Proofreading Handbook for SUNY Adirondack Students

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SUNY Adirondack

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**1. INTRODUCTION**

This handbook provides instruction and exercises in the most common grammatical mistakes students make in their composition courses. The purpose is to encourage you to develop as a proofreader rather than as a grammarian, so the guide does not cover all the rules, just the most common ones. It is also light on grammatical terms. Still, it is good to know some basic terms.

**verb** - a word that indicates action (**examples:** play, is, am, write)

**noun** - a word that names a person, place, thing, or idea (**examples:** boy, dirt, I, students, papers)

**pronoun** - a word used in place of a noun, usually for convenience (**examples:** he, she, it, they, we, our, who, which, that)

**adjective** - a word that describes a noun or pronoun (**examples:** beautiful, difficult, happy, green, good)

**adverb** - a word that describes a verb, an adjective, or another adverb and that explains when, where, how, or to what extent (**examples:** happily, easily, often, there, well)

**preposition** - a word that is used along with a noun and any descriptor words to explain when, where, how, or to what extent (**examples:** about, behind, down, for, in, of, on, to, up)

**conjunction** - a word used to join other words (**examples:** and, but, or, unless, because, however, therefore)

**interjection** - a word expressing some sort of emotion, usually surprise (**examples:** oh, wow, hey)

**singular** - indicates one (**examples:** boy, dirt, I, student, paper)

**plural** - indicates more than one (**examples:** boys, dirt, we, students, papers)

**clause** - a group of words that has both a noun **and** a verb

**phrase** - a group of words that has both a noun **or** a verb

**independent clause** - a group of words that could stand alone as a sentence

**dependent clause** - a group of words that cannot stand alone as a sentence—it is dependent on something else to be complete

**sentence** - an independent clause by itself or a collection of clauses and phrases that make up a complete thought (**examples:** ***The boy played in the dirt. It is another beautiful fall day. SUNY Adirondack students easily write difficult papers for online classes.*)**

**2. EDITING AND PROOFREADING TIPS**

**EDITING**

**Editing** is making changes to style, wording, sentence structure, as well as correcting errors in grammar, usage, and so forth. Below are some strategies for making editing more effective.

**Make the language more concrete and specific.** Language is concrete when it describes things through the senses: colors, textures, sizes, sounds, smells, actions. Language is specific when it names particular people, places, or things.

**Test your language.** Inspect your word choices to see where they can be improved. Replace vague, dull, or clichéd words with specific, lively words.

**Cut wordiness.** In particular, go after wordy verb phrases (for example, change *make the evaluation* to *evaluate*), redundancies (for example, change *initial start-up* to *start-up*), and strings of prepositional phrases (for example, change *in the bottle on the shelf in the refrigerator* to *in the bottle on the refrigerator shelf*). Be ruthless.

**Check your transitions.** Transitions are the words and phrases that connect one sentence to the next and one paragraph to the next. When transitions are missing, your ideas will seem disconnected. Often, you just need to add transitional words and phrases to the beginnings of sentences or paragraphs.

**Polish the introduction and conclusion.** Edit (or even rewrite) the introduction and conclusion after you have edited the rest of the paper. That ensures that both the introduction and conclusion relate well to the body.

**PROOFREADING**

**Proofreading** is correcting surface errors and typing mistakes and is the last stage of the process.

Most likely you are tired and impatient when you finish a piece of writing. The last third of the document often gets written in a hurry, and the proofreading is even more rushed. You may start with patience, but as you read the last part, you will probably be reading too quickly to spot errors. Try these techniques to help you spot the errors:

**Proofread at the time of day when you are most alert.**

**Try to make a break between writing and editing and proofreading.**

**Proofread the second half of the paper first**. That is where the errors tend to crop up. Then proofread the first half.

**Know your own typical mistakes.** Look over papers you have written in the past, and list the errors you make repeatedly. Not sure what your typical mistakes are? Tutors can find them for you—this is a great reason to visit the CRW.

**Proofread for one type of error at a time.** If “commas after introductory elements” is your most frequent error, go through the paper checking just that one problem. Then proofread again for the next most frequent error.

**Proofread backwards.** Begin at the end and work back through the paper paragraph by paragraph or even line by line. This will force you to look at the surface elements rather than the meaning of the paper.

**Place a ruler or piece of paper under each line as you read it.** This will give your eyes a manageable amount of text to read.

**Proofread once aloud.** This will slow you down so you can hear the difference between what you meant to write and what you actually wrote. It will also help you to hear the rhythm of your sentences.

**Use the search/change command in your word-processing program to look for specific surface errors.** For instance, if you use *to be* verbs too frequently, direct the computer to find *be*, *is*, *are*, *was*, and *were* and replace them, when possible, with more lively verbs.

**3. SENTENCE FRAGMENTS**

Beginning writers often have difficulty determining whether or not a group of words is a sentence, especially when the word group has the appearance of a sentence; that is, it might begin with a capital letter and end with a period and seem to be a proper length. Length, however, has nothing to do with whether a group of words is a sentence. For instance:

**Run!**

This is a sentence. The subject is understood to be “you” and the verb is “run,” so the sentence is complete.

**On the sofa, under the cushion.**

This is a sentence fragment, even though it is quite a bit longer than Run! First, there is no subject; second, there is no complete thought. What is on the sofa? What is the action? Make this a sentence by completing the thought: The dollar bill is on the sofa, under the cushion.

**Because I said so.**

This is the type of construction that students often have trouble defining as a fragment because there is an action taking place (said) and someone doing the action (I). But the word because leads the reader to believe that this group of words should be attached to another group of words, either before or after it. Make it complete by adding that other group of words: Clean your room because I said so.

Fragments can usually be corrected by adding more information.

**Fragment:** **If the dog runs away.** (What if the dog runs away?)

**Sentence:** **If the dog runs away, call the dog pound.**

**Fragment:** **Water sparkling in the moonlight.** (What about it?)

**Sentence:** **The water was sparkling in the moonlight.**

**NOTE:** We use fragments every day in speaking, writing notes, asking questions, writing directions, and making outlines. Writers may use fragments for stylistic effect. You should, however, write complete sentences for standard academic essays.

**EXERCISE #1: Make complete sentences out of each of the fragments below. Correct sentences will vary.**

1. Hoping to graduate at the top of her class.

2. And to talk with his old friends.

3. Like science fiction.

4. Movies such as It’s a Wonderful Life.

5. And to make a quick exit.

6. Where I want to travel.

7. Only three days to go.

8. Because it is part of Disney World.

9. At my house.

10. A little town where everyone knows everyone else.

**See the Answer Key in the back of this booklet for suggested answers.**

**4. RUN-ONS and COMMA SPLICES**

**RUN-ONS**

A run-on occurs when two or more independent clauses are strung together without any punctuation dividing them. Punctuation and possibly also a connector word (for example, and, or, but) is needed to indicate the boundaries of each clause.

**Ordinary People was Judith Guest’s first novel one reviewer called the book “an unpretentious, expert piece of fiction.”**

Notice that this sentence is really two complete sentences (Ordinary People was Judith Guest’s first novel and one reviewer called the book “an unpretentious, expert work of fiction”) whose boundaries need to be defined.

**Ordinary People was Judith Guest’s first novel. One reviewer called the book an “unpretentious, expert piece of fiction.”**

In this case, a period shows where one independent clause ends and the other begins.

**Ordinary People was Judith Guest’s first novel; one reviewer called the book “an unpretentious, expert piece of fiction.”**

In this case, a semicolon acts like a period and shows where one independent clause ends and the other begins; it also indicates that the idea in the first clause connects closely with the idea in the second clause.

**Ordinary People was Judith Guest’s first novel, and one reviewer called the book “an unpretentious, expert piece of fiction.”**

In this case, a comma plus the connector word and connects the two clauses. Other simple connector words (called “coordinating conjunctions”) are for, nor, but, or, yet, and so. An easy way to remember them is with the acronym FANBOYS.

There are other ways to fix run-ons.

**Though Ordinary People was Judith Guest’s first novel, one reviewer called the book “an unpretentious, expert piece of fiction.”**

This revision changes the meaning of the sentence somewhat. The method you choose to fix a run-on is your stylistic decision.

**COMMA SPLICES**

Comma splices are a variation of the same problem that causes run-ons. A comma splice occurs when independent clauses are strung together with just a comma dividing them. Think of commas as grammatical weaklings, not strong enough to divide independent clauses from each other. Fix them the same way you fix run-ons, with periods, semicolons, commas along with a coordinating conjunction, or by rewriting.

**Ordinary People was Judith Guest’s first novel, one reviewer called the book “an unpretentious, expert piece of fiction.”**

Although the independent clauses are divided here, the comma, because it has so many other functions in a sentence, is insufficient to mark boundaries between those clauses. It needs to be “upgraded” to a stronger punctuation mark (period or semicolon) or to be supported by a coordinating conjunction (one of the FANBOYS).

**Exercise #2 (run-ons): Add punctuation and connecting words so the boundaries of each sentence are clear.**

1. The current was swift he could not swim to shore.

2. Frogs swallow only moving objects they will die of hunger rather than strike a motionless insect.

3. The art company sent a collection of American paintings the work of Norman Rockwell was left out.

4. The dean said that the poster was inappropriate for school we put it up anyway.

5. I pounded on the car horn three times this morning. It stopped working.

**See the Answer Key in the back of this booklet for suggested answers.**

**Exercise #3 (comma splices): Correct the punctuation and connecting words so the boundaries of each sentence are clear.**

1. In the 1920s, the Harlem Renaissance was not confined to New York City, Harlem was only one of several African-American urban districts where the arts flourished during this time.

2. One of the leading poets of the Harlem Renaissance was Claude McKay, he arrived in the United States from Jamaica in 1912 at the age of 23.

3. He studied briefly at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, in 1917, he moved to Harlem, he published his first poem there.

4. He said that poetry was his vehicle of protest, he wrote his 1919 poem “If We Must Die” in response to the race riots of that year.

5. The Harlem Renaissance continued through 1945, many writers, including Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and Zora Neale Hurston, launched their literary careers because of the Renaissance.

**See the Answer Key in the back of this booklet for suggested answers.**

**5. PROOFREADING PRACTICE #1: FRAGMENTS, RUN-ONS, COMMA SPLICES**

**The following passage contains fragments, run-ons, and comma splices. Correct those errors.**

Torture is apparently my roommate’s major he enjoys waking me up at the crack of dawn to do an aerobic workout in our room. He tells me I do not have to get up. When he does. I can stay in bed what he does not pay attention to is the noise he is making. Huffing and puffing and counting out loud. I wonder if it is too late to move to another room, he will probably find me anyway. At five o’clock in the morning.

 I have spoken to my R.A. about this guy he tells me no one has been able to live with him. For more than three months. I thought it would be bad living with a smoker. Someone who is always reeking of stale smoke and coughing in the middle of the night. But a hacking smoker is preferable to this fitness freak. Any day.

 I am afraid even to eat in front of him he is liable to start giving me nutritional advice I can live without his advice. I just cannot live without sleep and I cannot sleep. When someone is loudly exercising.

 The only thing worse than having him as a roommate is having to read Ordinary People by Judith Guest, I hate that book and I bet you do, too, now that it has been mentioned repeatedly in this booklet. On proofreading.

**See the Answer Key in the back of this booklet for suggested answers.**

**6. OTHER COMMA ISSUES**

Many students confess to being “comma sprinklers,” putting commas into papers seemingly at random, wherever they look “right.” Although commas do have the function of giving readers a place to breathe, they do conform to rules. If you learn the three basic rules below, you will most likely be able to correct most of your comma mistakes.

**RULE #1: COMMAS TO DIVIDE INDEPENDENT CLAUSES**

An independent clause is a group of words that can stand alone as a sentence.

**The band started to play.**

This is both an independent clause and a sentence.

**When the band started to play.**

This is a dependent clause, dependent on something else to make it complete.

**The band started to play. The crowd grew quiet.**

Here are two independent clauses, properly punctuated. But what if you want to combine them?

**The band started to play the crowd grew quiet.** (Nope—this is a run-on.)

**The band started to play, the crowd grew quiet.** (Nope—this is a comma splice.)

As you have read earlier in this guide, combining independent clauses needs more than a space or a mere comma. To combine independent clauses with a comma, you need to include a coordinating conjunction along with it. There are seven coordinating conjunctions, easy to remember with FANBOYS: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so.

**The corrected sentence: The band started to play, and the crowd grew quiet.**

Note: The comma-coordinating conjunction combo is used only when there are independent clauses on both sides of it. You do not need a comma when the second clause is dependent, as in “I went to the store and bought my weekly supply of chocolate.”

**Exercise #4 (commas to divide independent clauses): Add commas where needed.**

1. Five inches of rain fell in two hours and one inch of ice built up when snow turned to freezing rain.

2. The playwright disliked arguing with directors so she avoided rehearsals.

3. The playwright disliked arguing with directors so avoided rehearsals.

4. My job title sounds impressive but “Administrative Clerk” is just another word for “Office Barista.”

5. City living is exciting but living in small towns is more pleasant and slow-paced so I am planning to move to Niceville.

**See the Answer Key in the back of this booklet for suggested answers.**

**RULE #2: COMMAS AFTER INTRODUCTORY ELEMENTS**

An introductory element is a clause or phrase at the beginning of a sentence that sets up the main independent clause.

**While the storm was raging we read by candlelight.**

The main independent clause is we read by candlelight. The introductory element while the storm was raging sets up the main clause, and a comma between the two helps readers see the division and hear the rhythm.

Other examples showing the correct use of the comma after introductory elements:

**Slowly, Wanda became aware of her predicament.**

**In the end, only you can decide.**

**Although being in the chorus was a handy item to include on his resume, John was a terrible singer**.

Note: Just as you need commas after introductory elements, you may also need commas before concluding elements, as in “John was a terrible singer, although that did not stop him putting ‘chorus’ on his resume.”

**Exercise #5 (commas after introductory elements): Place commas where needed.**

1. Obtained mainly from sugar cane and sugar beets sugar is also made from the sap of maple trees.

2. After Mary returned from holiday she discovered that she had forgotten to tell her boss.

3. Since I am leaving on a jet plane I am not sure when I will be back again.

4. Working as assistant chefs students applied what they had been learning in their courses.

5. Those who can play the piano an hour or more each day.

**See the Answer Key in the back of this booklet for suggested answers.**

**RULE #3: COMMAS AROUND NONESSENTIAL ELEMENTS**

A nonessential element is a clause or phrase inserted into a sentence to add useful, but not grammatically essential, information. Such elements can be removed from the sentence without harming the grammatical integrity of the sentence. For example, the phrase but not grammatically essential is a nonessential element because, although it adds useful information, the sentence is still complete without it.

The trick is to identify what is and is not an essential element. Consider this scenario: Stu has been accused of pilfering creamers from the cafeteria; some people think he is guilty, and some think he is innocent. Which of the two sentences below makes more sense?

**Everyone, who knows Stu, believes he is innocent.**

**Everyone who knows Stu believes he is innocent.**

In the first sentence, commas around who knows Stu means that this clause is not grammatically necessary, but removing it leaves us with just Everyone believes he is innocent. This means us that everyone on campus believes Stu is innocent, whether they know him or not. Thus, the clause who knows Stu is essential and needs to be seamlessly connected to the sentence. No commas should be used around the clause. Think of the commas as marks for cutting out the words (or as parentheses around extra information).

Now consider the sentence below. Are commas needed?

**In the parade will be several children carrying flags and many important officials.**

As it stands, the sentence creates the impression that the children are carrying both flags and officials, a rather onerous task for the children.

**In the parade will be several children, carrying flags, and many important officials.**

In this sentence, the burden has been lifted off the children. With the nonessential element carrying flags removed, the sentence would read In the parade will be several hundred children and many important officials. It is useful to know that the children are carrying flags, but it is not grammatically essential.

Other examples showing the correct use of commas around nonessential elements:

**The governor, who was recently ousted by the voters, and his wife left the state capital.** (Without the commas, it might be difficult to know whether the governor was ousted by both the voters and his wife.)

**We are going to eat, Mother, before we go to school.** (Without the commas, the situation will be cannibalistic.)

**Now, my friends, listen to me.** (Without the commas, the writer might have just finished reading a self-help book on making friends.)

Whether to add commas or not takes some practice; when in doubt, ask yourself the meaning of the sentence both with and without the commas around inserted phrases and clauses. Should it be The play ended happilyorThe play ended, happily? Both are grammatically correct sentences, but they have quite different meanings!

**Exercise #6 (commas around nonessential elements): Place commas where needed.**

1. The barn owl scientists find keeps barns free of rodents.

2. Anna who is in excellent physical condition jogs every day.

3. My parents who are both over age sixty-five took a defensive driving course this year.

4. States should retest drivers who are over the age of sixty-five to check their driving competency.

5. I dedicate this book to my wife Edith for all her help.

**See the Answer Key in the back of this booklet for suggested answers.**

**7. PROOFREADING PRACTICE #2: COMMAS**

**Add commas where needed in the following passage.**

About five thousand young people commit suicide each year according to the National Center for Health Statistics and five hundred thousand others attempt to do so. Researchers divide these adolescents into the attempters and the committers and the evidence indicates that each of these groups has different characteristics. Usually attempters are female and firstborn children very close to their mothers and able to give help but unable to accept help themselves. Their fathers are often physically absent and the girls will if the parents are divorced blame themselves for the split.

 The committers three out of four are usually male often a younger child someone who tends to keep things inside. A loner he may be from any social class. Whether female or male the committers feel hopeless suffering from a kind of tunnel vision. They look into the future and see only darkness.

 Education is our most valuable tool to prevent suicide by young people. Schools should set up programs whether for suicide prevention or for dealing with depression that will provide a way for students to seek help. On the national level we need a presidential task force to get state legislators to recognize the need for education on a state level. Right now states are trying to set up their own task forces but that is ineffective.

**See the Answer Key in the back of this booklet for suggested answers.**

**8. SHIFTS IN TENSE**

Tense refers to the time of the action, and one reason a writer uses verbs is to indicate when actions occurs. Verbs can show present or past action and can show future action with the helping verb will.

**Present:** **Alice paints.**

**Past:** **Alice painted yesterday.**

**Future:** **Alice will paint tomorrow.**

People often switch tenses when they are speaking, but since students have to be more concise and precise in academic writing, these shifts can create difficulties for readers.

**I was always getting in trouble at school. First, I climb on the bus and make the diver’s life a living hell. Then, as the bus pulls up to the school, I imagine how boring the whole day was going to be and started dreaming up schemes.**

The verbs in this passage shift randomly from past to present. In this case, it is better to choose one tense and stick with it.

**I was always getting in trouble at school. First, I climbed on the bus and made the diver’s life a living hell. Then, as the bus pulled up to the school, I imagined how boring the whole day was going to be and started dreaming up schemes.**

The verbs in this passage are all in the past tense. All is right with the world.

**Exercise # 7: Using the tense of the first verb, edit the following passage to match that tense.**

Every morning, Hal cooked us breakfast. He poaches some eggs and fries the bacon to a crisp brown. Next, he fires up the stove and bakes the best muffins in the world. He will allow the bread to rise a half hour, then tossed it in the oven for forty-five minutes. I will jump out of bed every morning to the smell of that bread. I am always up before Hal had a chance to call us when breakfast is ready. We sat around the table each day talking, laughing, and being glad that Hal will be willing to get up so early to make this breakfast. We go to work full, and we always regret lunch time because it was never as good as Hal’s cooking is.

**See the Answer Key in the back of this booklet for suggested answers.**

**9. PROBLEMS WITH SUBJECT/VERB AGREEMENT**

A subject must have a verb that agrees with it, which means that the subject and verb match in number (singular or plural). In short sentences, the agreement is easy to identify.

**Julie sings in the morning.**

The subject is Julie, and the verb sings agrees with the singular. You would not write Julie sing in the morning**.**

**The stray cats sing all night.**

The subject here is cats, and the verb sing agrees with the plural word. You would not write The stray cats sings all night.

Basic subject-verb agreement is usually straight-forward. Problems arise when the subjects are not easily classified as singular or plural.

**PLURAL SUBJECTS THAT LOOK SINGULAR – “AND”**

When the subject has more than one noun and the nouns are joined by and, you have a compound subject.

**Only Susan and Tom know the truth.**

Susan and Tom is the compound subject. To test this, replace Susan and Tom with the pronoun they, which makes Only they know the truth.

**PLURAL SUBJECTS THAT LOOK SINGULAR – “EACH” – “EVERY” – “OR” – “NOR”**

If you use each or every at the beginning of a compound subject, either each or every is the word that must agree with the verb.

**Each pen and pencil is inscribed with the school’s logo.**

Here each agrees with is: **Each is inscribed.**

**Every boy and girl was asked to join the youth choir.**

Here every agrees with was: **Every[one] was asked...**

This gets even trickier with subjects that are connected by or or nor, but it might help to think of the subjects as disconnected by these words. The noun nearer to the verb is the one to use for agreement.

**Greg or his parents are driving to California.**

His parents is after or so that is what agrees with are: **parents are driving**

**His parents or Greg is driving to California.**

Greg is after or so it agrees with is. Sounds strange, but it is correct: **Greg is driving**

**SINGULAR SUBJECTS THAT LOOK PLURAL**

Problems arise when the subject is not close to the verb.

**Everyone who knows Susan and Tom believes they are innocent.**

The subject here is everyone and the main verb is believes. They match in number. But because the subject is so far away from the verb and because Susan and Tom are right before the verb, it is tempting to use believe, as if it were Susan and Tom who believe rather than other people.

Likewise, some subjects that are actually singular are spelled as plurals.

**Jones and Sons is a highly respected local architectural firm.**

Jones and Sons is the name of a single company, so it makes a singular subject.

**NOUNS THAT ARE PART OF PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES**

Nouns part of prepositional phrases are not subjects of sentences. Watch out for phrases such as one of the or a number of; ignore those phrases when checking the subject/verb agreement.

**One of the students was chosen to be on the president’s advisory board.**

Ignore the prepositional phrase of the students to find the subject, One:

**One...was chosen...to be on the president’s advisory board.**

**Exercise #8: Choose the correct verb in each of the following sentences.**

1. Measles **is/are** a contagious childhood disease.

2. Neither the explorer nor the explorer’s companions **was/were** ever seen again.

3. A number of students in the seminar **was/were** aware of the importance of the new scientific data.

4. The actress and her press agent **was/were** on the flight with me.

5. Each of the college gardens **has/have** been planted.

6. No one on the team **support/supports** the coach.

7. None of his textbooks **make/makes** any sense.

8. Graph paper and a pocket calculator **is/are** required.

9. Two forms of identification **is/are** needed.

10. You **is/are** not anything but a hound dog.

**See the Answer Key in the back of this booklet for suggested answers.**

**10. PROBLEMS WITH APOSTROPHES**

Apostrophes (‘) have two functions: to show possession and to mark where letters or words are left out (contractions).

**APOSTROPHES USED TO SHOW POSSESSION**

Sometimes, you need to show that one word “owns” another. Using plurals and possessives is a common problem for students, but it is easy to correct.

**Terry’s cat ran away from home.**

In this case, cat belongs to Terry. You must show this grammatically by putting an apostrophe (**‘**) plus an s after Terry.

**The girl’s toy truck is on the floor.**

Grammatically, truck belongs to girl, so you must put an **apostrophe + s** after girl. You would do this with any singular noun, even if the noun ends with an s, such as the word duchess—the possessive of duchess is duchess’s.

Use an apostrophe by itself when the owner word is plural. Simply take the plural word as it is and add an apostrophe at the end.

**The girls’ toy truck is on the floor.**

This sentence means that there are two or more girls who together own one toy truck.

**The dogs’ leashes were tangled up in a ball.**

This sentence means that there are two or more dogs and that each one has a leash.

Some students have trouble knowing where to place apostrophes with plurals that do not have an s, such as children, women, and men. In these cases, use an **apostrophe + s** to show possession: the children’s toys (not the childrens’ toys), the women’s circle, the men’s square.

**APOSTROPHES USED TO MARK CONTRACTIONS**

**A clever dog knows its/it’s master.**

Should the pronoun be its or it’s? In this sentence, either way is grammatical, but the sentences mean quite different things, depending on which version of it you use. A clever dog knows its master means that the dog recognizes to whom it belongs; the its is possessive. A clever dog knows it’s master means that the dog knows that it is the master of the household; the it’s is a contraction of it is.

So why is the apostrophe not used in the first instance to show possession? This is the one exception to the apostrophe-for-possessive rule. When you use the pronouns its, hers, his, yours, and theirs, you do not use an apostrophe.

However, it seems to be the only one of these pronouns that causes a problem. Writing the dog is her’s or the truck is hi’s would probably look odd to you. (If it does not, it should.)

A handy trick to “fix” this problem is always to spell out contractions in your academic papers. Rather than writing won’t, write will not; rather than isn’t, write is not; and rather than writing it’s, write it is.

**Exercise #9: Add apostrophes where needed.**

1. The womens lunch has been postponed.

2. The professors grades are due today.

3. The mans hats were on the hook.

4. The cats dish is near the stove.

5. I put a nightlight near the childrens room.

6. John Keats poetry is very moving.

7. The childs friends parents came to the talent show.

8. The mens room is the second door on the right.

9. Never judge a book by its cover.

10. My computers memory is insufficient.

**See the Answer Key in the back of this booklet for suggested answers.**

**11. PROOFREADING PRACTICE #3: TENSE, SUBJECT/VERB AGREEMENT, and APOSTROPHES**

**Correct the errors in tense, subject/verb agreement, and apostrophes in the passage below.**

Despite the crime that raged all through the United States and the danger that are so obviously all around us, I am not convinced that capital punishment work. Does this form of punishment really deter crime, or does it simply provide a legal method of revenge?

 I am not saying that time or money need to be spent on murderers rights. I do not care if the condition in prisons are lousy—they are not supposed to be luxury hotels. I do not care about rehabilitation, either. The murderer have inflicted the ultimate loss—loss of life. In turn, the murderer should have had to lose liberty forever.

 I cannot condone murder in any sense of the word. One cannot stands in favor of executing someone and at the same time preach about the horrors of murder. I can understand peoples anger when a friends or family members life have been taken, especially when the killer have a long record of crime. However, the publics desire for revenge is only a refined version of the killers behavior. Its not that we have to be soft on crime, but we needs to show that violence of any type are not the American way.

**See the Answer Key in the back of this booklet for suggested answers.**

**12. PRONOUN PROBLEMS: AGREEMENT, REFERENCE, VOICE, CASE**

**PRONOUN PROBLEMS: AGREEMENT**

Just as subject and verbs must agree in number, so too must nouns and pronouns. Agreement means that the terms match in number: If a noun is singular, then the pronoun that refers back to it should be singular, too; if the noun is plural, the pronoun should be plural, too.

**A student should always do their homework.**

This sentence is incorrect because the noun (student) is singular, but the pronoun (their) is plural. To correct this disagreement, change the noun to plural or the pronoun to singular.

**Students should always do their homework.**

**A student should always do his or her homework.**

As you can imagine from these examples, pronoun disagreement happens when writers try to avoid gender-specific pronouns (he, she, his, her). A problem can also arise when these pronouns are used with nouns that have traditionally been linked to female or male roles, as in the sentence A single parent should advocate for her rights. Single parents are not always female, so the corrected sentence could be Single parents should advocate for their rights.

**EDITING SOLUTIONS**

Below are some accepted ways to avoid gender-specific pronouns:

**1. Use one.** One should always do one’s homework.

Although this will solve the problem, one can make your paper sound overly formal. One would be appropriate for a traditional term paper but not for an informal essay.

**2. Use he or she or his or her.**A student should always do his or her homework.

Again, this will solve the problem, but too much of he or she or his or her will make your sentences cumbersome.

**3. Use they and change the referent from singular to plural.** Students should always do their homework. This is probably the most common solution. The pronoun they will work in every situation except when you need to refer to an individual, such as a hypothetical person.

**4. Use he and she alternatively.** A student should always do her homework.

If you are writing a long work, you can use he in one chapter and she in another; however, alternating he and she in a short paper can be irksome to the reader.

**5. If first-person is acceptable for the assignment, consider using I.** I should always do my homework.

**6. Rewrite the sentence to eliminate pronouns.** A student should always do the assigned homework.

If the sentence can be rewritten, this is usually the best solution. Even if you cannot eliminate all problematic pronouns, reducing their number will allow you to use one or he or she without making your prose sound awkward.

**WHEN NOUNS ARE JOINED BY AND OR *OR/NOR***

When the nouns to which the pronouns refer are joined by and, by or, or by nor, you need to pay special attention to agreement.

**The senator from New York and the senator from Wisconsin explained their new bill.**

The subject is plural (senator...and...senator).

**The senator from New York or the senator from Wisconsin explained his or her new bill.**

The subject is singular (senator...or...senator). Of course, if both senators are female or both male, you can use the appropriate gender-specific pronoun.

**WHEN NOUNS ARE COLLECTIVE**

Some nouns seem as if they are plural when they are actually singular and need singular pronouns. Which sentence in each of the pairs below is correct?

**The committee met to go over their recommendations.**

**Starbucks is offering their regular customers a discount.**

Neither of these sentences is correct because the subjects (committee and Starbucks) are singular, so they need singular pronouns to match. The correct sentences are:

**The committee met to go over its recommendations.**

**Starbucks is offering its regular customers a discount.**

**Exercise #10 (pronoun agreement): Correct the pronouns where needed.**

1. In our office, everyone works at their own pace.

2. A secretary should take her lunch break after her boss has returned from his break.

3. Either the professor or the dean will be giving a talk about their research in Antarctica.

4. Ben & Jerry’s is giving away free ice cream from their new store in Lakeville.

5. I’m a rocket man, burning out his fuse up here alone.

**See the Answer Key in the back of this booklet for suggested answers.**

**PRONOUN PROBLEM: REFERENCE**

In the previous section, you learned that the noun and pronoun must agree in number. Another problem arises when a pronoun does not clearly refer back to a specific noun.

**The car went over the bridge just before it fell into the water.**

To what does the pronoun it refer, to the car or to the bridge? Which of these fell into the water? The easiest way to fix an unclear pronoun is to replace the pronoun with the noun.

**The car went over the bridge just before the car fell into the water.**

**The car went over the bridge just before the bridge fell into the water.**

Both of these sentences are correct but with different meanings.

**In 2013, they shut down government agencies until a budget crisis was resolved.**

Who is they? Replace they with the appropriate noun.

**In 2013, Congress shut down government agencies until a budget crisis was resolved.**

A more complex way to fix the problem is to revise the sentence.

**Brian’s mother encouraged his athleticism, which led to his becoming a professional athlete.**

In this sentence, the pronoun which could refer to the mother’s encouragement or to Brian’s athleticism. Revising the sentence makes it clear.

**Brian’s mother’s encouragement of his athleticism led to his becoming a professional athlete.**

**Exercise #11 (pronoun reference): Revise the sentences to correct the pronoun reference problems. There is more than one way to revise the sentences correctly, and you may need to be creative in how you reword the sentence. The problematic pronoun is underlined.**

1. Mr. Mondloch told Mr. Doherty that he would be in charge of the project.

2. If students are forced to attend class, they will resist learning. This is unacceptable.

3. Having finished every course with an A, Carol knew they would put her on the Dean’s List.

4. After braiding her daughter’s hair, Ann decorated them with ribbons.

5. The cheesecake that Peter spent hours making was in the car when it was stolen.

**See the Answer Key in the back of this booklet for suggested answers.**

**PRONOUN PROBLEM: VOICE**

Another common problem is “shifts in voice,” caused when writers use pronouns inconsistently. Be consistent about the “who” in your writing. Take a look at these examples:

**A person should always look both ways before crossing a busy intersection because you could easily get hurt.**

**I like going downtown because you can do so many things, especially on the weekends.**

**When you get research paper assignments, one should keep a research log.**

Each example above has an unnecessary shift in voice, caused by inconsistent pronouns. Corrected, the sentences are:

**A person should always look both ways before crossing a busy intersection because he or she could easily get hurt.**

**I like going downtown because I can do so many things, especially on the weekends.**

**When one gets research paper assignments, one should keep a research log.**

**WHO VS. THAT**

Use who when referring to a person, and use that when referring to an animal or object.

**A specialist is a person who has expertise in a particular subject.** (NOT a specialist is a person that...)

**Exercise #12 (pronoun problems: voice): Correct each sentence so the voice is consistent.**

1. After I saw my Visa bill, I wondered whether you can ever get out of debt.

2. A man has to do what a man has to do. Sometimes, that means they have to defend themselves.

3. When you have to work full-time, I have a hard time being a full-time student.

4. It is too bad that you have to fend for yourself all the time. I would like someone to look out for me once in a while.

5. I hate makeup, but you have to wear it on stage.

**See the Answer Key in the back of this booklet for suggested answers.**

**PRONOUN PROBLEM: CASE**

Case is the grammatical function of a word in a sentence. There are many grammatical cases, but in English, you need to worry about just three:  the **nominative** case (the subject of a sentence), the **objective** case (the direct or indirect recipient of the action of a sentence), and the **possessive** case (the apostrophe + s that shows ownership). Because pronouns change spellings in more obvious ways than nouns, pronouns cause the most proofreading trouble. For instance, English has I (nominative case) and me (objective case) and mine (possessive case).

**PRONOUNS ALONE and PRONOUNS IN COMBINATIONS**

It is easy to decide what pronoun to use when you are using them alone rather than in combinations.

**Mary greeted me.**

There is no problem determining that me (instead of I) is needed at the end of the sentence. Mary is the subject of the sentence and me is the receipient of the action (greeting), so me, the direct object of Mary’s greeting, is correct.

It is when pronouns are used in combination that it is easy to get confused about which pronoun form to use.

**Mary greeted her and me.**

If you try each pronoun separately, you will see that this sentence is indeed correct: Mary greeted her. Mary greeted me. Both her and me are objects of the action.

**Mary greeted her and I.**

This sentence is incorrect because, if you take it apart, you have Mary greeted her and Mary greeted I. The pronoun I is nominative case and so must always have a subject function.

Another incorrect use is when people use the wrong forms of pronouns in the subject. In the sentence I greeted Mary, the subject is I. No problem with that, but what happens when the subject has two pronouns?

**Me and Cindy went dancing.**

If you take the sentence apart, you get Me went dancing and Cindy went dancing. Ouch. Not only can you hear the problem, you now know the linguistic reason why it is a problem: The pronoun me is objective case and so cannot be used as the subject.

**PRONOUNS IN COMPARISONS**

When making comparisons using as or than, make the pronoun go along with the verb, even if the verb is not stated.

**You sing better than I.**

This is correct because the understood verb after I is sing: You sing better than I sing. The second sing is dropped because it sounds redundant.

**You sing better than me.**

This is incorrect, as adding the verb sing after me would make this awkward sentence: You sing better than me sing.

**I can’t run as fast as he.** This is correct because the understood verb after he is runs: I can’t run as fast as he runs.

**I can’t run as fast as him.** This is incorrect for the same reason: I can’t run as fast as him runs.

Of course, it is not always that easy to determine the correct pronoun. Should it be my husband likes golf better than me or my husband likes golf better than I? When in doubt, add the words that are not stated in order to figure out the meaning.

**My husband likes golf better than [he likes] me.**

**My husband likes golf better than I [like golf].**

Hmmmm....Both are correct, but with quite different meanings. Isn’t grammar fun?

**Exercise #13 (pronoun case): Correct the pronouns in these sentences as necessary.**

1. Me and Judy found the money.

2. Mr. Dithers makes more money than me.

3. The guidance counselor gave career advice to she and I.

4. Her and me skipped class today since there was not anything important on the syllabus.

5. During the trial, the accused man repeatedly denied that the kidnapper was him.

**See the Answer Key in the back of this booklet for suggested answers.**

**13. PROOFREADING PRACTICE #4: PRONOUN USE**

**Overlooking the generally bad writing of the following passage, just correct the pronoun errors. You may need to be creative in how you correct or rewrite the passage.**

No matter what bans are put on assault weapons, they would not keep deadly machine gun-type weapons from the hands of potential criminals, yet they would still get them. All they would need to do is ask, and when you ask, you receive. Thus, criminals would get them but law-abiding people would not. You could not protect yourself from them. A ban would also keep them from hunters, but what hunter would use them? What assault weapon would not blow away the animals? No hunter would use them because they usually use it for food. During our research, me and my research partner talked to some about them. I asked them if they thought it was a good idea, even with all its restrictions. One gun owner said that it would not work, but another gun owner said that gun control in general is a good idea. I agree with him. It would not meet its designed purpose, so we should not support any legislation proposing one. There needs to be more policing, not policies, in place. They would merely hurt regular, law-abiding citizens. Me and the local hunting club will be creating our own counter-proposal for any ban that is proposed by state legislators, which will solve the problem.

**See the Answer Key in the back of this booklet for suggested answers.**

**14. LACK OF PARALLELISM**

Parallelism means that the parts of something are structured similarly so that the whole is more easily comprehended. Think of words and phrases in a series as being like roof joists: Roof joists need to be parallel to make the house hold together.

An obvious use of parallelism is in the résumé. When writers list their job duties on résumés, they use the same grammatical structure for each item, as in supervised employees, trained new employees, and maintained company records. Each of these job duties is a phrase that starts with an active verb in past tense, describing a past job. Writers use parallelism to make the reader’s task easier—when the parts of a sentence, essay, or other document are structurally aligned, the reader can read more quickly and can see how the parts relate to each other.

Consider this unparallel sentence:

**Children who study music also learn confidence, disciplined, and they are creative.**

The three phrases—1) learn confidence, 2) disciplined, and 3) they are creative—do not match structurally. To correct this, chose a structure and use it consistently for each phrase.

**Children who study music also learn confidence, discipline, and creativity.** (All phrases are now single nouns.)

**Children who study music also learn confidence and become disciplined and creative.** (The first phrase is kept as a verb phrase, and the second two items are combined into a second verb phrase.)

When you use conjunctions that come in pairs, such as either...or, not only...but also, or both...and, make sure that the parts of the sentence following each conjunction match in structure.

**Not parallel: SUNY Adirondack both has scholarships for traditional students and returning adult students.**

The problem here: The word both appears earlier than necessary in the sentence and the word for, which would link with both, is missing.

**Parallel sentence:** **SUNY Adirondack has scholarships both for traditional students and for returning adult students.**

**Not parallel:** **Frank not only wanted to move out of his small hometown but also live in the Northeast.**

The problem here is that the phrases after each conjunction (not only...but also) do not match structurally; words are missing in the second phrases.

**Parallel sentence: Frank not only wanted to move out of his small hometown but also wanted to live in the Northeast.**

**Exercise #14 (parallelism): Correct the errors in parallelism.**

1. Jen told me that she had bought a new rock-climbing harness and of her desire to climb Mt. Rushmore.

2. Parents can get involved in their children’s education by going to parent-teacher meetings, reading to children, and also take children to museums.

3. Sam wanted to drive to the wine country or at least Ithaca.

4. Class assignments included reading the textbook, small-groups, and papers.

5. Arriving at the campground during a thunderstorm, the family found it safer to remain in the car than setting up the tent.

6. Our study showed that left-handed students had difficulty using conventional classroom desks and buying special desks should be done immediately.

7. Police dogs are used for finding lost children, tracking criminals, and the detection of bombs and illegal drugs.

8. When asked about her painting process, Alice said that she preferred collaborating with others rather than to work alone in a studio.

9. Ian would like to study robotics engineering and also have the opportunity to study abroad.

10. Although he was dedicated to his career, Riley also recognized that having fun was important and the necessity of cultivating a rich social life.

**See the Answer Key in the back of this booklet for suggested answers.**

**15. PASSIVE VOICE**

When you use forms of the verb to be (such as is, are, was, were), you are using passive voice.

**There was a kicking interaction between Bill and Jim.**

**Mistakes were made.**

These classic examples illustrate the main problem with passive voice—not knowing who is doing the action. Is Bill kicking Jim or Jim kicking Bill? Who made the mistakes?

Another problem with passive voice is that it makes sentences longer than necessary. Although some disciplines expect or prefer passive voice, using active verbs creates livelier, more concise, and more precise prose. Consider the following wordy sentence:

**One of the main arguments of the governor is that SUNY community colleges should be able to be funded entirely through taxpayers and tuition.**

In this sentence, the writer has used 24 words to say what could be said in 12 words. To edit this sentence, first locate the passive verbs (is, should be able, and to be), then locate words that could be used as verbs (argument and funded). Finally, rewrite the sentence to use those verbs.

**The governor argues that taxpayers and tuition should fund SUNY community colleges.**

If to be verbs are thirty percent or more of the verbs in your essay, you are probably overusing passive voice. When possible and appropriate, switch to be verbs to active verbs.

Although not technically “passive voice,” the words seem, feel, appear, and look are also overused and lead to wordy or imprecise sentences. As with to be, try to find an appropriate active verb to replace these words.

**Exercise #15: In the first five sentences, reorder the words so that the verb can be used as an active verb. In the second five sentences, rewrite the sentence to condense it and use active voice.**

1. Huge pine trees were uprooted by the storm.

2. I was given a scholarship by the National Potato Council.

3. Swimmers at the beach were told by the lifeguard to watch out for sharks.

4. The students were given permission by the college to organize next year’s Earth Day celebration.

5. A new logo was chosen by the company.

6. John F. Kennedy was killed by a bullet that was fired by Lee Harvey Oswald who was hiding alongside the motorcade route that John F. Kennedy was in.

7. In society today and at this point in time, it is interesting to note that the majority of crimes are committed by teenagers wearing gorilla suits.

8. There are many examples of irony in the story “The Story of an Hour,” a story that is about a woman being told by her sister that her husband has been killed.

9. It is funny, I find, to be able to be given an award when one is the only person who was nominated.

10. I was in Vermont when it was hit by Hurricane Irene in 2011 and was shocked by the devastation.

**See the Answer Key in the back of this booklet for suggested answers.**

**16. PROOFREADING PRACTICE #5: PARALLELISM & PASSIVE VOICE**

**Rewrite the passage to make it parallel and active.**

As dogs became tamed and were domesticated by humans over many thousands of years, they were evolved into hundreds of breeds that were designed for particular tasks, such as pulling sleds and also to guard sheep. Over time, there was a decreased need for many breeds. For example, as humans were evolved from hunter-gatherers into farming, it was no longer necessary for hunting dogs to be owned by them. Later, as farming societies were industrialized, there was not only a disappearance of herd animals, but fewer herding dogs such as sheepdogs. However, by this time, dogs were part of humans’ lives, such as companionship, so breeding was continued. In society today, most dogs are kept by their owners simply as companions, but some dogs still do the work they were bred for, such as following a scent, guard dogs for homes, or to lead the blind.

**See the Answer Key in the back of this booklet for suggested answers.**

**17. APPENDIX A: PUNCTUATION**

Below is a list of punctuation marks. A discussion of each mark follows.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  . period |  ! exclamation point |  ? question mark |
|  , comma |  ; semicolon |  : colon |
|  - hyphen |  — dash |  . . . ellipses |
|  ‘ apostrophe |  “ quotation mark |  ( ) parentheses |
|  [ ] brackets |  / forward slash |  \ back slash |

**THE PERIOD or FULL STOP (.)**

Use a period at the end of every complete sentence.

**Violence as a way of achieving racial justice is both impractical and immoral.** *―Martin Luther King, Jr., “Nonviolent Resistance”*

Use a period after certain abbreviations.

**Oh, he told Uncle Rondo I didn’t learn to read till I was eight years old and he didn’t see how in the world I ever got the mail put up at the P.O., much less read it all....** *―Eudora Welty, “Why I Live at the P.O.”*

**THE EXCLAMATION POINT (!)**

Use an exclamation point to show surprise or strong feeling.

**“You get out of my eyes before I smack you down!” my father bellowed in disgust, then turned over in bed.***―Richard Wright,* Black Boy

**THE QUESTION MARK (?)**

Use a question mark at the end of a direct question.

**“What are men to rocks and mountains?”** *―Elizabeth Bennet in Jane Austen’s* Pride and Prejudice

**THE COMMA (,)**

Use a comma to separate items in a series.

**All those Towns and Dales, all those Villages, all those Forests and Parks and Lands. Stonestown, Hillsdale. Valley Fair, Mayfair, Northgate, Southgate, Eastgate, Westgate, Gulfgate. They are toy garden cities in which no one lives but everyone consumes . . . .** *―Joan Didion, “On the Mall”*

**EDIBLE, *adj.* Good to eat, and wholesome to digest, as a worm to a toad, a toad to a snake, a snake to a pig, a pig to a man, and a man to a worm.** *―Ambrose Bierce,* The Devil’s Dictionary

Use a comma to separate two independent clauses that are joined by a coordinating conjunction: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so.

**We’re trained to feel embarrassed if we’re praised, but if we see a criticism coming at us from miles down the road, we rush to acknowledge it.***―Barbara Ehrenreich, “What I’ve Learned from Men”*

Use a comma after introductory elements.

**In Algonquin Provincial Park in Ontario, thousands of people howl with the wolves in the early autumn. Whether or not it is a high point for the wolves, it certainly is for the people.** *―Edward Hoagland, “Howling Back at the Wolves”*

Use a comma around nonessential elements.

**The world froze, congealed, in that moment. Jane could no longer calculate the interval before the front doorbell would ring and some competent long-faced figure would appear, some Friend of Widows and Orphans, who would inform her, officially, that Pete was dead.** *―Tom Wolfe,* The Right Stuff

Use a comma to set off direct quotations.

**“She gets her dog food,” Caro argued, but Neal said, “Suppose she didn’t? Suppose someday we all disappeared and she had to fend for herself?”** *―Alice Munro, “Gravel”*

**THE SEMI-COLON (;)**

Use a semi-colon to connect two independent clauses that are closely related or to connect two independent clauses that are connected with an adverbial conjunction (some examples: however, therefore, as a result, on the other hand).

**“A lady’s imagination is very rapid; it jumps from admiration to love, from love to matrimony in a moment.”** *―Jane Austen,* Pride and Prejudice

Use a semi-colon to separate groups of items in a series when the groups themselves include commas.

**Mr. Weston was a man of unexceptionable character, easy fortune, suitable age, and pleasant manners; and there was some satisfaction in considering with what self-denying, generous friendship she had always wished and promoted the match; but it was a black morning’s work for her.** *―Jane Austen,* Emma

**THE COLON (:)**

The colon is an end mark, as are the period, exclamation point, and question mark. It may be used only at the end of a complete sentence. Use a colon to introduce a list, an explanation, a summary, or a lengthy quotation.

**Men are the worriers: It is hard for them to learn what they must learn: how you have a journey to take and very likely, for a while, will not return.** *―Phyllis McGinley, “First Lesson”*

**Our society is as paradoxical as a Puritan congregation: We stand together, alone.** —*Richard Rodriguez, “Does America Still Exist?”*

**Powell describes his grandfather as follows: “He was a deep-tobacco-colored man, five feet, seven inches tall, and, at fifty, still had a hint of a strut in his walk.”** *―quote from Gregory Powell, “Good Fathers Are Not Extinct”*

**THE HYPHEN  or EN DASH (-)**

Use a hyphen to connect two or more words that are usually separate: *brother-in-law, passers-by, full-time*. Think of the hyphen as “temporary glue.”

**DAY, *n.* A period of twenty-four hours, mostly misspent.***―Ambrose Bierce,* The Devil’s Dictionary

**In walks these three girls in nothing but bathing suits . . . . The one that caught my eye first was the one in the plaid green two-piece . . . . I stood there with my hand on a box of HiHo crackers trying to remember if I rang it up or not. I ring it up again and the customer starts giving me hell. She’s one of these cash-register-watchers . . . .***―John Updike, “A & P”*

**. . . they all three of them went up the cat-and-dog-food-breakfast-cereal-macaroni-rice-raisins-seasonings-spreads-spaghetti-soft drinks-crackers-and-cookies aisle.***―John Updike, “A & P”*

Use a hyphen to separate words at the end of a line, if necessary. Separate words between syllables, and check the word in a dictionary to see where syllable breaks are.

**THE DASH or EM DASH (*―*)**

Use a dash to indicate an abrupt break in speech or a shift in thought. Word-processing programs will usually convert two hyphens into a dash as you type.

**“I’m sorry—it’s impossible—” The duty officer could hardly get the words out because he was so busy gulping back sobs.** *―Tom Wolfe,* The Right Stuff

Use a pair of dashes to set off certain interrupting material, often for emphasis.

**After we worked cautiously back and forth on the ground for an hour, the instructor took our class up a chair lift*―*he sat with me, since he could see how I felt about this*―*and guided us down the bunny slope.** *―Susan Allen Toth, “Sure, You Can Learn to Ski”*

**ELLIPSES (. . .)**

Use ellipses to indicate omitted material such as language removed from quoted material.

**In walks these three girls in nothing but bathing suits . . . . The one that caught my eye first was the one in the plaid green two-piece . . . . I stood there with my hand on a box of HiHo crackers trying to remember if I rang it up or not. I ring it up again and the customer starts giving me hell. She’s one of these cash-register-watchers . . . .***―John Updike, “A & P”* (Ellipses used here are used by the author of this guide to truncate the quote.)

Use ellipses*―*sparingly and creatively*―*to indicate hesitation or cogitation.

**There were only twenty men in the squadron, and soon nine or ten had been accounted for . . . by the fluttering reports of the death angels.** *―Tom Wolfe,* The Right Stuff (Ellipses used here are part of Wolfe’s own sentence.)

**THE APOSTROPHE (‘)**

Use the apostrophe to show ownership.

**Since Sophie’s apartment windows faced theirs from across the air shaft, she became the official watchman for the block....***―Gloria Naylor,* The Women of Brewster Place

Use the apostrophe to form a contraction or to indicate where letters have been left out for style.

**Someone left the cake out in the rain. I don’t think that I can take it ‘cause it took so long to bake it, and I’ll never have that recipe again.** *―Donna Summer, “MacArthur Park”*

**QUOTATION MARKS (“ “)**

Use quotation marks to enclose direct quotations.

**“She gets her dog food,” Caro argued, but Neal said, “Suppose she didn’t? Suppose someday we all disappeared and she had to fend for herself?”** *―Alice Munro, “Gravel”*

Use single quotation marks to enclose quotations within quotations.

**“It was the same night I met Celestino Fabia, ‘just a Filipino farmer’ as he called himself, who had a farm about thirty miles east of Kalamazoo.”** *―Bienvenido Santos, “The Scent of Apples”*

Use quotation marks to enclose titles of articles, short stories, poems, and song titles. (Italicize titles of books and magazines—underline these titles if using handwriting.)

**Sororities were a joke to her, and so was politics—though she liked to play “The Four Insurgent Generals” on the phonograph, and sometimes also the “Internationale,” very loud, if there was a guest she thought she could make nervous.** *―Alice Munro, “The Bear Came over the Mountain”*

Use quotation marks to indicate irony or sarcasm.

**I had by all objective accounts a “normal” and “happy” family situation, and yet I was almost thirty years old before I could talk to my family on the telephone without crying after I had hung up.** *―Joan Didion, “On Going Home”*

**PARENTHESES (( ))**

Use parentheses to enclose interrupting material that clarifies, supplements, or illustrates.

**We ate our supper (cold biscuits, bacon, and blackberry jam) and discussed tomorrow.***―Truman Capote, “A Christmas Memory”*

**People are not, for example, terribly anxious to be equal (equal, after all, to what and to whom?) but they love the idea of being superior.***―James Baldwin,* The Fire Next Time

**BRACKETS ([ ])**

Use brackets to enclose material that you insert into a direct quotation when you need to clarify the quoted text, when you need to change a letter in the quote to upper- or lower-case, or when you need to insert a comment into the quote. Brackets are often used to indicate that a misspelling in the original quote (using the Latin word *sic*, meaning *so, thus*).

**“[Blitzee the dog] gets her dog food,” Caro argued, but Neal said, “Suppose she didn’t? Suppose someday we all disappeared and she had to fend for herself?”** *―Alice Munro, “Gravel”*

**Alice Munro wrote of the character that [s]ororities were a joke to her.**

**Ordinary People...are so used to be dazled [sic] with Riches, that they pay as much Deference to...a Man of an Estate, as of a Man of Learning.** *―Joseph Addison, Issue #112 of* The Spectator

Use brackets to replace parentheses within parentheses.

**Orwell’s *Animal Farm* is an example of “anti-utopian” fiction. (Other examples include Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We* [In fact, Orwell got this idea for *1984* after reading *We*]).**

**FORWARD SLASH (/)**

Use the forward slash to separate lines of poetry or to separate paired terms.

**In his famous haiku, Mizuta Masahide asks us to consider the positive side to tragedy: “Barn’s burnt down *―* / now / I can see the moon.”**

**BACK SLASH (\)**

Use the back slash only in computing.

**18. APPENDIX B: CAPITALIZATION**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **DO** | **DON’T** |
| Capitalize months, days of the week…**January, Wednesday** | …but not seasons.**autumn, winter, fall, spring**  |
| Capitalize names of languages…**Italian, English, German** | …but not school subjects other than languages, unless they are the formal names of courses.**mathematics, history, science, Math 109, History 104, Science 111**  |
| Capitalize proper adjectives denotingrace or language…**Swiss, Lapp, Eskimo** | …but not a common noun modified by a proper adjective.**German shepherd, Vienna bread**  |
| Capitalize high school, college, or university when used as a part of a proper name…**Lane High School, Podunk University** | …but not the names of high school classes or high school, college, or university used as a common noun.**sophomore, junior, college**  |
| Capitalize titles before a name…**Dean Smith, President Ellis, Doctor Duncan** | …but not occupations or names of offices.**the dean, the president, our doctor**  |
| Capitalize father, mother, uncle, aunt, etc. when used in place of the person’s name…**tell Dad; no, Mother; where’s Pop?** | …but not when the word is used as a common noun.**my dad, her mother, Emily’s aunt**  |
| Capitalize street names, building names, geographical names and directions, and events when used as part of a proper name…**Elm Street, Grand Boulevard, Palace Theater, Hudson River, the South, World War II**  | …but not when used as common nouns.**on the corner of Elm and Oak streets, the Palace and Strand theaters, the river, south, the world wars**  |
| Capitalize words in titles…***Pride and Prejudice*, “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?”** | …but not words that are prepositions, articles, and conjunctions, unless those words are the first words of titles or subtitles.***On the Beach*, “A Hunger Artist”**  |
| Capitalize words in historical documents, events, and periods…**Magna Carta, World War II, Declaration of Independence**  | …but not the articles used at the beginning of such names.**the Declaration of Independence, the Civil War** |
| Capitalize the names of holidays.**the Fourth of July, Veteran’s Day**  |   |
| Capitalize the formal names of deities…**God, Jehovah, Muhammad, Buddha, Thor** | but not when deities are used as common nouns.**Norse gods, Greek goddess** |

**19. APPENDIX C: EASILY MISTAKEN WORDS**

**A/AN/AND**

1. A is used before a word beginning with a consonant or a consonant sound. **Examples: a** dog, **a** cat, **a** house, **a** uniform

2. An is used before a word beginning with a vowel or a silent h. **Examples:** **an** airplane, **an** eagle, **an** orange, **an** hour

3. And joins words or ideas together. **Examples:** John **and** Roberta play baseball on Sundays. I like apples **and** oranges. They are good students, **and** they know it.

**ALREADY/ALL READY**

1. Already means at this time or before. **Examples:** He had **already** left by the time we arrived. I **already** know how to drive, so I do not need lessons.

2. All ready means everything is ready. **Examples:** the children are **all ready** to leave for camp. The dinner is not **all ready** yet.

**BUY/BY**

1. Buy means purchase. **Example:** I want to **buy** a new kayak.

2. By means next to, near, according to, etc. **Examples:** I walked **by** my old apartment. **By** the lake is my favorite place to read. Did you read the new book **by** Ruth Ozeki?

**ITS/IT’S**

1. Its is the possessive form of it. **Examples:** The dog gnawed at **its** bone. The scorpion’s sting is in **its** tail.

2. It’s is a contraction of it is or it has. Spelling out contractions will solve the problem. **Examples:** **It’s** raining. **It’s** been a long day. **It is** raining. **It has** been a long day.

**LOSE/LOOSE**

1. Lose means misplace or leave behind accidentally. **Example:** Did you **lose** your homework?

2. Loose means ill-fitting or too large. **Example:** That shirt is loose around the collar.

**THERE/THEIR/THEY’RE**

1. There indicates a place or forms part of the subject. **Examples:** My car is over **there**. **There** is a lot of noise in here.

2. Their and theirs shows possession. **Examples:** **Their** cat is missing. The red house is **theirs**.

3. They’re is a contraction of they are. Spelling out contractions will solve the problem. **Example:** **They’re** at the beach. **They are** at the beach.

**THROUGH/THOUGH/THOUGHT**

1. Through means in one side and out the other, or done with. **Examples:** The train sped **through** the tunnel. Are you **through** yet?

2. Though means although or as if. **Examples: Though** it is somewhat damp, the weather in England is pleasant. I feel as **though** I have lived my life before.

3. Thought is both a verb (the past tense of think) or a noun (an idea). **Examples:** I **thought** I had won the lottery. Now there’s an interesting **thought**!

**TO/TOO/TWO**

1a. To indicates a direction toward a destination. **Examples:** I am going **to** the movies. She went **to** SUNY Adirondack last year.

1b. When it accompanies a verb, to forms an infinitive. **Examples:** I want **to swim** in the Olympics. She wanted **to go** to SUNY Adirondack this year.

2a. Too means also or in addition. **Example:** She wanted to go to SUNY Adirondack this year, **too**.

2b. Too can also mean exceedingly or very. **Example:** He is **too** passive to play football.

3. Two is the number 2. **Example:** I always read **two** books at once.

**USE/USED TO**

1. **Use** means to employ or make use of. **Examples:** He **uses** Wikipedia for his research paper sources. I **use** a feather pen to write letters. (Past tense: He **used** Wikipedia.... and I **used** a feather pen....)

2. **Used to** means accustomed to or in the habit of. **Examples:** He **used to** walk to school. They **used to** get good grades.

**WEATHER/WHETHER**

1. Weather refers to atmospheric conditions. **Example:** The **weather** is very hot today.

2. Whether implies a question. **Example:** I am not sure **whether** or not I should go.

**WHERE/WERE/WE’RE**

1. Where indicates a place or location. **Examples:** **Where** are you going? Paris is **where** I want to move.

2. Were is the past tense of the verb are. **Example:** The boys **were** late for the party.

3. We’re is a contraction of we are. Spelling out contractions will solve the problem. **Examples:** **We’re** too tired to play football. If **we’re** late for the party, the food will be gone. We **are too** tired to play football. If **we are** late for the party, the food will be gone.

**WHOSE/WHO’S**

1. Whose shows possession. **Example:** **Whose** book is that?

2. Who’s is a contraction of who is or who has. Spelling out contractions will solve the problem. **Example:** **Who’s** at the door? **Who is** at the door?

**YOUR/YOU’RE**

1. Your shows possession. **Example:** Is that **your** car?

2. You’re is a contraction of you are. Spelling out contractions will solve the problem. **Example:** **You’re** going to have to be more careful, or **you’re** going to hurt yourself. **You are** going to have to be more careful, or **you are** going to hurt yourself.

**20. ANWERS TO EXERCISES – Corrections are underlined.**

**Exercise #1 (fragments) - Responses will vary. Below are suggested answers.**

1. Hoping to graduate at the top of her class, Mary studied every day.

2. Mark returned to his hometown to attend his high school reunion and to talk with his old friends.

3. My life is like science fiction.

4. Movies such as It’s a Wonderful Life present a sentimental image of small-town America.

5. Stephanie sat near the door to catch the breeze and to make a quick exit.

6. Where I want to travel is not on any map.

7. There are only three days to go.

8. Because it is part of Disney World, Space Mountain is a popular attraction.

9. The party will be at my house.

10. A little town where everyone knows everyone else can drive you crazy.

**Exercise #2 (run-ons) - Other correct answers are possible by rewriting the sentences.**

1. The current was swift. He could not swim to shore.

The current was swift; he could not swim to shore.

The current was swift, so he could not swim to shore.

2. Frogs swallow only moving objects. They will die of hunger rather than strike a motionless insect.

Frogs swallow only moving objects; they will die of hunger rather than strike a motionless insect.

Frogs swallow only moving objects, and they will die of hunger rather than strike a motionless insect.

3. The art company sent a collection of American paintings. The work of Norman Rockwell was left out.

The art company sent a collection of American paintings; the work of Norman Rockwell was left out.

The art company sent a collection of American paintings, but the work of Norman Rockwell was left out.

4. The dean said that the poster was inappropriate for school. We put it up anyway.

The dean said that the poster was inappropriate for school; we put it up anyway.

The dean said that the poster was inappropriate for school, but we put it up anyway.

5. I pounded on the car horn three times this morning. It stopped working.

I pounded on the car horn three times this morning; it stopped working.

I pounded on the car horn three times this morning, so it stopped working.

**Exercise #3 (comma splices) - Other correct answers are possible.**

1. In the 1920s, the Harlem Renaissance was not confined to New York City; Harlem was only one of several African-American urban districts where the arts flourished during this time.

2. One of the leading poets of the Harlem Renaissance was Claude McKay. He arrived in the United States from Jamaica in 1912 at the age of 23.

3. He studied briefly at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, and in 1917, he moved to Harlem, where he published his first poem.

4. He said that poetry was his vehicle of protest, and he wrote his 1919 poem “If We Must Die” in response to the race riots of that year.

5.The Harlem Renaissance continued through 1945, and many writers, including Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and Zora Neale Hurston, launched their literary careers because of it.

**Exercise #4 (commas to divide independent clauses)**

1. Five inches of rain fell in two hours, and one inch of ice built up when snow turned to freezing rain.

2. The playwright disliked arguing with directors, so she avoided rehearsals.

3. Correct as is.

4. My job title sounds impressive, but “Administrative Clerk” is just another word for “Office Barista.”

5. City living is exciting, but living in small towns is more pleasant and slow-paced, so I am planning to move to Niceville.

**Exercise #5 (commas after introductory elements)**

1. Obtained mainly from sugar cane and sugar beets, sugar is also made from the sap of maple trees.

2. After Mary returned from holiday, she discovered that she had forgotten to tell her boss.

3. Since I am leaving on a jet plane, I am not sure when I will be back again.

4. Working as assistant chefs, students applied what they had been learning in their courses.

5. Those who can, play the piano an hour or more each day.

**Exercise #6 (commas around nonessential elements)**

1. The barn owl, scientists find, keeps barns free of rodents.

2. Anna, who is in excellent physical condition, jogs every day.

3. My parents, who are both over age sixty-five, took a defensive driving course this year.

4. Correct as is.

5. I dedicate this book to my wife, Edith, for all her help. (However, if the writer is a polygamist, the commas would not be used because “Edith” would be essential information as the phrase “Edith” distinguishes which wife.)

**Exercise #7 (shifts in tense)**

Every morning, Hal cooked us breakfast. He poached some eggs and fried the bacon to a crisp brown. Next, he fired up the stove and baked the best muffins in the world. He allowed the bread to rise a half hour, then tossed it in the oven for forty-five minutes. I jumped out of bed every morning to the smell of that bread. I was always up before Hal had a chance to call us when breakfast was ready. We sat around the table each day talking, laughing, and being glad that Hal was willing to get up so early to make this breakfast. We went to work full, and we always regretted lunch time because it was never as good as Hal’s cooking was.

**Exercise #8 (subject-verb agreement)**

1. Measles is a contagious childhood disease.

2. Neither the explorer nor the explorer’s companions was ever seen again.

3. A number of students in the seminar was aware of the importance of the new scientific data.

4. The actress and her press agent were on the flight with me.

5. Each of the college gardens has been planted.

6. No one on the team supports the coach.

7. None of his textbooks makes any sense.

8. Graph paper and a pocket calculator are required.

9. Two forms of identification are needed.

10. You are not anything but a hound dog.

**Exercise #9 (apostrophes)**

1. The women’s lunch has been postponed.

2. The professors’ grades are due today.

3. The man’s hats were on the hook.

4. The cat’s dish is near the stove.

5. I put a nightlight near the children’s room.

6. John Keats’s poetry is very moving.

7. The child’s friend’s parents came to the talent show.

8. The men’s room is the second door on the right.

9. Correct as is.

10. My computer’s memory is insufficient.

**Exercise #10 (pronoun agreement) - Suggested answers. Other correct answers are possible.**

1. One should always look both ways before crossing a busy intersection because one could get hurt.

2. In our office, everyone works at his or her own pace.

3. Secretaries should take their lunch breaks after their bosses have returned from their breaks.

4. Every plant and animal has its own ecological niche.

5. One’s home is one’s castle.

6. Either the professor or the dean will be giving a talk about his [or her] research in Antarctica.

7. One of a lawyer’s responsibilities is to represent clients ethically.

8. Ben & Jerry’s is giving away free ice cream from its new store in Lakeville.

9. Ben Franklin believed that anyone could achieve success as long as one lived a virtuous life and worked hard.

10. I’m an astronaut, burning out my fuse up here alone.

**Exercise #11 (pronoun reference): Answers will vary. Suggested answers are below.**

1. Hurricanes are unpredictable, and Hurricane Rita destroyed many homes along the coast. Hurricanes’ unpredictability is why I decided not to move to the coast.

2. Mr. Mondloch put Mr. Doherty in charge of the project.

3. The poem, originally published in 1945, has been published in a new book.

4. The new job’s workload, worn office furniture, and poor lighting were manageable, once I got used to them.

5. If students are forced to attend class, they will resist learning. Compulsory attendance is unacceptable.

6. My husband paints houses, but house painting is a poorly paid profession.

7. Expecting a job as CEO right out of college is silly.

8. Having finished every course with an A, Carol knew she would be on the Dean’s List.

9. After braiding her daughter’s hair, Ann decorated the braids with ribbons.

10. The cheesecake that Peter spent hours making was in the car when the car was stolen.

**Exercise #12 (pronoun problems: voice) - Some sentences can be corrected in other ways.**

1. After I saw my Visa bill, I wondered whether I could ever get out of debt.

2. A man has to do what a man has to do. Sometimes, that means he has to defend himself.

3. When I have to work full-time, I  have a hard time being a full-time student.

4. It is too bad that I have to fend for myself all the time. I would like someone to look out for me once in a while.

5. I hate makeup, but one has to wear it on stage.

**Exercise #13 (pronoun case)**

1. I and Judy found the money.

2. Mom gave the money to Judy and me.

3. Mr. Dithers makes more money than I.

4. Either Harvey or he is making a movie with Francis Ford Coppola.

5. They and she are on the board of directors.

6. Give the reward to Bob and me.

7. The guidance counselor gave career advice to her and me.

8. He and I are not on speaking terms.

9. She and I skipped class today since there was not anything important on the syllabus.

10. During the trial, the accused man repeatedly denied that the kidnapper was he.

**Exercise #14 (parallelism) Answers may vary somewhat.**

1. Jen told me that she had bought a new rock-climbing harness and that she wanted to climb Mt. Rushmore.

2. Parents can get involved in their children’s education by going to parent-teacher meetings, by reading to children, and by taking children to museums.

3. Sam wanted to drive to the wine country or at least to Ithaca.

4. Class assignments included reading the textbook, participating in small-groups, and writing papers.

5. Arriving at the campground during a thunderstorm, the family found it safer to remain in the car than to set up the tent.

6. Our study showed that left-handed students had difficulty using conventional classroom desks and argued that buying special desks should be done immediately.

7. Police dogs are used for finding lost children, tracking criminals, and detecting bombs and illegal drugs.

8. When asked about her painting process, Alice said that she preferred collaborating with others rather than working alone in a studio.

9. Ian would like to study robotics engineering and to study abroad.

10. Although he was dedicated to his career, Riley also recognized that having fun was important as was cultivating a rich social life.

**Exercise 15 (passive voice) - Answers for questions 6-10 will vary.**

1. The storm uprooted huge pine trees.

2. The National Potato Council gave me a scholarship.

3. The lifeguard told swimmers at the beach to watch out for sharks.

4. The college gave permission to the students to organize next year’s Earth Day celebration.

5. The company chose a new logo.

6. From his hiding place, Lee Harvey Oswald assassinated John F. Kennedy as the president’s motorcade passed by.

7. Teenagers wearing gorilla suits commit the majority of crimes.

8. “The Story of an Hour,” about a woman told that her husband has been killed, has many examples of irony.

9. As the only person nominated, I find it funny to get an award.

10. The devastation that Hurricane Irene wreaked on Vermont in 2011 shocked me.

**21. ANWERS TO PROOFREADING PRACTICES – Corrections are underlined.**

**Proofreading Practice #1 (fragments, run-ons, comma splices)**

Torture is apparently my roommate’s major. He enjoys waking me up at the crack of dawn to do an aerobic workout in our room. He tells me I do not have to get up when he does, that I can stay in bed. What he does not pay attention to is the noise he is making: huffing and puffing and counting out loud. I wonder if it is too late to move to another room. He will probably find me anyway at five o’clock in the morning.

 I have spoken to my R.A. about this guy. He tells me no one has been able to live with him for more than three months. I thought it would be bad living with a smoker, someone who is always reeking of stale smoke and coughing in the middle of the night, but a hacking smoker is preferable to this fitness freak any day.

 I am afraid even to eat in front of him as he is liable to start giving me nutritional advice. I can live without his advice. I just cannot live without sleep, and I cannot sleep when someone is loudly exercising.

 The only thing worse than having him as a roommate is having to read Ordinary People by Judith Guest. I hate that book, and I bet you do, too, now that it has been mentioned repeatedly in this booklet on proofreading.

**Proofreading Practice #2 (commas)**

About five thousand young people commit suicide each year, according to the National Center for Health Statistics, and five hundred thousand others attempt to do so. Researchers divide these adolescents into the attempters and the committers, and the evidence indicates that each of these groups has different characteristics. Usually, attempters are female and firstborn children, very close to their mothers and able to give help but unable to accept help themselves. Their fathers are often physically absent, and the girls will, if the parents are divorced, blame themselves for the split.

 The committers, three out of four, are usually male, often a younger child, someone who tends to keep things inside. A loner, he may be from any social class. Whether female or male, the committers feel hopeless, suffering from a kind of tunnel vision. They look into the future and see only darkness.

 Education is our most valuable tool to prevent suicide by young people. Schools should set up programs, whether for suicide prevention or for dealing with depression, that will provide a way for students to seek help. On the national level, we need a presidential task force to get state legislators to recognize the need for education on a state level. Right now, states are trying to set up their own task forces, but that is ineffective.

**Proofreading Practice #3 (tense, subject/verb agreement, and apostrophes)**

Despite the crime that rages all through the United States and the danger that is so obviously all around us, I am not convinced that capital punishment works. Does this form of punishment really deter crime, or does it simply provide a legal method of revenge?

 I am not saying that time or money needs to be spent on murderers’ rights. I do not care if the condition in prisons is lousy—they are not supposed to be luxury hotels. I do not care about rehabilitation, either. The murderer has inflicted the ultimate loss—loss of life. In turn, the murderer should have to lose liberty forever.

 I cannot condone murder in any sense of the word. One cannot stand in favor of executing someone and at the same time preach about the horrors of murder. I can understand people’s anger when a friend’s or family member’s life has been taken, especially when the killer has a long record of crime. However, the public’s desire for revenge is only a refined version of the killer’s behavior. It is not that we have to be soft on crime, but we need to show that violence of any type is not the American way.

**Proofreading Practice #4: (pronouns)**

**Below are suggested corrections. Your corrected passage may differ.**

No matter what bans are put on assault weapons, bans would not keep deadly machine gun-type weapons from the hands of potential criminals, yet criminals would still get assault weapons. As the adage goes, all they would need to do is ask, and when they ask, they will receive. Thus, criminals would get assault weapons but law-abiding people would not. Law-abiding people could not protect themselves from being shot by criminals with assault weapons. A ban would also keep assault weapons from hunters, but what hunter would use them? What assault weapon would not blow away the animals? No hunter would use assault weapons because hunters usually use the animals they kill for food. During our research, my research partner and I talked to some gun owners about assault weapon bans. We asked them if they thought a ban was a good idea, even with all its restrictions. One gun owner said that a ban would not work, but another gun owner said that gun control in general is a good idea. I agree with the first gun owner. A ban would not meet its designed purpose, so we should not support any legislation proposing a ban . More policing, not policies, should be in place. An assault weapon ban would merely hurt regular, law-abiding citizens. The local hunting club and I will be creating our own counter-proposal for any ban that is proposed by state legislators, and we think our proposal will solve the problem.

**Proofreading Practice #5 (parallelism and passive voice) - Suggested answer. Other answers are possible.**

As dogs became domesticated over many thousands of years, they evolved into hundreds of breeds designed for particular tasks, such as pulling sleds and guarding sheep. Over time, the need for many breeds decreased. For example, as humans evolved from hunter-gatherers into farmers, they no longer needed hunting dogs. As farming societies became industrial societies, not only did herd animals disappear, but herding dogs did, too. However, dogs had become part of humans’ lives, so breeding continued. Today, most people keep dogs as companions, but some dogs still do the work they were bred for, such as following a scent, guarding homes, or leading the blind.