**	**plural**
First	I	We	Me	Us	My	Our
Second	You	You	You	You	Your	Your
Third	He She It	They	Him Her It	Them	His Her Its	Their

Table 3: Pronouns by case, number, and person

Reflexive pronouns

Some people try to avoid this problem by using the reflexive pronoun (*myself, yourself, himself, herself*):

> *The prize money was divided between himself and myself because the judges could not decide who was better*.

However, reflexive pronouns are used only when they are the object, or when they come after a preposition and refer to the subject. These sentences correctly use the reflexive pronoun:

> I gave *myself* a nasty shock.
>
> Siobhan bought *herself* a present with her lottery winnings.

In the first sentence, the *I* of the subject is the same person as the *myself* of the object. In the second sentence, the subject *Siobhan* is the same person as the *herself* of the indirect object.

Rule 12: Use who and whom correctly

Problems with using *who* and *whom* also occur because of uncertainty about case. *Who* is the nominative case (the subject of the verb). In these sentences, *who* is the subject of verbs emphasised:

> *Who* is that?
>
> The person *who* wrote this clearly knows what they're talking about. [*who wrote this* is an adjectival clause modifying person]

Whom is the objective case (i.e., of verbs and prepositions).

To *whom* did you present the proposal? [*whom* is the object of preposition *To*]

To make this sentence easier to understand, convert it into a declarative:

You presented this proposal to whom. [*whom* is the object of preposition *to*]

Lady Macbeth, whom Macbeth loved, convinced him to kill Duncan and become King of Scotland.

In the second sentence, *whom Macbeth loved* is an adjectival clause where Macbeth is the subject and *whom* is the object of Macbeth's love: Macbeth loved whom.

Whom does one tell? [One tells whom?; *Whom* is the object of the verb *does tell*]

Whom is the telephone call for? [The telephone call is for whom? *Whom* is the object of the preposition *for*]

A useful hint is to find the verbs first; then ask *who* before the verb. This is the subject position that uses *who*. Remember: Always use *who(m)* for people and *which* or *that* for things.

Rule 13: Use that and which correctly

Most users do not understand when each word should be used. The answer lies in whether the word introduces a **restrictive** or **non-restrictive** clause [these are also called **defining** and **non-defining** clauses].

That introduces only restrictive clauses; *which* usually introduces non-restrictive clauses.

A **restrictive clause** is one that:

- limits the meaning of words to which it applies; and
- is essential to the meaning of the sentence, and so cannot be omitted without significantly changing the sentence.

In the following sentence, the italicised adjectival clause must be in the sentence for the reader to understand which driveways do not conform to council guidelines. If the clause is omitted, the information value of the sentence is lost.

Driveways *that have too steep a gradient* do not conform to council guidelines.

The information *that have too steep a gradient* is essential to the meaning of the sentence as this tells the reader exactly which driveways do not conform to the guidelines. Removing the restrictive clause gives wrong information or makes for a nonsensical sentence:

Driveways do not conform to council guidelines.

A **non-restrictive clause** is not crucial to the functioning of the sentence. It

- provides incidental, rather than crucial, information; and
- may be eliminated without significantly altering the sentence.

Thus, in the following sentence the italicised adjectival clause adds information that is not crucial to the sentence. In other words, the steep gradient may or may not be the cause of the driveway not conforming to council guidelines.

> *This driveway, which has a steep gradient, was poorly constructed.*

Notice the punctuation of a non-restrictive clause. The commas at either end of the adjectival clause should remind us that this portion is not crucial to the construction of the sentence to keep the sentence's meaning intact:

> *This driveway was poorly constructed.*

In the following sentences, note how the information about the contract is not crucial in the first sentence, but is crucial in the second.

> *The contract, which was first drawn up in 2008, had overlooked the vital issue of selecting a CEO.*
>
> *The clause that specifies who should be liable must be withdrawn from the contract.*

Rule 14: Avoid unclear pronoun references

Pronouns stand in the place of nouns, allowing the writer or speaker to state things without continually using the noun. Consequently, they are very useful. However, when pronouns are used excessively, the reader or listener can become confused about which actual person or thing is being referred to.

The person or thing referred to is called the **noun-referent**. When the noun-referent gets too far away from the pronoun, or if there are intervening nouns between the noun-referent and the pronoun, the meaning becomes unclear.

Consider the ambiguity in each of these sentences where the unclear pronoun is italicised.

> *The peasants carried such heavy loads on their bamboo canes that they sagged under the weight.*
>
> Did the peasants or the canes sag?
>
> Sharyn told Gretchen that she was not doing *her* fair share of the work.

Is this a confession or an accusation by Sharyn? The weak verb *told* does not inform the reader either way. Thus, the meaning would be clearer by using a more descriptive verb:

Sharyn accused Gretchen of not doing *her* fair share of the work.

Sharyn admitted to Gretchen that she was not doing *her* fair share of the work.

Rule 15: Use the correct pronoun in elliptical clauses

An elliptical clause is a clause with words omitted, but understood by the reader or listener. The sentence:

She is a much better runner than I. … means …

She is a much better runner than I ***am***.

In situations like this, the concluding pronoun takes its case by extending the clause. Because *I* is the subject of the verb *am,* to use *me* would be incorrect. We would not say, therefore:

She is a much better runner than me [am].

Similarly, the following sentence:

The rap music annoyed him much more than me. … means …

The rap music annoyed him much more than it annoyed me.

In this sentence, the objective case, *me*, is appropriate because it is the object of *annoyed* (annoyed whom?). If we were to write the sentence:

The rap music annoyed him much more than I.

then we would mean:

The rap music annoyed him much more than I annoyed him.

This is a strong example of how correct pronoun usage is crucial to conveying the correct meaning.

Rule 16: Use that to avoid unclear object of preceding verb

The word *that* can be used to introduce a noun clause. Thus, in the statement, *I hope that you are well,* the words after *that* constitute a noun clause object of the verb *hope*. When the word is omitted in such instances, it can lead to confusing statements. Thus, in the sentence

I see the Prime Minister is holidaying in the Caribbean. …

the object of the verb *see* appears to be *the Prime Minister.* But this is not so: the writer cannot literally *see* the Prime Minister. What is seen is the contents of the noun clause beginning with *that:*

I see that the Prime Minister is holidaying in the Caribbean.

Punctuation

Commas

In written and spoken communication, commas separate units of information within sentences. In spoken communication, commas are also used to indicate pauses. The three main functions of commas are to link, to enclose, and to separate.

1 To link

The comma is used to join independent or main clauses within a sentence. These clauses are usually linked by a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, or, for, so, yet,* and *nor*).

> *I submitted my tax return on time, but was fined for not signing it.*
>
> *Greg Norman has often been in contention to win the Masters tournament, but the best he has finished is second.*
>
> *We could cycle to Lorne, or we could surf at Bells Beach.*

Note that in the two examples, the clauses could stand alone.

2 To enclose

Commas are used to enclose or surround extra (parenthetical) information in a sentence that is not essential to the meaning of the sentence. In this case, the comma is placed before and after this extra unit of information.

> *I bought my first car, a Holden, when I was 17.*
>
> *The politician sued the newspaper, a well-known publisher of scandals, for defamation.*

Note that the parenthetical information could be removed, and the sentences would still stand as complete units of thought: i.e.,

> *I bought my first car when I was 17.*
>
> *The politician sued the newspaper for defamation.*

If the information is essential to the meaning of the sentence (a restrictive clause), then it should not be enclosed within commas. The following sentence contains a restrictive phrase (*with the broken bridle*) necessary for identifying which horse ran last in the race.

> *The horse with the broken bridle ran last in the rac*e.

Commas also separate other non-adjectival phrases and clauses that are separated by commas before and after.

The defendant, the judge noted, had a long criminal record.

This plane, I believe, will never get off the ground.

These sentences simply re-arrange alternative sentence constructions.

The judge noted that the defendant had a long criminal record.

I believe that this plane will never get off the ground.

3 To separate

Commas should be used to separate introductory phrases or clauses within a sentence. Commas also distinguish items in a list.

Although the report was well-written, it failed to convince the committee.

After finishing last, he vowed never to race again.

A good fruit salad should contain apples, pears, bananas, and a dollop of cream.

Some debate may be caused by the last example above, which uses the **serial comma**, or a comma before the final word or phrase and in a list. Many people have been taught that *and* does the work of a comma.

A comma also separates dates, places, titles.

On 29 March, 1902, Enrico Caruso provided the first acceptable recordings of the singing voice when record producer, Fred Gaisberg paid him £100.

We lived in Gin Gin, Queensland, for several years.

Mary McMurtrie, Divisional Operations Manager, has been promoted to Managing Director.

Professor Kathryn Davidson, Dean of the Faculty of Health, will address the conference on Thursday.

Words followed by a comma

The words listed below are invariably followed by a comma (Renton, 1994, p. 49).

by the way	for example	furthermore
however	in conclusion	in fact
in the same way	more importantly	namely
nevertheless	notwithstanding this	of course
on the other hand	put simply	similarly
that is	therefore	

Apostrophes

Apostrophes tend to cause a good deal of confusion.

Possession

Firstly, apostrophes indicate possession: they show that the name of the person or object following another noun belongs to that first noun.

> *John's book; Susan's car*

Contraction

Secondly, the apostrophe is used to indicate that two words have been contracted into one.

- *would not* becomes *wouldn't*, *did not* becomes *didn't* and *have not* becomes *haven't.*

It's versus Its

It's is a contraction of the two words, *it is*. Because the *i* of *is* has been omitted, the apostrophe is used to mark this. Therefore,

> It's cold in here. (i.e., It is cold in here)

Its with no apostrophe is the possessive form of it. It is used correctly in the following sentence.

> *The parietal lobe is located at the top, behind the frontal lobe.* ***Its role*** *is primarily to regulate movement, orientation, calculation, and some forms of recognition.*

Colons

The colon is used in the following situations:

1 Items in a list

The colon is used here to mark the beginning of a series of elements. These may be either words, phrases, or clauses within a sentence, or bullet-points.

> *Those who are skeptical about global warming should consider the following: Cyclone Larry in 2005 will be repeated more frequently and will move further south so that Brisbane will become a cyclone-prone region; the Murray-Darling in 2005 is experiencing a thousand-year drought; the polar ice caps are melting at a faster rate than the worst predictions.*

Bullet-point lists are useful for longer phrases and clauses:

> *Those who are skeptical about global warming should consider the following:*
>
> - *Cyclone Larry in 2005 will be repeated more frequently and will move further south so that Brisbane will become a cyclone-prone region;*
> - *the Murray-Darling in 2005 is experiencing a thousand-year drought;*
> - *the polar ice caps are melting at a faster rate than the worst predictions.*

2 Separate explanations, elaborations, and information

The colon is used in this sense to separate material in a sentence that is explanatory or informative in nature. Each sentence needs to be able to stand in its own right (a main clause).

> The system is designed to be fool-proof: a user cannot access the system without three different user names and five passwords.

In this sentence, the material after the colon explains how the system is foolproof and gives information on how the system works.

3 To introduce an appositive

An appositive is a noun or noun phrase that re-names a noun or full statement before it. In the following sentence the noun phrase, *tour de force,* in a sense re-names or restates the part before it.

> *This EMI recording of Beethoven's Triple Concerto with the chocolate rich violin of David Oistrakh, the idiomatic playing of Mstislav Rostropovich, and Sviatoslav Richter's exquisite piano produces one of the century's great recordings: a tour de force.*

4 To introduce a long quotation

The manner of introducing quotations is presented below. However, where quotations are quite lengthy (three lines or more), a colon should be used to open the quotation.

In General

Colons, wherever possible, should be preceded by independent clauses (i.e., the material in front of the colon should be able to stand alone as a sentence).

> *The most important things in life are: living well, staying healthy, and balancing work and leisure.*

This is because *The most important things in life are* cannot stand alone as a sentence. Rather than structuring the sentence in this manner, it is preferable to recast without the colon. While there is some debate on this principle (e.g., the *Australian Government Style Manual* does not insist on this point), most commentators on the topic suggest that the colon should be preceded by an independent clause.

Semi-colons

Semi-colons and commas are not the same, and perform very different functions.

Semi-colons should be used to separate closely related main clauses, separate an ensuing clause that begins with a conjunctive adverb, and separate items (expressed in more than a single word, e.g., phrases or clauses) in a list after a colon.

A good test for using a semi-colon is to ensure that the sentence portion (e.g. phrase, independent clause) that is separated by a semi-colon should be grammatically equivalent to the portion on the other side of the semi-colon.

1 Separate closely related sentences

Where independent clauses are separated by a semi-colon, each portion could, by definition, be a sentence (remember that an independent clause can stand alone as a sentence). However, if the two clauses are very closely related then they should be separated by a semi-colon. This is a matter of writer judgement for which no rule can provide total guidance.

> *The truck needs new brakes; otherwise it may cause a tragic accident.*

2 Separate an ensuing sentence that begins with a conjunctive adverb

A conjunctive adverb is an adverb that 'relates two main clauses in a sentence' (Fowler & Aaron, 1998, p. 818). Their role may be one of the following:

- Additive (*besides*, *furthermore*, *incidentally*)

- Emphatic (*indeed*, *undoubtedly*)
- Comparative/Contrastive (*however*, *nevertheless*, *similarly*)
- Causative (*accordingly*, *hence*, *therefore*)
- Temporal (*finally*, *meanwhile*, *then*)

These examples identify typical semi-colon use with a conjunctive adverb. The second portions of these sentences provide a contrastive, causative, or temporal statement to complement the first portions:

> *The defence failed to convince the jury of Pratt's innocence; however, the judge issued a suspended sentence.*
>
> *The reactor core began to over-heat; therefore, the high-pressure water pumps were activated.*
>
> *Ned Kelly and his gang rode in to town; meanwhile, the troopers lay in wait.*

3 Separate items greater than a single word

Normally a comma would separate items (usually nominal) in a sentence. However, where the grammatical items contain several words, separated by commas, a semicolon should be used.

> The kitchen has been completely re-furbished. There are pots, pans, and a griller; a new fridge; a dishwasher; a free-standing, marble bench; and a microwave oven.

Without the semi-colons in the sentence above, the reader would be confused as to which items belong in which larger group. The items *pots, pans*, *and a griller* are a single set of cooking utensils that would not include, for instance, *the marble bench*.

Brackets and parentheses

Brackets and parentheses are not the same things and, although the terms are often used interchangeably, they serve different purposes.

> Brackets refer to [ ]. These are used when a writer wants to insert their own material into a sentence, usually in the form of commentary or explanation.
>
> *The nearest galaxy to our own is several light-years away [a light-year is the distance light travels in a year].*
>
> *Hamilton wrote that 'Robert Menzoid [sic] was the longest-serving prime minister in Australian history.'*
>
> > The [*sic*] is a means of informing readers that the spelling mistake (Menzoid instead of Menzies) is Hamilton's, not the person quoting Hamilton. Such remarks are always placed within brackets.

Parentheses ( ) are used to surround extra material in the sentence that is not essential to the reader's understanding. Commas can also do the work of parentheses.

The horse (which had previously seemed so placid) bolted and ran for the lantana bushes.

This would preferably be punctuated with commas:

The horse, which had previously seemed so placid, bolted for the lantana bushes.

Commas are often better than parentheses as they are less disruptive to the typographical flow of the sentence. Parentheses can be used to enclose entire sentences that are additions to a discussion, but again not essential to the reader's understanding.

John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas in 1963. (Many people remember this moment vividly.)

The Qantas 747 is expected to land at Newark Airport at noon. (Newark is one of three airports servicing New York City.)

Note that when the entire sentence is within the parentheses, the full stop comes before the closing parenthesis.

References

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