

All Megablunders 6

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Each of the following sentences is correct or exemplifies a Mega-blunder. Possible Megablunders include ROS, FRAG, AGREE, PR, CASE, PAR, MM, DM. 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.

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CORRECTED VERSIONS ARE SUGGESTIONS ONLY; OTHER ANSWERS ARE POSSIBLE.

1.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE: The tenant, whose claims to have been educated at Oxford were unverified, was obviously a tremendous reader: they were stacked on his desk, under his bed, beside the sink, and even in the kitchen cabinets.

ERROR: PR

CORRECTED VERSION: The tenant, whose claims to have been educated at Oxford were unverified, was obviously a tremendous reader: books were stacked on his desk, under his bed, beside the sink, and even in the kitchen cabinets.

EXPLANATION: *A pronoun must refer to a noun that actually appears in the context, not to an idea that is merely implied. The corrected version eliminates the bad pronoun "they" and substitutes the noun "books."*

2.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE: Having been stalled in committee for months, the promotion for which I made such an extraordinary effort went to someone else because of a personality conflict between my boss and I.

ERROR: CASE

CORRECTED VERSION: Having been stalled in committee for months, the promotion for which I made such an extraordinary effort went to someone else because of a personality conflict between my boss and me.

EXPLANATION: *A pronoun that is the object of a preposition such as "between" must be in the object case.*

3.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE: Homer wondered whether he could climb Mount Springfield without oxygen while he sat on the famous living room couch, which appears in every episode, and ate Pringles straight from the tube.

ERROR: MM

CORRECTED VERSION: While he sat on the famous living room couch, which appears in every episode, and ate Pringles straight from the tube, Homer wondered whether he could climb Mount Springfield without oxygen.

EXPLANATION: *The adverb clause ("while...tube") at the end of the original sentence is placed so that it appears to modify "climb." Logically, however, it must modify "wondered": one can wonder while sitting on a couch, but one cannot climb a mountain while doing so. The corrected version moves the adverb clause to the beginning of the sentence, where it is closer to "wondered" than to "climb."*

4.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE: The students not only held a wild party but also lied about it when they were questioned, therefore the D.C. imposed a severe punishment.

ERROR: ROS

CORRECTED VERSION: The students not only held a wild party but also lied about it when they were questioned; therefore, the D.C. imposed a severe punishment.

EXPLANATION: *The original sentence contains two main clauses joined by the conjunctive adverb "therefore." When a conjunctive adverb appears between main clauses, it must be preceded by a full stop.*

5.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE: Preparing to fight Drederick Tatum for the world heavyweight crown, the story of Mo's boxing career, which thrived on inventive rules violations, inspires Homer to fill his own gloves with barbed wire.

ERROR: DM or MM

CORRECTED VERSION: Inspired by the story of Mo's boxing career, which thrived on inventive rules violations, Homer fills his own gloves with barbed wire as he prepares to fight Drederick Tatum for the world heavyweight crown.

EXPLANATION: *An introductory participial phrase must modify the subject of the main clause. In the original sentence, "Preparing to fight" cannot logically modify "story." Since the noun that the participle does modify--"Homer"--actually appears in the sentence, the modifier might be considered misplaced rather than dangling; either answer would be correct.*

6.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE: Neither the team, which pays Pedro's salary, nor the fans, who idolize him, were thrilled by his lackluster performance in the month of September.

ERROR: NONE

7.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE: The students who didn't study for the grammar test earned low grades. Although Rosamund, whose grammatical intuition was good, did better than the rest of them.

ERROR: FRAG

CORRECTED VERSION: The students who didn't study for the grammar test earned low grades, although Rosamund, whose grammatical intuition was good, did better than the rest of them.

EXPLANATION: *In the original sentence, the structure beginning with "Although" contains two subordinate clauses and no main clause. It must not be punctuated as if it were a complete sentence.*

8.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE: Tom reminded Zachary that because of the 2000-word paper, which remained to be written, he would not have time for either a party or a movie that night.

ERROR: PR

CORRECTED VERSION: Because Tom had not yet written his 2000-word paper, he would not have time for either a party or a movie that night, and he reminded Zachary of this unfortunate fact.

EXPLANATION: *In the original sentence, the pronoun "he" could refer to either to Tom or to Zachary—its reference is ambiguous. In the corrected sentence, "he" refers unambiguously to "Tom."*

9.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE: Stability being an important value, a computer that comes equipped with many expensive bells and whistles are not necessarily superior to a well-engineered low-end machine.

ERROR: AGREE

CORRECTED VERSION: Stability being an important value, a computer that comes equipped with many expensive bells and whistles is not necessarily superior to a well-engineered low-end machine.

EXPLANATION: *The subject of the original sentence, "computer," is singular and the verb, "are," is plural. Evidently the writer has been distracted by the plural nouns ("bells," "whistles") in the intervening adjective clause. These nouns should not affect the relationship between subject and verb.*

10.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE: In the interests of getting into college, Zack has studied diligently, cultivated his skills, and he has curried favor with whoever might be willing to write him a recommendation.

ERROR: PAR

CORRECTED VERSION: In the interests of getting into college, Zack has studied diligently, cultivated his skills, and curried favor with whoever might be willing to write him a recommendation.

EXPLANATION: *In the original sentence, two verb phrases ("studied diligently, cultivated his skills") set the pattern for a parallel series: all further items in the series must also be verb phrases. But "he has curried favor" is not a verb phrase but a complete clause.*

