

All Megablunders 9

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Each of the following sentences is correct or exemplifies a megablunder. Possible megablunders include ROS, FRAG, AGREE, PR, CASE, PAR, MM, and 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 sentence version in the space below.

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CORRECTED VERSIONS ARE SUGGESTIONS ONLY; OTHER ANSWERS ARE POSSIBLE.

1.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE: The 11-year-old Shakespeare may have witnessed the Queen's visit to nearby Kenilworth in 1575; there is, however, no documentary evidence.

ERROR: NONE

2.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE: I barely saw ten geese on the banks of a pond where they used to come by the thousands.

ERROR: MM

CORRECTED VERSION: I saw barely ten geese on the banks of a pond where they used to come by the thousands.

EXPLANATION: *If a number or quantity is stated in a sentence, modifiers like "barely," "scarcely," "only," and "just" usually belong with it, not with the verb. Consider the opposite, "more than" or "over": no one would write "I more than saw ten geese," and no one should write "I barely saw ten geese." (If a sentence does not contain a number or quantity, modifiers like "barely" may well belong with the verb: "Robin barely escaped from the sheriff's trap.")*

3.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE: No matter how rough and daunting the path may appear, one should never hesitate to follow their dreams.

ERROR: AGREE

CORRECTED VERSION: No matter how rough and daunting the path may appear, one should never hesitate to follow one's dreams.

EXPLANATION: *In the original sentence, the writer shifts for no good reason from "one" to a different gender-neutral pronoun, "their." The possessive form of "one" is "one's."*

4.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE: The package went unclaimed because the student who it was addressed to never received notification.

ERROR: CASE

CORRECTED VERSION: The package went unclaimed because the student whom it was addressed to never received notification.

EXPLANATION: *To test for the case of a relative pronoun, rearrange the clause in normal sentence order. Here, "who it was addressed to" becomes "it was addressed to whom" (or, if substituting a personal pronoun for the relative makes the point still clearer, "it was addressed to him"; the relative pronoun is clearly the object of the preposition "to" and must be in the object form.*

5.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE: According to the regulations, permission to carry a nail clipper on board can be granted by either the gate attendant or by the captain.

ERROR: PAR

CORRECTED VERSION: According to the regulations, permission to carry a nail clipper on board can be granted by either the gate attendant or the captain.

EXPLANATION: *The correlative conjunctions "either...or" require parallel structure. In the original sentence, "either" is followed by a noun phrase, "or" by a prepositional phrase; in the corrected version, both are followed by noun phrases. Of course it would also be possible to correct the error by moving "by" after "either" so that both structures became prep phrases.*

6.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE: Homer attempted to dispose of his lighted firecracker in the dishwasher; this caused a catastrophic flood in the kitchen of Flanders's summer cottage.

ERROR: PR

CORRECTED VERSION: Homer's attempt to dispose of his lighted firecracker in the dishwasher caused a catastrophic flood in the kitchen of Flanders's summer cottage.

EXPLANATION: *In the original sentence, pronoun "this" refers to the entire previous clause. The corrected version eliminates the pronoun altogether and also unifies the sentence by reducing it to a single clause.*

7.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE: Jules reaches a bold conclusion, he can keep Kathe only by sharing her with Jim.

ERROR: ROS

CORRECTED VERSION: Jules reaches a bold conclusion: he can keep Kathe only by sharing her with Jim.

EXPLANATION: *Two main clauses that are not connected by a coordinating conjunction require a full stop between them. Here, since the second clause explains the first, the best choice for a full stop is a colon.*

8.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE: The computer, which required thousands of vacuum tubes, were so big that the company had to construct a special building.

ERROR: AGREE

CORRECTED VERSION: The computer, which required thousands of vacuum tubes, was so big that the company had to construct a special building.

EXPLANATION: *The subject of the sentence, "computer," is singular and requires a singular verb, "was." Those thousands of vacuum tubes in the intervening clause do not change this relationship.*

9.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE: Sauteed in a mixture of goose fat and butter, Mme. Reynaud admitted that her potato dish was not for people who needed to lose weight.

ERROR: DM or MM

CORRECTED VERSION: Sauteed in a mixture of goose fat and butter, the potato dish was not, Mme. Reynaud admitted, for people who needed to lose weight.

EXPLANATION: *Since Mme. Reynaud has not been sautéed in goose fat and butter, she may not be the subject of the main clause. In the corrected version, her admission is discreetly interpolated later in the sentence.*

10.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE: Because the sum that the president initially promised was equal to the amount spent every five hours on the war in Iraq.

ERROR: FRAG

CORRECTED VERSION: The sum that the president initially promised was equal to the amount spent every five hours on the war in Iraq.

EXPLANATION: *The original sentence contains two subordinate clauses and a participial phrase but no main clause. The easiest solution is to remove the subordinating conjunction "Because" so as to create a main clause.*