

All Megablunders 12

Each of the following sentences is correct or contains a Megablunder. Possible Megablunders include ROS, FRAG, PAR, MM, DM, PR, AGREE, CASE. In the space to the left of the sentence, write either C for correct or the abbreviation for the Megablunder. For sentences containing an error, write a complete corrected version in the space below.

CORRECTED VERSIONS ARE SUGGESTIONS ONLY; OTHER ANSWERS ARE POSSIBLE.

1.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE: Ulysses promised to strive, to seek, to find, and that he would never yield.

ERROR: PAR

CORRECTED VERSION: Ulysses promised to strive, to seek, to find, and never to yield.

EXPLANATION: *Items in a series should be in parallel structure. The first three items in this four-item series are infinitives; therefore, the fourth item must also be an infinitive.*

2.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE: As a responsible hiker, we should take care of our own equipment so that the guides can concentrate on following the trail.

ERROR: AGREE

CORRECTED VERSION: As responsible hikers, we should take care of our own equipment so that the guides can concentrate on following the trail.

EXPLANATION: *In the original sentence, the plural "we" refers to the singular noun "hiker." To fix the agreement error, make the singular into a plural, "hikers."*

3. The wound at first did not seem life-threatening; McKinley's doctors, therefore, took their time about getting him to the hospital.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE:

ERROR: NONE

4.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE: Dangling from the lip of a thousand-foot precipice, sleet began to fall.

ERROR: DM

CORRECTED VERSION: Dangling from the lip of a thousand-foot precipice, we were horrified when sleet began to fall.

EXPLANATION: *A verbal phrase at the beginning of a sentence must modify the subject of the main clause. Another way to think about this relationship is that, if the verbal is active, the doer of the action and the subject of main clause must be the same. In the original sentence, "sleet" cannot logically be dangling from the lip of a precipice. The corrected version supplies a logical subject. Alternatively, we could change the participial phrase to a subordinate clause: "As we dangled from the lip of a thousand-foot precipice, sleet began to fall."*

5.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE: The problem was not that there were too many visitors, it was that the ferry didn't make enough trips.

ERROR: ROS

CORRECTED VERSION: The problem was not that there were too many visitors: it was that the ferry didn't make enough trips.

EXPLANATION: *When two main clauses are separated only by punctuation, that punctuation must be a full stop. This principle holds even when the clauses stand in the common negative/positive relationship illustrated here. Though a semi-colon or period would be correct, a colon is the best choice for signaling this relationship: the second clause answers a question that the first implies.*

6.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE: The teacher offered a prize of ten snack bar dollars for whomever committed the fewest Megablunders in the course of the year.

ERROR: CASE

CORRECTED VERSION: The teacher offered a prize of ten snack bar dollars for whoever committed the fewest Megablunders in the course of the year.

EXPLANATION: *The case a pronoun is determined by its grammatical role in its own clause. In the noun clause that ends the original sentence, the pronoun is the subject and must have the subject form: "whoever." (The entire clause, not the pronoun, is the object of the preposition "for.")*

7.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE: When the Ostrogoths encountered the Visigoths at Tintinium in A.D. 479, they were put to flight in less than an hour.

ERROR: PR

CORRECTED VERSION: At Tintinium in A.D. 479, the Ostrogoths put the Visigoths to flight in less than an hour.

EXPLANATION: *In the original sentence, "they" is an ambiguous pronoun: it might refer either to "Ostrogoths" or to "Visigoths." (The writer's use of passive voice in the main clause contributes to the ambiguity.) The corrected version eliminates the offending pronoun altogether and also reduces wordiness.*

8.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE: All things being equal, Stephen was sure that the friendship between Jack and him would survive even Jack's most pig-headed behavior.

ERROR: NONE

9.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE: The trouble with tennis is that people who play often suffer severe elbow pain.

ERROR: MM

CORRECTED VERSION: The trouble with tennis is that people who play suffer frequent and severe elbow pain.

EXPLANATION: *In the original sentence, the adverb "often" is a "two-way" modifier, sandwiched between two verbs ("play" and "suffer") that it could equally well modify. In the corrected version, the idea of frequency is firmly attached to the pain. The following alternative correction attaches it to the playing: "The trouble with tennis is that when people play often, they suffer severe elbow pain."*

10.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE: Dressed to kill in a buckskin jacket that had a pleated waist, velvet lapels, and a built-in holster.

ERROR: FRAG

CORRECTED VERSION: Dressed to kill in a buckskin jacket that had a pleated waist, velvet lapels, and a built-in holster, Wild Bill lay on the saloon floor in a pool of blood.

EXPLANATION: *The original sentence is actually participial phrase. The corrected version adds a main clause.*