Crimes Against the English Language

— First Edition —

Jill Meryl Levy
Firebelle Productions

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Crimes Against the English Language

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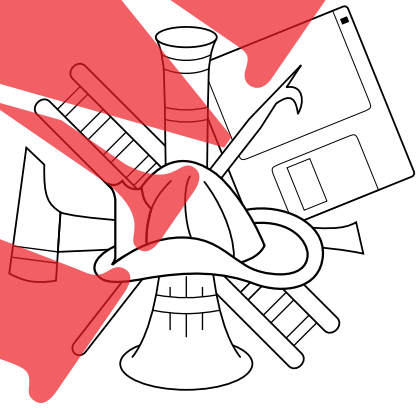

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To My Readers

What if writing is not one of your strengths?

If writing is not one of your strengths, take heart. You don't have to be an English major to improve your writing. I certainly wasn't. I had little interest in English classes in school. However, I enjoyed reading and loved writing (and frequently rewriting) about three boys who captured my heart when I was twelve. I didn't know it then, but those three boys would set in motion a chain of events that led to my becoming an author, publisher, and volunteer firefighter. One is now the love of my life, three decades later. It's to him that this book is dedicated.

When I look back at some of the things I wrote early in my career, I find a number of errors, many of which are addressed in this book. I cringe to think about the thousands of brochures, booklets, and newsletters distributed with those errors. Fortunately, my writing is much better today, largely because of all the research I did towards my first writing book—*Take Command of Your Writing*.

The ability to become a better writer is within you, just as it was within me. What's the secret? First, one has to make the choice that this is important. Perhaps you want to communicate more effectively. Maybe your job requires a lot of writing or greater accuracy and clarity in your documentation. Or possibly you've realized that other people perceive those who write well as being more intelligent, more professional, and more credible than those who don't write well. Regardless of your incentive, believing that this is important is the first step.

Second, decide which areas of your writing need improvement, and start working on those areas. Remember the Chinese proverb: The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. You won't become a great writer overnight. However, you can make significant improvements overnight. If you're someone who frequently confuses the words *it's* and *its*, for example, turn to "The Case of the Confusing Contractions" in this book, read through the information on how to distinguish between contractions and possessive pronouns, and complete the worksheet on the following page. You'll quickly master the difference between this word pair and three other word pairs that frequently confuse writers. Something that simple is a big step forward.

What about topics not covered in this book?

Crimes Against the English Language was written to highlight some of the common errors people make. It was not intended to be a comprehensive grammar reference book the way *Take Command of Your Writing* was. Future editions will contain more information based partly on feedback from my readers. The book will also be revised as I and others find the handful of mistakes that may have been missed, despite several passes at proofreading. (I've long since accepted that while I'm a perfectionist, I'm not perfect. I do make mistakes.)

Meanwhile, I highly recommend that you invest in a good dictionary and several good grammar reference books. There are many good books available, some of which are more thorough than others and some of which will appeal to you more than others. Choose what appeals to you—books you are likely to use instead of leave sitting on the shelf gathering dust.

If you have comments on this book or suggestions for future editions, you may contact me by email at jill@firebelleproductions.com.

Jill Meryl Levy

Dedication

To Robert Charles Innis,
who sparked my imagination in junior high school
and inspired in me a passion for writing.
Having Charlie back in my life today
is the greatest blessing I could ask for.

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The Case of the Fragmented Sentence

Common Violations

A *sentence fragment* is part of a sentence that is incorrectly punctuated as if it were a complete sentence. Common violations include:

- Sentences missing a subject.
- Sentences missing a verb.
- Phrases or clauses separated from the rest of the sentence.

The following paragraph is an example of the type of writing sometimes seen in incident reports where the author assumes that the subject doesn't need to be identified in the narrative because he, she, or it is already indicated elsewhere in the report.

> Arrived on scene at 1537 hours. Found the structure fully involved. Took a line through the front door. Began searching for victims. Ordered next-in unit to lay a supply line.

Crime Prevention

Make sure all your sentences contain both a subject and a verb. Watch out for incomplete verbs, such as the word *choking* in the second fragment example below. *Choking* is a verb form, but one that requires a helping verb, such as *was*, to be complete.

Fragment: Arrived on scene at 1537 hours.
Revised: *Engine 10* arrived on scene at 1537 hours.

Fragment: The baby choking.
Revised: The baby *was* choking.

The more common errors involve allowing a phrase or clause to become separated from the rest of the sentence. Often the best fix is to pull the sentence back together. However, you can often create separate independent sentences with just minor editing.

Fragment: David crouched behind the desk. *Hoping the intruder wouldn't notice him in the darkness.*
Revised: David crouched behind the desk, hoping the intruder wouldn't notice him in the darkness.
Revised: David crouched behind the desk. *He* hoped the intruder wouldn't notice him in the darkness.

Fragments are sometimes used intentionally, particularly in works of fiction where they add dramatic effect. However, most experts agree that intentional fragments should be used sparingly and should not be used in formal writing.

> Nancy gasped as she opened the lid. Here at last was the clue she'd been looking for. *The clue that would solve the case.*

Sentence fragments are different from *elliptical (condensed) expressions* used to represent a complete sentence. Elliptical expressions are acceptable.

Elliptical expression: *No problem.* We are ready to proceed when you are.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Fragmented Sentence

Instructions: Correct any sentence fragments below. More than one solution may be possible. If the sentence is correct as is, write OK next to it. (Check your answers on page 158.)

Example: Arrived on scene at 1537 hours.

Engine 10 arrived on scene at 1537 hours.

1. The patient is complaining that her eye irritated.

2. Rescuers finally pulled the last survivor from the wreckage. Five days after the magnitude 7.1 earthquake destroyed the building.

3. Was there another earthquake this morning? What time? How strong?

4. I'll testify against him. If you give me police protection.

5. We had to delay searching the house. Because we didn't have a search warrant.

6. Will I work for you on Christmas? Not a chance.

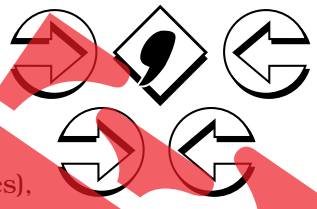
7. Cuffed the suspect and read him his rights.

8. The highway patrol should be able to open the off-ramp in about fifteen minutes. After paramedics and firefighters have cleared the scene.

9. Can you describe the pain? Is it sharp? Dull? Crushing? On a scale of 1 to 10, how bad is it?

10. Is it true? That the residents were manufacturing methamphetamine in their basement.

The Case of the Sentence Splices



Common Violations

When writers incorrectly join two independent clauses (complete sentences), they create one of two common violations:

- In a *run-on sentence*, two sentences are joined without any punctuation whatsoever.
- In a *comma splice*, the sentences are joined by a comma alone, rather than by a comma and a coordinating conjunction (such as *and*, *but*, or *or*).

Both run-ons and comma splices are confusing because there are no clues to let readers know that a new sentence has started. The following are examples:

Run-On Sentence: The smoke was thick they had trouble advancing.
Comma Splice: The smoke was thick, they had trouble advancing.

Crime Prevention

Writers can use several options to avoid run-ons and comma splices. The best option will vary depending on the content of the sentences and the relation between them.

One fix is to write two separate sentences. However, this is not necessarily the best choice with short sentences, like those below, because the result can be choppy.

The smoke was thick. They had trouble advancing.

If two sentences are closely related, they can be joined with a comma and a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, or, nor, for, so,* or *yet*).

The smoke was thick, *so* they had trouble advancing.

We know who killed her, *but* we can't prove it.

Two closely related sentences of equal importance can be joined with a semicolon. This option sometimes works better with a transitional expression that helps show the relation between the two sentences, such as in the second example below.

We know who killed her; we just can't prove it.

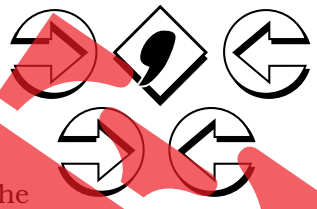
The smoke was thick; *as a result*, they had trouble advancing.

Often the most effective way to fix a run-on sentence or a comma splice is to make one clause subordinate to the other. Subordination generally shows the relation between ideas more clearly than any other option does. Subordination can be achieved either by joining two sentences with a subordinating conjunction (such as *after, although, because, before, unless,* and *whereas*) or by converting one sentence to a phrase that modifies the main idea.

They had trouble advancing *because* the smoke was thick.

The smoke was thick, *making it difficult for them to advance*.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Sentence Splices



Instructions: For each of the sentences below, put "CS" next to the sentence if it contains a comma splice, "RO" next to it if it contains a run-on, or "OK" next to it if it is punctuated properly. If the sentence contains a comma splice or run-on, identify how you might correct it. More than one solution may be possible. (Check your answers on page 158.)

Example: CS The smoke was thick, they had trouble advancing.

The smoke was thick, so they had trouble advancing.

1. _____ Products are sometimes pumped through pipelines in cycles this can drastically change the hazards involved in a pipeline accident.

2. _____ Because the building had a common attic, the fire spread quickly to adjoining occupancies.

3. _____ The driver's chest was bruised from hitting the steering wheel, she was also complaining of chest pain.

4. _____ The roof collapsed without warning, and one firefighter was killed.

5. _____ We pulled everyone back just in time the tank ruptured, sending debris at least half a mile in every direction.

6. _____ All the occupants got out safely, however, there were some tense moments when we thought one person was still trapped inside.

7. _____ When multiple agencies respond to a hazmat incident, however, which agency has incident command authority depends on where the incident is located.

8. _____ One officer was wounded in the scuffle his injuries are described as minor.

9. _____ We found a partial fingerprint on the knife, it did not match our suspect.

10. _____ Disoriented from smoke inhalation, the occupant was unable to find his way out of the house we found him unconscious on the floor just ten feet from the door.

The Case of the Questioning Mark

Common Violations

This case looks at three common violations associated with questions:

- Using periods to punctuate *direct* questions.
- Using question marks to punctuate *indirect* questions.
- Using question marks to punctuate *implied* questions—statements reflecting confusion or curiosity about something.

Crime Prevention

A *direct question*—one that asks a question directly—is punctuated with a question mark.

Wrong: How many people are injured.
Right: How many people are injured?

An *indirect question*—one that merely reports what has been asked—is punctuated with a period.

Wrong: The dispatcher asked how many people were injured?
Right: The dispatcher asked how many people were injured.

Use periods, not question marks, to punctuate *statements* reflecting confusion or curiosity. These are not questions, either direct or indirect.

Wrong: I'm confused? I thought you were a paid firefighter, not a volunteer?
Right: I'm confused. I thought you were a paid firefighter, not a volunteer.

Wrong: I'm curious about what it takes to become a firefighter?
Right: I'm curious about what it takes to become a firefighter.

You can, of course, turn them into direct questions as illustrated below. Then it would be appropriate to use question marks.

Right: I'm confused. Are you a paid firefighter or a volunteer?

Right: What does it take to become a firefighter?

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Questioning Mark

Instructions: In each set of sentences below, put a check mark next to the one that is punctuated properly. (Check your answers on page 158.)

Example:
_✔_ Is anyone injured?
_____ The dispatcher asked if anyone was injured?

1. a. ____ Which hospital was the patient transported to?
   b. ____ Which hospital was the patient transported to.

2. a. ____ I'm wondering why they delayed calling 911.
   b. ____ I'm wondering why they delayed calling 911?

3. a. ____ Did the reporting party indicate whether the tanker is leaking.
   b. ____ Did the reporting party indicate whether the tanker is leaking?

4. a. ____ I asked the witness if she could describe the suspect.
   b. ____ I asked the witness if she could describe the suspect?

5. a. ____ Tell me about your ride-along experience.
   b. ____ Tell me about your ride-along experience?

6. a. ____ It's not a question of if? It's a question of when?
   b. ____ It's not a question of if. It's a question of when.

7. a. ____ Is anyone complaining of respiratory distress?
   b. ____ Please let me know if anyone is complaining of respiratory distress?

8. a. ____ Did you feel the earthquake last night.
   b. ____ I'm curious if anyone else felt the earthquake last night.

9. a. ____ I'm confused as to how the fire started?
   b. ____ Do you have any idea how the fire started?

10. a. ____ Do you need a Level 2 hazmat response.
    b. ____ The battalion chief is asking if you want a Level 2 hazmat response.

11. a. ____ How quickly can we get a search warrant?
    b. ____ I'd like to know how quickly we can get a search warrant?

12. a. ____ When will the doctor call to explain the test results.
    b. ____ I'd like to question the doctor about my test results.

The Case of the Careless Colon

Common Violations

Colons are often used to introduce a list. However, writers sometimes incorrectly use a colon in a horizontal list when the list is preceded by an incomplete sentence.

Wrong: The fire triangle consists of: fuel, heat, and oxygen.

Crime Prevention

Use a colon only if a grammatically complete sentence precedes a horizontal list.

Colon: The fire triangle consists of three elements: fuel, heat, and oxygen.
No Colon: The fire triangle consists of fuel, heat, and oxygen.

When items are presented in a *vertical* list, you have several options. If the statement preceding the list is a *complete* sentence, you can punctuate it with either a period or a colon. If the introductory statement is an *incomplete* sentence, many experts recommend punctuating it with a colon (as in the example below) to signal the reader that something else is coming. However, some experts disagree; they insist on using either no punctuation at all or a dash (—) instead. Since several options are acceptable, use what you think will be clearest for the reader.

Our orders were to:

- Search the room for hot spots,
- Preserve any evidence that might prove useful, and
- Secure the scene until the investigator arrived.

Colons may also be used to introduce quotations and questions that follow a grammatically complete statement. An incomplete sentence should be followed by a comma instead.

Colon: McGruff says this: "Take a bite out of crime."
Comma: McGruff says, "Take a bite out of crime."

Colon: Here's my question: What's the best place to do my paramedic internship?
Comma: My question is, What's the best place to do my paramedic internship?

One exception to the rule prohibiting using a colon following an incomplete sentence is when introducing a long or formal quotation, such as in a regulation or policy manual.

29 CFR 1910.146 (Permit Required Confined Spaces), Section (k)(1)(iii) states: "Each member of the rescue service shall practice making permit space rescues at least once every 12 months...."

Colons are also commonly used to introduce notes, warnings, and announcements.

Caution: Eye protection needed beyond this point.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Careless Colon

Instructions: Identify each of the following sentences as being correctly (C) punctuated or incorrectly (I) punctuated. (Check your answers on page 158.)

Examples:

I The fire triangle consists of: fuel, heat, and oxygen.

C The fire triangle consists of three elements: fuel, heat, and oxygen.

1. _____ We recommend smoke detectors for one reason: they save lives.
2. _____ The two most important factors are: flash point and flammable range.
3. _____ Fingerprint patterns are divided into three primary categories: loops, arches, and whorls.
4. _____ My childhood heroes were: Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys.
5. _____ Burns are categorized as superficial, partial-thickness, or full-thickness.
6. _____ As a citizen, you can stop CPR if: another trained rescuer takes over, EMS personnel arrive and take over, you are exhausted and unable to continue, or the scene becomes unsafe.
7. _____ The spine is divided into five regions: cervical, thoracic, lumbar, sacrum, and coccyx.
8. _____ The three most significant factors in wildland fire behavior are: fuel, weather, and topography.
9. _____ When planning your response to a hazmat incident, consider the potential outcome should you choose: nonintervention, defensive actions, or offensive actions.
10. _____ The wildland firefighting acronym LACES stands for: lookouts, awareness, communications, escape routes, and safety zones.
11. _____ Which is the preferred choice when faced with an armed suspect: cover or concealment?
12. _____ The suspect had: motive, means, and opportunity.
13. _____ It's one of the first rules of both forcible entry and auto extrication: "Try before you pry."
14. _____ The common nerve agents include: sarin, tabun, soman, and VX.
15. _____ Danger: Do Not Enter.

The Case of the Saucy Semicolon

Common Violations

The semicolon is used to signal a break in thought. It is stronger than a comma, but not as strong as a period. Semicolons are more characteristic of formal or literary writing than they are of ordinary writing, so it's not uncommon for writers to misuse this less familiar mark of punctuation. Common violations include:

- Using a semicolon to join sentences that are not of equal importance.
- Mistakenly using a comma instead of a semicolon.
- Using a semicolon to introduce a list.
- Failing to effectively use semicolons to separate items in a series.

Crime Prevention

Use a semicolon to join two closely related sentences. Although it's certainly not necessary, you can use a semicolon to join two closely related sentences *of equal importance*. Do not use a semicolon if the sentences are not equally important. Instead, punctuate them as two separate sentences, or join them in another manner. (Do not capitalize the first word of the second sentence unless it is the pronoun *I*, a proper noun, or a proper adjective.)

Wrong: The driver thought he eluded our officers; the officers backed off their pursuit to avoid endangering other motorists. *(not equally important)*

Right: The driver thought he eluded our officers; he wasn't counting on the roadblock we had set up at the end of town. *(equally important)*

The semicolon takes the place of a comma and a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, for, or, nor, so,* or *yet*). Using a comma alone creates a comma splice, as shown in the first example below.

Wrong: The incident commander didn't want to take any chances, he ordered a defensive attack and pulled everyone out of the burning warehouse.

Right: The incident commander didn't want to take any chances, *so* he ordered a defensive attack and pulled everyone out of the burning warehouse.

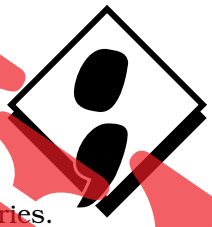
Right: The incident commander didn't want to take any chances; he ordered a defensive attack and pulled everyone out of the burning warehouse.

Joining two sentences with a semicolon and a transitional expression, such as *consequently, furthermore, however, in addition, meanwhile, nevertheless, otherwise,* and *therefore*, often helps show the relation between the sentences better than a semicolon alone. It can also prevent a paragraph from becoming too choppy when there are several short sentences in a row. Be careful not to mistake these transitional expressions for coordinating conjunctions, or you will end up with another comma splice.

Wrong: The accident was not her fault, *however*, she will still be cited for driving without a license.

Right: The accident was not her fault; *however*, she will still be cited for driving without a license.

The Case of the Saucy Semicolon (continued)



Avoid using semicolons to introduce a list. When introducing a list that follows a grammatically *complete* sentence, use a colon not a semicolon.

Wrong: There are three types of blood vessels; arteries, veins, and capillaries.
Right: There are three types of blood vessels: arteries, veins, and capillaries.

Don't use either a semicolon or a colon if an *incomplete* statement precedes the list.

Wrong: The three types of blood vessels are; arteries, veins, and capillaries.
Wrong: The three types of blood vessels are: arteries, veins, and capillaries.
Right: The three types of blood vessels are arteries, veins, and capillaries.

Use semicolons as needed to separate items in a series. Use a semicolon to separate items in a series if any of the items have commas in them. Otherwise, your sentences may be very confusing. Think of the semicolon as sort of a "super comma" when used in this capacity.

Confusing: We're sending three of our instructors to compare classes taught in San Luis Obispo, California, Pueblo, Colorado, and Emittsburg, Maryland.
Clear: We're sending three of our instructors to compare classes taught in San Luis Obispo, California; Pueblo, Colorado; and Emittsburg, Maryland.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Saucy Semicolon

Instructions: Circle any errors in punctuation in the sentences below, and indicate the correct punctuation mark. (More than one option may be acceptable.) If a sentence is correct as is, write OK next to it. (Check your answers on page 158.)

Example: There are three types of blood vessels; arteries, veins, and capillaries.

replace with a colon

1. He thought he could get away with stealing, he didn't realize we were prepared for looters.

2. We know there were witnesses to the shooting, but we can't find anyone who is willing to talk with the police.

3. I don't like to use smoke grenades, however, we may not have much choice.

4. There are two types of trauma: penetrating trauma and blunt trauma.

5. I've gotten input from the National Guard WMD Civil Support Teams in Hayward, California, Aurora, Colorado, and Columbus, Ohio.

6. Explosives contain both an oxidizer and a fuel component in the same formula; therefore, two sides of the fire triangle are already complete.

7. Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction, it is a life-threatening emergency.

8. Assess the adequacy of a patient's breathing by evaluating; rate, rhythm, quality, and depth (tidal volume).

9. Onset of health effects is delayed with most biological agents; the incubation periods can range from several hours to several days.

10. Choking agents quickly cause irritation to the eyes, nose, and throat, respiratory distress, nausea and vomiting, burning of exposed skin, and tightness in the chest.

The Case of the Direct Quotations

Common Violations

This case looks at how to avoid five common violations in punctuating quotations:

- Failing to use quotation marks to punctuate *direct* quotations.
- Using quotation marks to punctuate *indirect* quotations.
- Improperly capitalizing and punctuating divided quotations.
- Improperly punctuating partial quotations.
- Improperly punctuating quotations within quotations.

Crime Prevention

Properly punctuate direct and indirect quotations. Use quotation marks around *direct* quotations—ones that quote the exact words someone has said or written. Do not use quotation marks around *indirect* quotations—ones that merely report someone's words.

Direct: "Lie down on the ground, and put your hands over your head," I ordered.
Indirect: I ordered him to lie down on the ground and put his hands over his head.

Note that commas and periods go inside the closing quotation mark. You'll learn more about where to position other punctuation marks with quotation marks in the next case.

In most cases, when a quotation is introduced by the word *that*, it's an indirect quotation and should be written without quotation marks, as in the second sentence below. The third sentence illustrates something that should be done sparingly. It has the less formal feel of an indirect quotation while putting extra emphasis on the spoken words. Used once in a while for effect, it's acceptable. However, readers may assume that you don't know how to write properly if you write this way too often or if you write this way when the extra emphasis is not warranted.

Direct: The captain said, "We are in grave danger."
Indirect: The captain said that we are in grave danger.
Rare: The captain said that "we are in grave danger."

The words *yes* and *no* are not enclosed in quotation marks unless they are (or will be) the exact words spoken.

You have a right to say no if you believe someone is asking you to do something unsafe.

When I asked if he had been drinking before the accident, he looked away and said "No."

Unspoken thoughts or imagined dialogue has been treated different ways over the years. The current trend is *not* to use quotation marks, as shown below. However, writers will sometimes use quotation marks or italics instead to help readers distinguish the internal dialogue from the exposition around it. The bottom line, as always, must be clarity. Pick a style that seems clearest, then be consistent within the same document.

I can't give up! Hannah told herself as she pushed further into the smoke and heat. I've got to find that baby!

The Case of the Direct Quotations (continued)

Properly capitalize and punctuate divided quotations. If a sentence is divided into two parts by expressions such as *he said* or *she replied*, the second part begins with a lowercase letter unless the word would normally be capitalized (such as the pronoun *I* or a proper name). The first part of the quotation ends with a comma followed by the quotation mark (not the other way around). The interrupting expression is also followed by a comma.

Wrong: "Rick is still alive", the doctor told her, "But he is in serious condition."
Right: "Rick is still alive," the doctor told her, "but he is in serious condition."
But: "Rick is still alive," the doctor told her. "He was very lucky."

Properly punctuate partial quotations. When quoting individual words or phrases from another source, as opposed to quoting the entire text, punctuate the partial quotes with quotation marks around only the exact words being quoted.

Full Quote: "Alex has been despondent since his wife's death," Diane revealed.
Partial Quote: Diane described her brother as "despondent" since his wife's death.

Properly punctuate quotations within quotations. When you have a quotation within a quotation, the outer set of quotation marks is double (" "), while the inner set is single (' ').

"If you park in a spot marked 'Handicapped,' you are going to get a ticket," Kurt warned.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Direct Quotations

Instructions: In each set of sentences below, put a check mark next to the one that is punctuated properly. (Check your answers on page 159.)

Example:
✔ "Put your hands over your head," I ordered.
____ I ordered him to "put his hands over his head."

1. a. ____ "The patient is a 36-year-old female who was beaten by her husband," Tina said.
   b. ____ The patient is a 36-year-old female who was beaten by her husband, Tina said.

2. a. ____ The dispatcher warned us that "the scene was not secure."
   b. ____ The dispatcher warned us that the scene was not secure.

3. a. ____ Jennifer asked, "Which patient should be transported first?"
   b. ____ Jennifer asked which patient should be transported first?

4. a. ____ Our questioned documents examiner said that "the signature is a forgery."
   b. ____ Our questioned documents examiner said that the signature is a forgery.

5. a. ____ "If they survive," Bud said. "It will be a miracle."
   b. ____ "If they survive," Bud said, "it will be a miracle."

6. a. ____ Jason described Dale as "an accident waiting to happen."
   b. ____ Jason described "Dale as an accident waiting to happen."

7. a. ____ I expect Ruthie to say "yes" if we offer her police protection.
   b. ____ I expect Ruthie to say yes if we offer her police protection.

8. a. ____ "If I recall correctly," Pat answered, "Engine 9 was first on scene."
   b. ____ "If I recall correctly," Pat answered, "engine 9 was first on scene."

9. a. ____ Can you give me a report on conditions asked the incident commander.
   b. ____ Can you give me a report on conditions asked the incident commander?
   c. ____ Can you give me a report on conditions? asked the incident commander.
   d. ____ "Can you give me a report on conditions?" asked the incident commander.

10. a. ____ Captain Tracy replied, "We've got a confined space rescue."
    b. ____ Captain Tracy replied "We've got a confined space rescue."
    c. ____ Captain Tracy replied we've got a confined space rescue.

The Case of the Misplaced Quotes

Common Violations

A common violation is for writers to put periods and commas outside a closing quotation mark.

Wrong: "Yes", Sam replied, "we had flames showing on our arrival".

It's also not usual for writers to struggle with determining where to put other punctuation marks in relation to the closing quotation mark.

Crime Prevention

Some punctuation marks always go inside the closing quotation mark. Some always go outside. Others may go inside or outside, depending on their relation to the quote. Keep the following simple chart in mind as we go through the rules.

Location of Various Punctuation Marks in Relation to the Closing Quotation Mark

Always Go Inside	Always Go Outside	May Go Inside or Outside
Periods	Colons	Question Marks
Commas	Semicolons	Exclamation Points
		Dashes
		Parentheses

In the United States, **periods and commas** always go *inside* the closing quotation mark. (The British style is to put the period *outside* when it punctuates the whole sentence and *inside* when it punctuates only the quoted material. The British style also puts the comma *outside* the closing quotation mark. These conventions are sometimes used by lawyers in the United States, but should not be used in ordinary writing.)

"Yes," Sam replied, "we had flames showing on our arrival."

The terms "anhydrous," "glacial," and "fuming" all denote acids in high concentrations.

If a sentence ends with an abbreviation that contains a period, the final period marks both the end of the abbreviation and the end of the sentence. However, if there would normally be a comma at the end of the quoted material, use both the period and the comma.

The coroner replied, "Time of death is estimated to be between midnight and 2:30 a.m."

"The call came in at 7:34 p.m.," the dispatcher confirmed.

The commas normally used to set off quoted matter may be omitted when a very short quotation is woven into the sentence or when a short quotation does not form a complete sentence.

He said "Not yet" and waved the officers back.

His coworkers regarded him as a "ticking time bomb" ever since that day.

The Case of the Misplaced Quotes (continued)

Periods and commas also go inside a *single* quotation mark used to identify a quotation within a quotation.

> Peering through her binoculars, Kelly said, "The bulging drum is labeled 'Organic Peroxide.'"

Note: An apostrophe used to show possession looks the same as a single quotation mark. However, the comma or period always goes after the apostrophe.

> Dan glanced at the license plate of the abandoned vehicle. "It's the Lehtolas'," he said.

Colons and semicolons always go outside the quotation mark.

> The following are commonly cited effects of the street drug known as "ice": paranoia, depression, fatigue, seizures, strokes, and psychosis.

> I said, "Put the gun down"; he refused.

Question marks and exclamation points go inside the quotation marks if they are part of the quoted material. Otherwise, they go outside.

> The battalion chief asked, "Has anyone turned off the electricity?"

> Did you say, "My neck hurts"?

> "I'll never go to prison!" he shouted at the officers.

If both the quoted material and the sentence as a whole call for the same punctuation, put one punctuation mark inside the closing quotation mark.

> Why did you ask the patient, "Is there a history of cancer in your family?" (not *?"?*)

Dashes and parentheses go inside the quotation marks if they are part of the quoted material. Otherwise, they go outside.

> He screamed, "I can't feel my legs. I can't feel my—" *(incomplete or interrupted sentence)*

> If the label says "Danger"— *(sentence broken off after the quoted material)*

> He said, "If the label says 'Danger'—" *(quotation of an interrupted sentence)*

> There are very strict criteria for pronouncing someone "dead on arrival (DOA)" at an accident scene.

> They found traces of cocaine (also known as "crack") in his bloodstream.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Misplaced Quotes

Instructions: In each set of sentences below, put a check mark next to the one that is punctuated properly. (Check your answers on page 159.)

Example:
a. ___ "Yes", Sam replied, "we had flames showing on our arrival".
b. ✔ "Yes," Sam replied, "we had flames showing on our arrival."

1. a. ____ She grabbed my hand and asked, "Am I going to die"?
   b. ____ She grabbed my hand and asked, "Am I going to die?"

2. a. ____ Who said, "The patient is not likely to survive"?
   b. ____ Who said, "The patient is not likely to survive?"

3. a. ____ "Tell me what you heard," the officer said.
   b. ____ "Tell me what you heard", the officer said.

4. a. ____ "Did you see what happened?," the officer asked.
   b. ____ "Did you see what happened?" the officer asked.

5. a. ____ Mail bombs may display markings such as "Personal", "Confidential", or "Private".
   b. ____ Mail bombs may display markings such as "Personal," "Confidential," or "Private."

6. a. ____ "Save my baby!" she shouted.
   b. ____ "Save my baby!," she shouted.
   c. ____ "Save my baby," she shouted!

7. a. ____ "The reporting party said the envelope was marked 'Anthrax'," Mary said.
   b. ____ "The reporting party said the envelope was marked 'Anthrax,'" Mary said.

8. a. ____ The placard says "Non-Flammable Gas," but anhydrous ammonia has a flammable range of 16% to 25%.
   b. ____ The placard says "Non-Flammable Gas", but anhydrous ammonia has a flammable range of 16% to 25%.

9. a. ____ "If only I called 911 sooner—" she said.
   b. ____ "If only I called 911 sooner"— she said.

10. a. ____ The Anthropology Research Facility in Tennessee is affectionately known as the "Body Farm".
    b. ____ The Anthropology Research Facility in Tennessee is affectionately known as the "Body Farm."

The Case of the Two-Clause Comma

Common Violations

If done properly, commas may be used between two sentences (also known as independent clauses). However, a number of violations can result from improper use of commas:

- Using a comma alone instead of a comma and a coordinating conjunction (such as *and, or, but,* or *so*), resulting in what is called a *comma splice*.
- Failing to use a comma and a coordinating conjunction where needed to separate two sentences.
- Putting the comma in the wrong location.
- Putting a comma in the middle of a compound predicate.

Crime Prevention

Two sentences can be joined with a comma and a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, or, nor, for, so,* or *yet*). They cannot be joined by a comma alone. Using only a comma results in what is called a *comma splice*. (Refer to "The Case of the Spliced Sentences" for more information on preventing comma splices.)

Wrong: The caller was unfamiliar with the area, he was unable to give us the exact location of the accident.

Right: The caller was unfamiliar with the area, *so* he was unable to give us the exact location of the accident.

A word that often gets writers into trouble is *however*. *However* is *not* a coordinating conjunction that allows you to join two sentences. It's a transitional expression. Using it as if it were a coordinating conjunction, as in the first example below, creates another comma splice. If you want to join the two sentences *of equal importance*—although nothing says you must—do so with a semicolon. The only time it is appropriate to put commas before and after *however* is when it's used as a *parenthetical element*—a nonessential word that interrupts the flow in the middle of a sentence, as in the third example below.

Wrong: The accident occurred because the driver fell asleep at the wheel, *however*, a median barrier may have prevented him from crossing into oncoming traffic.

Right: The accident occurred because the driver fell asleep at the wheel; *however*, a median barrier may have prevented him from crossing into oncoming traffic.

Right: The accident occurred because the driver fell asleep at the wheel; a median barrier, *however*, may have prevented him from crossing into oncoming traffic.

The comma may be omitted when one or both sentences are short and closely related.

The bomb exploded *but* no one was injured.

Let's see how bad the damage is *and* then we'll decide.

The Case of the Two-Clause Comma (continued)

However, a comma is often needed to prevent misreading. A sentence must be clear *as the reader is reading it*—from left to right—without having to back up and reread something that created confusion the first time. Without commas, the following sentences may be misread to imply that *we never searched the house for the owner* and that I want to *cut either the seat belt or the victim*. The comma provides the pause that would be heard if the sentence were read aloud.

Confusing: We never searched the house *for* the owner told us everyone was out.
Clear: We never searched the house, *for* the owner told us everyone was out.

Confusing: Let's cut the seat belt *or* the victim will have trouble breathing.
Clear: Let's cut the seat belt, *or* the victim will have trouble breathing.

Do not use a comma if there is no complete sentence (subject and predicate) after the conjunction. The following examples contain a *compound predicate*—two predicates sharing the same subject. The text that follows the conjunction *and* cannot stand alone as a complete sentence.

Wrong: Paramedics placed her on the gurney, and loaded her into the ambulance.
Right: Paramedics placed her on the gurney and loaded her into the ambulance.

Some experts say it's permissible to use a comma if the compound predicate expresses contrast, such as when joined with the word *but*. Others disagree. The bottom line is clarity. If the sentence is clear without a comma, you can safely omit it (as in the example below). If it isn't clear or if you're unsure, use a comma. You have a greater obligation to your readers than to the punctuation police.

Paramedics treated her for minor injuries but didn't transport her to the hospital.

The comma almost always goes *before* the coordinating conjunction, not after.

Wrong: We finally subdued the suspect *but*, it took all four of us to do it.
Right: We finally subdued the suspect, *but* it took all four of us to do it.

The comma goes *after* the coordinating conjunction only when it is part of an interrupting expression in a compound sentence. What differentiates the two sentences below is the inclusion or omission of the subject *we* after the second comma.

Comma Before: We won't have time to visit the fire station this week, *but* if it's all right with you, *we* can reschedule for next week.
Comma After: We won't have time to visit the fire station this week *but*, if it's all right with you, can reschedule for next week.

For years it was considered unacceptable to start a sentence with a coordinating conjunction. This is no longer the case. You can occasionally use a coordinating conjunction at the beginning of a sentence either for special emphasis or to provide a smoother transition in a series of sentences. However, make sure there is a logical connection between the sentences, and use this technique in moderation so that it doesn't become a distraction to your readers.

Is there a chance they are still alive under all that rubble? *Or* is this just going to be a body recovery operation?

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Two-Clause Comma

Instructions: Correct the following sentences by inserting missing commas, crossing out inappropriate commas, and providing any other punctuation that may be needed. If a sentence is correct as is, write OK next to it. (Check your answers on page 159.)

Example: We never searched the house for the homeowner told us everyone was out.

1. The fire raged out of control and dozens of homes were damaged or destroyed.

2. Morgan grabbed the nozzle, and proceeded up the stairs.

3. I rescued the wife and the husband carried their children to safety.

4. Ken's friends tried to stop him from driving away but, he wouldn't listen.

5. Leslie completed paramedic training, and is now applying for a job with AMR.

6. Ed insisted he never fired the gun but gunshot residue on his hands told a different story.

7. I finished cataloging the evidence collected and am now finalizing my report.

8. Placards identify the primary hazard, they do not reflect secondary hazards that can also present a significant danger.

9. I'll review the common types of cargo tanks, the hazardous materials they generally transport and how they behave in an emergency and since you have more expertise with rail cars, I'll let you cover rail transportation of hazardous materials.

10. The injuries Cassandra sustained are not serious but the doctor wants to keep her in the hospital overnight for observation.

11. The patient couldn't wiggle his fingers nor could he squeeze my fingers when I asked him to.

12. My recommendation is to let the fire burn for without sufficient foam, we're more likely to spread the burning gasoline.

The Case of the Introductory Comma

Common Violations

Most introductory words, phrases, and clauses should be set off by commas. The comma signals readers that the introductory part is over and the main part of the sentence is about to begin. It also provides a natural pause, as there would be if the sentence were read aloud. Common violations in this section are:

- Failing to use commas after introductory matter where it is standard to use them.
- Failing to use commas where the comma is essential to ensure clarity.
- Using commas after phrases that look like introductory matter but which serve as subject of the sentence instead.

Crime Prevention

Use a comma after the words *yes* or *no* and mild interjections at the beginning of a sentence.

Yes, I checked for a pulse before starting CPR.

Well, what did you expect?

Use a comma after independent comments (e.g., *fortunately, obviously*, and *if necessary*) added to provide insight as to the writer's attitude. Likewise, use a comma after transitional expressions (e.g., *however, generally,* and *for example*) used to help move a reader from one idea to the next.

Fortunately, their injuries were minor.

However, the car was totaled.

Use a comma after most introductory phrases and clauses. It's not necessary for you to know the proper grammatical terms for the different types of phrases or clauses. It *is* necessary, however, to recognize when readers need that signal—that pause—to indicate a break between the introductory matter and the main part of the sentence.

After the fire, all I want is a hot shower and a warm bed.

Considering what the car looked like, it's amazing that anyone survived the crash.

Although I can't prove it, I firmly believe that Victor is the arsonist.

While commas are used to set off most introductory words, phrases, and clauses, there are exceptions and special circumstances. If you don't understand these concepts, you may find yourself either putting commas where they don't belong or omitting them where they're needed.

Watch out for phrases that look like introductory material but which actually serve as the subject of the sentence. Do not use a comma in these situations.

Comma: *Having been arrested twice before*, you should be familiar with the process.
No Comma: *Having been arrested twice before* is nothing to be proud of.

The Case of the Introductory Comma (continued)

Comma: *Knowing that the woman had been shot by her husband*, we staged a block away until police secured the scene.
No Comma: *Knowing that the woman had been shot by her husband* made us wary.

Commas are unnecessary after ordinary introductory adverbs that tell when or how often.

Sometimes we have difficulty determining the origin of the fire.

Last week one of my neighbors was arrested.

You can often omit the comma after a short prepositional phrase. A prepositional phrase is one that starts with a word used to indicate place (e.g., *above, below,* and *inside*), direction (e.g., *up, down,* and *across*), time (e.g., *before, during,* and *after*) or other relationships (e.g., *by* and *with*).

In July we start our new budget year.

By nine o'clock we had already run three EMS calls.

Sometimes, however, the comma is needed to ensure clarity. A sentence must be easily understood *as a person is reading it.* In the following examples, a comma provides just enough of a pause to keep readers from running the words together, creating confusion that requires reading the sentence a second time. An alternate solution is to rewrite the sentence.

Unclear: *After eating* the firefighters felt better. *(Who ate the firefighters?)*
Clear: *After eating*, the firefighters felt better.
Clear: The firefighters felt better after eating.

Unclear: *Inside* the smoke was thick. *(What was inside the smoke?)*
Clear: *Inside*, the smoke was thick.
Clear: The smoke was thick inside.

Do not omit the comma if the prepositional phrase contains any form of a verb.

By backing out now, we have a better chance of reaching the safety zone without having to deploy our fire shelters.

Before we do anything else, I want to photograph the scene.

Omit the comma if the normal word order is inverted.

Inverted Word Order: *From deep within the wreckage* came a faint cry for help.
Normal Word Order: A faint cry for help came from deep within the wreckage.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Introductory Comma

Instructions: Insert commas where appropriate in the sentences below. If the sentence is correct as is, write OK next to it. (Check your answers on page 159.)

Example: Before we do anything else I want to photograph the scene.

1. Knowing that my mother was afraid of hospitals I was reluctant to suggest calling for an ambulance.

2. Nevertheless we need to treat this as a crime scene.

3. In the afternoon I want to go to the gun range.

4. If direct pressure and elevation aren't sufficient to stop the bleeding apply a pressure point.

5. When the wind shifts the homes in this neighborhood will be in danger from the fire.

6. Scattered throughout the apartment were illegal drugs and drug paraphernalia.

7. Separated from the rest of his crew Ryan began to panic.

8. If you can be there a half hour early.

9. Because the caller provided specific details we considered the bomb threat to be real rather than a hoax.

10. If possible I'd like to get a copy of the coroner's report before noon.

11. Until the rapist is caught we recommend that women take extra precautions to protect themselves.

12. Before we leave the captain wants to take one more look at the roof.

The Case of the Nonessential Elements

Common Violations

One of the things writers struggle with most is understanding the relation between commas and essential or nonessential elements. Common violations include:

- Using commas with essential elements.
- Failing to use commas with nonessential elements.
- Inadvertently changing the meaning of the sentence by using or omitting commas.

Crime Prevention

Being able to identify whether an element is essential or nonessential is the key to determining whether you need to use commas.

- A *nonessential element* is one that can be deleted without changing the meaning of the sentence or leaving the sentence structurally incomplete. A nonessential element is set off by commas.
- An *essential element*, on the other hand, cannot be deleted from the sentence. An essential element is *not* set off by commas.

This sounds simple enough, but even the best writers periodically agonize over whether or not commas are needed. So we'll look at several examples and work through two "You Be the Detective" exercises. But when in doubt, you may want to remember this very appropriate quotation by author Claire Kehrwald Cook: *"When you have trouble getting the commas right, chances are you're trying to patch up a poorly structured sentence."* In other words, sometimes it's easier to rewrite the sentence than it is to determine if or where to use commas.

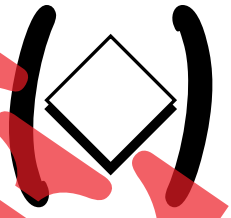
The two sentences below are almost identical. However, in the first one, the italicized text provides helpful information, but it isn't essential to the sentence. It's sufficient to write that Kim has a history of arson. But in the second example, where Kim isn't named, the italicized text is essential to identifying who has a history of arson and essential to providing a structurally complete sentence.

Nonessential: I learned that Kim, *the girl who started the fire*, has a history of arson.
Essential: I learned that *the girl who started the fire* has a history of arson.

To better illustrate the point, let's look at the same sentences punctuated incorrectly. Violations like these are fairly common.

Wrong: I learned that Kim *the girl who started the fire* has a history of arson.
Wrong: I learned that, *the girl who started the fire*, has a history of arson.
Wrong: I learned that *the girl, who started the fire*, has a history of arson.

The Case of the Nonessential Elements (continued)



Another way to determine if text is essential or nonessential is to try separating the sentence into two independent clauses. A sentence containing an essential phrase or clause can't be split, whereas one with a nonessential phrase or clause can.

Essential: The man *who was accused of theft last week* has been released on bail.
Nonessential: Slade, *who was accused of theft last week*, has been released on bail.
Test Version: Slade was accused of theft last week. He has been released on bail.

Here are examples with the text in question positioned at the end of the sentence instead of in the middle. The text is nonessential in the second example because the word *irrationally* identifies how Erica is behaving.

Essential: Erica is behaving *as if she is under the influence of drugs.*
Nonessential: Erica is behaving irrationally, *as if she is under the influence of drugs.*

This next set is similar but perhaps not as obvious. The phrase *after the accident* is essential in the first example because it tells when. But in the second sentence, *last year* tells when, and *after the accident* provides additional but nonessential information.

Essential: Adam began wearing seat belts *after the accident.*
Nonessential: Adam began wearing seat belts last year, *after the accident.*

The examples below contain something called an *appositive*—a noun or noun phrase that defines, explains, or renames another noun before it. An appositive must be set off with commas. An appositive is often introduced by the word *or* or the phrase *that is*. (Note the extra comma after *that is*.)

Wrong: Psychogenic shock *or fainting* is usually not serious.
Right: Psychogenic shock, *or fainting,* is usually not serious.

Wrong: Hypoglycemia *that is low blood sugar* can sometimes be life-threatening.
Right: Hypoglycemia, *that is, low blood sugar*, can sometimes be life-threatening.

Names and titles used as appositives are normally set off by commas. However, the third example below shows an exception with the phrase *my sister Lori* because if it were read aloud, it would be read like one unit, without any intervening pause.

The fire chief, *Benjamin F. Lopes III*, will present the award.

Eric Pearson, *community services officer*, spotted the stolen vehicle.

My sister Lori is teaching CPR next week.

Sometimes other punctuation marks are less confusing than commas. In the following example, does *my captain* refer to Kyle, or were there three people on the line? Parentheses work better than commas if Kyle and my captain are one and the same.

Confusing: Kyle, my captain, and I took the first line through the front door.
Clear: Kyle (my captain) and I took the first line through the front door.

The Case of the Nonessential Elements (continued)

Usually the meaning of the sentence determines whether or not commas are needed. However, sometimes it is the use of commas that determines the meaning of the sentence. See if you can tell the difference between the two sentences below.

Essential: The second patient *who was transported to Valley Medical Center* had extensive third-degree burns.
Nonessential: The second patient, *who was transported to Valley Medical Center,* had extensive third-degree burns.

The first sentence clearly refers to the second of two or more patients transported to Valley Medical Center. The next sentence also refers to the second of two or more patients, but it's not clear where the first one was transported. It may or may not have been to the same facility. In essence, *who was transported to Valley Medical Center* is a parenthetical element—useful but nonessential information that either interrupts the flow of the sentence or has been added as an afterthought. Such elements are called *parenthetical* because they can (and sometimes do) appear in parentheses.

Parenthetical elements can sometimes be positioned in different locations within a sentence. When different options are possible, look at what flows smoothly, what is the clearest, and what provides the emphasis you want.

Beginning: *Particularly during peak traffic hours,* driving Code 3 can be dangerous.
Middle: Driving Code 3, *particularly during peak traffic hours,* can be dangerous.
End: Driving Code 3 can be dangerous, *particularly during peak traffic hours.*

The following sentence contains something called an *absolute phrase*. It's not important that you know the name, but it is important to recognize that it modifies the sentence as a whole and must be set off by a comma.

The critical patients transported, we turned our attention to the walking wounded.

If you are unsure whether an expression is essential or nonessential, read the sentence aloud and listen to your vocal inflection. It will often give away the answer. Pay particular attention to the words *no doubt* as you read the sentences below.

Essential: This fire is *no doubt* the work of an arsonist.
Nonessential: This fire, *no doubt,* is the work of an arsonist.

If an expression is essential, your voice will tend to *rise*, but if it is nonessential, your voice will tend to *drop*. Realistically, the words *no doubt* can be omitted from both sentences above without changing the meaning, so one might consider them nonessential in either case. Yet when they come before the verb *is*, they interrupt the flow of the sentence in a way that doesn't happen when they come after. Herein lies part of the distinction between nonessential and essential.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Nonessential Elements
Part 1: Essential or Nonessential?

Instructions: In each set of sentences below, put a check mark next to the one that is punctuated properly. (Check your answers on page 159.)

Example:
___✔___ I learned that Kim, the girl who started the fire, has a history of arson.
_____ I learned that Kim the girl who started the fire has a history of arson.

1. a. ____ A woman who was pregnant with twins was killed in the accident.
   b. ____ A woman, who was pregnant with twins, was killed in the accident.

2. a. ____ Any students caught carrying weapons will be suspended from school.
   b. ____ Any students, caught carrying weapons, will be suspended from school.

3. a. ____ All candidates male and female were given the same consideration.
   b. ____ All candidates, male and female, were given the same consideration.

4. a. ____ We have special public education programs aimed at older adults who are more vulnerable to fire than younger adults are.
   b. ____ We have special public education programs aimed at older adults, who are more vulnerable to fire than younger adults are.

5. a. ____ The grass fire that we had yesterday was directly behind my house.
   b. ____ The grass fire, that we had yesterday, was directly behind my house.

6. a. ____ Triage or victim sorting helps us prioritize patients based on the severity of their injuries and the likelihood of survival.
   b. ____ Triage, or victim sorting, helps us prioritize patients based on the severity of their injuries and the likelihood of survival.

7. a. ____ The pin that prevents accidental discharge of a fire extinguisher is held in place by a thin plastic strap that will break easily when the pin is twisted or pulled.
   b. ____ The pin that prevents accidental discharge of a fire extinguisher is held in place by a thin plastic strap, that will break easily when the pin is twisted or pulled.

8. a. ____ The body that they found in the desert was a victim of foul play.
   b. ____ The body, that they found in the desert, was a victim of foul play.

9. a. ____ This patient who has only minor injuries can be transported to the hospital by her family.
   b. ____ This patient, who has only minor injuries, can be transported to the hospital by her family.

10. a. ____ I'm feeling queasy as if I'm about to faint.
    b. ____ I'm feeling queasy, as if I'm about to faint.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Nonessential Elements
Part 2: Commas or Not?

Instructions: Insert commas where appropriate in the sentences below. If the sentence is correct as is, write OK next to it. (Check your answers on page 159.)

Example: Psychogenic shock , or fainting , is usually not serious.

1. The explosion occurred at 0810 hours minutes after shift change.

2. The explosion was reported by the firefighters at Loyola Station who were close enough to hear and feel the blast.

3. The explosion that leveled their house was caused by a natural gas leak.

4. The three people who were home at the time miraculously escaped with only minor injuries.

5. The post-incident analysis is scheduled for next Tuesday the first shift of the tour.

6. The July 7, 2005, bombings in London were particularly disturbing to my cousin Sue who lived in London until recently.

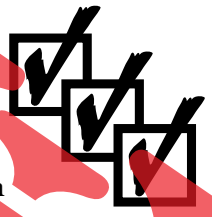
7. The four bombs that shook London were detonated by suicide bombers.

8. Prime Minister Tony Blair who was in Scotland for the G8 Summit when the bombings occurred hurried home to London.

9. The gun that was used in the murder was never found.

10. Blister agents also known as mustard agents or vesicants are extremely toxic chemicals that produce characteristic blisters on exposed skin.

The Case of the Cited Examples



Common Violations

Writers sometimes incorrectly punctuate sentences that cite examples. Common violations include:

- Failing to use a comma when expressions such as *for example* introduce or end a sentence.
- Using commas with essential examples.
- Failing to use commas to set off nonessential examples.
- Using commas when other punctuation marks would provide greater clarity.

Crime Prevention

Use a comma to set aside *for example* or similar expressions used to introduce or end a sentence.

> *For example*, if you see an orange placard, you should know right away that you are dealing with explosives.
>
> *Particularly on calls like this*, you need to be extra careful.
>
> The training officer said we need to spend more time on our basic skills. He thinks we struggle too much with ladders, *for example*.

Commas are needed to set off *nonessential* examples, but they must not be used around *essential* examples. What's the difference? *Nonessential* examples are ones that can be deleted without changing the meaning of the sentence or leaving the sentence structurally incomplete. *Essential* examples, on the other hand, cannot be deleted.

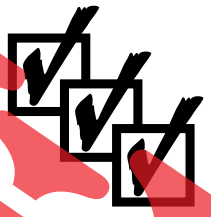
The two sentences below are almost identical. The examples in the first sentence are essential because you cannot put a period after the word *behavior* and still have a complete sentence. However, if you omit everything after the word *behavior* in the second sentence, it would still be grammatically complete. And even without the examples, the meaning is clear.

> *Essential:* The factors that have a significant impact on wildland fire behavior *include weather, fuel, and topography.*
> *Nonessential:* Many factors have a significant impact on wildland fire behavior, *including weather, fuel, and topography.*

The first example in the set below might appear to be nonessential because removing it would still leave a complete sentence. However, the meaning of the sentence would change. The writer's intent isn't to claim that *any* blow (from mild to skull-shattering) is often more severe than it initially appears. The intent is to signify a *blow like the one Lucy sustained.* Therefore, the example is essential. However, the second sentence specifies *any strong blow*, so citing Lucy's injury helps illustrate the point, but it isn't vital.

> *Essential:* A blow to the head *like the one Lucy sustained* is often more severe than it initially appears.
> *Nonessential:* Any strong blow to the head, *particularly one like Lucy sustained*, is often more severe than it initially appears.

The Case of the Cited Examples (continued)



Some expressions (*for example, for instance, namely,* and *that is*) require commas before and after the expression. Others (*especially, including, such as, like,* and *particularly*) should have a comma before but not after.

> Some of the risk factors for heart disease cannot be changed, *for example*, heredity, male gender, and age.
>
> However, you can control other risk factors, *such as* smoking, high blood pressure, blood cholesterol levels, and physical activity.

Commas are also needed before and after the Latin abbreviations of *for example* (*e.g.*) and *that is* (*i.e.*).

> Although an EMT cannot pronounce someone dead, the presence of rigor mortis, *i.e.*, the stiffening of the body after death, is one condition under which the EMT can presume death. Can you name the others?

Sometimes using parentheses or dashes provides more clarity than using a comma. This is particularly true with the expressions *that is* and *namely*, which are less familiar to readers than *for instance, including*, and most of the others. The sentences below illustrate how parentheses and dashes provide a better separation between the main part of the sentence and the examples. And although it isn't shown below, the parentheses and dashes provide enough of a separation that the expressions *that is* and *namely* are no longer needed. They can be omitted to make the sentences more concise.

Less Clear: Oxygen-deficient atmospheres, *that is*, atmospheres where the oxygen level is below 19.5%, require the use of self-contained breathing apparatus.
More Clear: Oxygen-deficient atmospheres (*that is*, atmospheres where the oxygen level is below 19.5%) require the use of self-contained breathing apparatus.

Less Clear: We found several stolen items, *namely*, computers, monitors, printers, scanners, and personal copiers, hidden in a storage locker.
More Clear: We found several stolen items—*namely*, computers, monitors, printers, scanners, and personal copiers—hidden in a storage locker.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Cited Examples

Instructions: Insert commas where appropriate in the following sentences. If the sentence is correct as is, write OK next to it. (Check your answers on page 159.)

Example: Some of the risk factors for heart disease cannot be changed *for example* heredity, male gender, and age.

1. A person suffering from smoke inhalation may exhibit irrational behavior such as clawing at a door instead of turning a door knob, going back into a burning building, or resisting the efforts of firefighters.

2. Recognize that an explosive device may be triggered in some manner other than the obvious. For example a timer may count up instead of down, and you would have no way of knowing when the device was set to detonate under those conditions.

3. Expect to find flammable liquids like acetone, ethyl ether, methyl ethyl ketone, and toluene in clandestine drug labs.

4. Fire extinguishers like the ones sold for home use often don't meet the minimum requirements for public buildings.

5. Riot control agents for instance tear gas, mace, and pepper spray cause temporary incapacitation by irritating the eyes and respiratory system.

6. When talking with the media, don't release confidential information (e.g. patient names) or information that would jeopardize a follow-up investigation.

7. It may be difficult to see placards under adverse conditions particularly in poor lighting or when obscured by smoke.

8. You need to weigh a number of factors before making entry including whether the result is likely to be a rescue or a body recovery operation.

9. All emergency equipment must be visible and easily accessible. This includes fire alarm boxes, emergency shutoff switches, and evacuation litters.

10. Anaphylactic shock that is a severe allergic reaction is a true life-threatening emergency.

The Case of the Serial Comma

Common Violations

The rules for handling a series of items within a sentence depend on the number of items and the complexity of those items. Where writers sometimes get into trouble is putting commas where they don't belong or omitting commas that are needed for clarity.

Crime Prevention

Commas are used to separate three or more items in a series, whether they be single words or entire phrases. They are not used when the series contains only two items.

No Commas: We need new child and infant manikins.
Commas: We need new adult, child, and infant manikins.

No Commas: Tip the head and check for breathing.
Commas: Tip the head, check for breathing, and give two breaths.

The examples below both contain only two items in series, so there should be no comma. However, the first item in the first sentence is so long that many writers would be tempted to insert a comma (1) to provide a pause where someone speaking might naturally take a breath and (2) to clarify that the purse was not in the basket with the medications. This is grammatically incorrect. Reversing the order of the two items maintains clarity without the need for any other punctuation.

Incorrect: She had enough time to grab only a basket containing some vital medications for her heart condition, and her purse.
Correct: She had enough time to grab only her purse and a basket containing some vital medications for her heart condition.

Some experts say it is permissible to omit the final comma in a series of three or more items, providing it doesn't hurt the clarity of the sentence. They feel the comma is superfluous and merely adds clutter. However, most experts say that the comma should *not* be omitted. One such grammarian, Wilson Follet, points out that a conjunction (e.g., *and*), which connects, cannot do the job of a comma, which separates. If there is any possibility of confusion, use the comma.

The first example below is potentially confusing because it's unknown whether the word *illegal* applies to the fireworks only or to both the fireworks and the guns. Inserting the final comma makes the distinction that the guns may include both legal and illegal weapons. Another valid solution is to change the order of the items so that the sentence is clear with or without the final comma.

Confusing: While searching the car, police found cocaine, *illegal fireworks and guns.*
Clear: While searching the car, police found cocaine, *illegal fireworks, and guns.*
Clear: While searching the car, police found cocaine, *guns and illegal fireworks.*
Clear: While searching the car, police found cocaine, *guns, and illegal fireworks.*

The Case of the Serial Comma

If a nonessential element follows the conjunction (*and* or *or*), interrupting the flow of the sentence, omit the comma before the conjunction.

Wrong: I'd like to work Homicide, Vice, or, if possible, Arson.
Right: I'd like to work Homicide, Vice or, if possible, Arson.

When the series contains an expression such as *and so on* or *etc.*, use commas to set off the expression.

The latest series of floods, mud slides, *etc.*, has done tremendous damage.

Commas are not needed when you repeat *and* or *or* between every item in the series. Writers will sometimes use both commas and conjunctions to put special emphasis on each item, but this technique should be used sparingly.

Normal Usage: If we don't stop the release before it gets to the river, it will contaminate the waterway for months or years or decades to come.
Special Emphasis: If we don't stop the release before it gets to the river, it will contaminate the waterway for months, or years, or decades to come.

Commas are not needed between items normally used together as a pair when they are joined by *and* or *or*.

The recruits still need to be tested on *search and rescue*, *ropes and knots*, and auto extrication.

Use semicolons to separate items in a series if any of the items have commas in them; otherwise, your sentences may be confusing. Think of the semicolon as sort of a "super comma" when used in this capacity.

Tipsters reported seeing the fugitive in *San Jose, California; Las Vegas, Nevada; and Houston, Texas.*

You Be the Detective: The Case of the Serial Comma

Instructions: Insert commas or other necessary punctuation where appropriate in the following sentences. If the sentence is correct as is, write OK next to it. (Check your answers on page 160.)

Example: We need new adult child and infant manikins.

1. If your clothes catch fire, stop drop and roll.

2. The safety officer has the authority to immediately alter suspend or terminate any unsafe activities that present imminent danger.

3. We use the START system to triage patients by quickly assessing breathing circulation and mental status.

4. The same principles of time distance and shielding that protect emergency responders from radioactive materials can be applied to any incident.

5. First responders at the awareness level are expected to recognize the presence of a hazardous material protect themselves call for trained personnel and secure the area.

6. Do not disturb the scene more than is necessary to ensure your safety treat the injured and protect the evidence from being damaged or destroyed.

7. Saturday's wildland drill will involve making progressive hose lays using hand tools and deploying tent shelters.

8. Determine response objectives (defensive offensive and nonintervention) possible action options for each and a process for determining the effectiveness of your efforts.

9. Our company transports flammable solids liquids and gases oxidizers organic peroxides and corrosive materials

10. Today's class will focus on recognizing responding to and defusing domestic violence calls knowing how to initiate a restraining order and knowing how to properly question and care for the victims of domestic violence.

The Case of the Consecutive Adjectives

Common Violations

Writers sometimes incorrectly punctuate sentences with two or more adjectives before a noun. Common violations include:

- Failing to put a comma between coordinate adjectives.
- Using a comma between adjectives that are not coordinate.
- Inadvertently changing the meaning of the sentence by using or omitting commas.
- Putting a comma between the final adjective and the noun.
- Putting a comma between an adverb and an adjective.

Crime Prevention

Use commas between two or more adjectives that equally modify the same word. These are called *coordinate adjectives*. Adjectives are not coordinate—and should *not* be separated by commas—when the one closest to the noun is more closely related to the noun in meaning.

Comma: She has a *strong, healthy* heartbeat.
No Comma: She has a *strong radial* pulse.

Two tests can help you identify whether adjectives are coordinate. One is the "*and* test." If the word *and* can be used in place of the commas without changing the meaning of the sentence, the adjectives are coordinate. *Strong and healthy* makes sense. *Strong and radial* does not. The second test is to try reversing the order of the adjectives. You can write *healthy, strong heartbeat*, but you cannot write *radial strong pulse*.

Often when adjectives are *not* coordinate, the first modifies the second. That is clearly the case above where *strong* describes what kind of *radial* pulse. It would be much more of a stretch to say that *strong* describes what kind of *healthy* heartbeat.

Adjectives are generally presented in the order indicated below.

1. Noun determiner (limiting adjectives, such as quantity)
2. Subjective description
3. Size
4. Shape
5. Age
6. Color
7. Origin
8. Material
9. Noun used as an adjective

Recognizing the different types of adjectives can also help you determine whether to use or omit the comma. In the first example below, *several* is a limiting adjective (identifies *how many*), and *angry* is a subjective description. They do not equally modify the noun *protestors*, so no comma is needed. In the second example, both *impatient* and *angry* are subjective descriptions, equally modifying the noun *protestors*. We need a comma here.

No Comma: *Several angry* protestors threatened to burn down the clinic.
Comma: *Impatient, angry* protestors threatened to burn down the clinic.

The Case of the Consecutive Adjectives (continued)

Sometimes the use or omission of a comma can change the meaning of the sentence. The first sentence below refers to a woman who is both pretty and tall. The second example implies that the woman is *fairly* tall and that *pretty* is being used as an adverb to modify the adjective *tall*. Whether you should use or omit the comma depends on the message you intend to convey.

Comma: The witness described her as a *pretty, tall* woman.
No Comma: The witness described her as a *pretty tall* woman.

Do not put a comma between the final adjective and the noun.

Wrong: Searching the collapsed building for victims was a slow, *tedious, process.*
Right: Searching the collapsed building for victims was a slow, *tedious process.*

If you are unsure whether you need a comma, use the "*and* test." If you put *and* between the words, will the sentence make sense?

Wrong: a slow and tedious and process
Right: a slow and tedious process

Do not use a comma between an adverb and an adjective. Most words ending in *-ly* are adverbs. Words ending in *-ly* are adjectives only if they modify the noun, not if they modify another adjective.

No Comma: It was a surprisingly realistic drill.
Comma: It was a timely, realistic drill.

Once again, if you are unsure whether you need a comma, use the "*and* test."

Wrong: a surprisingly and realistic drill
Right: a timely and realistic drill

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Consecutive Adjectives

Instructions: Insert commas where appropriate in the following sentences. If the sentence is correct as is, write OK next to it. (Check your answers on page 160.)

Example: She has a strong healthy heartbeat.

1. Fire spread quickly through the steep treacherous terrain.
2. Choking black smoke made the stairwells untenable.
3. The mystery began on a dark stormy night.
4. Firefighters extricated the frightened injured teens from the vehicle.
5. Proceed in a calm orderly manner to the nearest safe exit.
6. Several elderly patients had to be evacuated from their apartments.
7. The patient has pale cool clammy skin.
8. Slow shallow irregular breathing is another sign of shock.
9. He was driving a small red foreign sports car.
10. The material gives off toxic flammable gases when in contact with water.
11. Sharp jagged or pointed objects require relatively little penetrating force to break the skin.
12. We found a partial latent print on the door knob.
13. The body was found in a remote uninhabited area.
14. He gained their trust with his quiet polite manner.
15. Poor air exchange is indicated by a weak ineffective cough.
16. The hikers were caught off guard by the sudden unexpected storm.
17. You're experiencing a normal fight-or-flight reaction.
18. The crime lab is examining the victim's torn bloodstained clothing.
19. It was a senseless brutal crime.
20. Sifting through the debris is a slow painstaking process.

The Case of the Contrasting Commas

Common Violations

Because commas signal a pause, they help call attention to contrasting elements in a sentence. Yet it's not always appropriate to use them. Common violations addressed in this case include:

- Omitting commas where they are needed to set off contrasting phrases.
- Unnecessarily using commas in short contrasting phrases that fit smoothly into the sentence.
- Using commas in compound predicates.
- Incorrectly using or omitting commas in *not-but* constructions.
- Using commas in *not only-but also* constructions.
- Incorrectly locating commas in sentences that contain two or more contrasting phrases.

Crime Prevention

Commas are generally used to set off phrases that express contrast. However, the comma is usually omitted around a short contrasting phrase that fits smoothly into the sentence.

Comma: The sooner we get to the hospital, the better the patient's chances of survival.
No Comma: *The sooner the better.*

Comma: The patient is in serious condition, but he is stable enough for ground transport.
No Comma: The patient is in *serious but stable* condition.

Don't omit the comma from short contrasting phrases if doing so might confuse the reader.

Confusing: Here today gone tomorrow.
Clear: Here today, gone tomorrow.

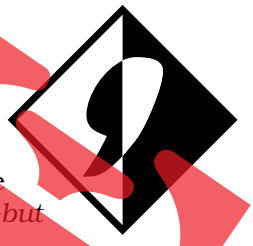
Ordinarily, no comma is used between parts of a compound predicate (two predicates sharing the same subject). However, the experts are divided on whether it's appropriate to use a comma if that compound predicate contains the word *but* to express contrast. (Notice the difference between a compound sentence, which contains two independent clauses, and a compound predicate, which doesn't.) The bottom line, as always, is clarity. If the sentence is clear without a comma, you can safely omit it. If not, use a comma. You have a greater obligation to your readers than to the punctuation police.

Compound Sentence: We found shell casings, but *we* didn't find any of the bullets.
Compound Predicate: We found shell casings but didn't find any of the bullets.

Commas are usually omitted in sentences containing *not ... but* before a verb, such as in the first example below. However, the comma is generally needed in other *not-but* constructions to help show the contrast.

No Comma: It is *not* the liquid *but* the vapors that *are burning.*
Commas: I don't like climbing our 100-foot aerial, *not* because I'm afraid of heights, *but* because I'm afraid of falling.

The Case of the Contrasting Commas (continued)



Not ... but is different from *not only ... but also*. The *not only-but also* construction is a connecting one, not a contrasting one. You can easily see this by replacing *not only ... but also* with *and*. (Often your sentences will be clearer if you do use *and* instead.) Do not use a comma to separate *not only-but also* constructions.

No Commas: I don't like climbing our 100-foot aerial *not only* because I'm afraid of heights *but also* because I'm afraid of falling.
No Commas: I don't like climbing our 100-foot aerial because I'm afraid of heights *and* because I'm afraid of falling.

Be careful when punctuating sentences that contain two or more contrasting phrases used to describe the words that follow.

Your *bold, though somewhat risky*, plan may be our best option.

The experts are divided on whether or not to use the second comma. In general, either the sentence above or the one below is considered acceptable.

Your *bold, though somewhat risky* plan may be our best option.

A common mistake writers make is to put the second comma where they would ordinarily pause to take a breath. This is wrong. When in doubt, try removing the words between the commas to see if the sentence still makes sense. If it does, you have the commas in the right place. If not, you need to move the comma.

Wrong: Your *bold, though somewhat risky* plan, may be our best option.
Wrong: Your bold may be our best option.
Right: Your bold plan may be our best option.
Thus: Your *bold, though somewhat risky*, plan may be our best option.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Contrasting Commas

Instructions: Insert commas where appropriate in the sentences below. If the sentence is correct as is, write OK next to it. (Check your answers on page 160.)

Example: The sooner we get to the hospital the better the patient's chances of survival.

1. First in last out.

2. It's the smoke not the fire itself that kills most of our nation's fire victims.

3. Direct occupants to use the exit stairwells not the elevators.

4. The lower the flash point the greater the risk.

5. This is the safest though not the most expedient way to stop the leak.

6. They say they're willing to release hostages but only women and children.

7. Lift with your legs not with your back.

8. It's not his performance but rather his attitude that got him kicked out of the academy.

9. He was dismissed from the academy not because he did poorly on the tests or couldn't perform the manipulative skills but because he displayed a poor attitude.

10. I cited the driver not only for failing to yield to a pedestrian but also for failing to signal before turning.

11. The aftershock this morning felt as strong as if not stronger than the original quake.

12. It's your tactics not your strategy that I question.

The Case of the Dated Comma

Common Violations

Commas may or may not be needed to set off dates. Common violations fit one of two categories:

- Omitting commas required.
- Inserting commas where they don't belong.

Crime Prevention

A full date written in order by month, day, and year requires commas to prevent misreading the numbers.

Commas: The *November 21, 1980*, fire at the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas inspired me to choose a career in public safety education.

However, commas are not needed when only one or two date elements are provided. Nor are they needed if the date elements are written in inverted order (date, month, year).

No Commas: I'd been a firefighter less than two weeks at the time of the *November 1980* fire at the MGM Grand Hotel.

No Commas: The *1980* fire at the MGM Grand Hotel killed 85 people and injured more than 600.

No Commas: Significant changes were made to the fire codes after the *21 November 1980* fire at the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas.

The comma is optional when a short date is used as an introductory element. However, a comma is required to prevent misreading if a date is followed by another figure.

Optional: On *April 19* (or *April 19,*) Oklahoma City will hold a special memorial for those killed by the bombing at the Alfred P. Murrah federal building.

Required: On *April 19, 168* victims of the Oklahoma City bombing will be honored in a special ceremony.

When a date is followed by nonessential information or when the date itself is nonessential (such as when used merely to clarify a time frame already named), the nonessential information is set off by commas.

Commas: *April 19,* the anniversary of the Oklahoma City bombing, has been set aside for special memorial.

Commas: The anniversary of the Oklahoma City bombing, *April 19,* has been set aside for special memorial.

Commas are generally not necessary after ordinary adverbs that represent dates (for example, *today, yesterday, tomorrow,* or *recently*).

No Commas: *Tomorrow* we'll observe a minute of silence in honor of the victims.

You Be the Detective: The Case of the Dated Comma

Instructions: Insert commas where required in the sentences below. If the sentence is correct as is, write OK next to it. (Check your answers on page 160.)

Example: The November 21 1980 fire at the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas inspired me to choose a career in public safety education.

1. September 11 forever changed the way America responds to terrorism.

2. The terrorist attacks of September 11 2001 claimed the lives of more than 400 emergency responders.

3. The burn relay in August benefits the Alisa Ann Ruch Burn Foundation.

4. I'll be in Washington, D.C., from May 13 through May 20 2006 for the National Police Week ceremonies.

5. Disaster relief agencies received unprecedented donations in response to the devastating 26 December 2004 tsunami in southeast Asia.

6. The two departments will merge this Sunday June 5 at one minute past midnight.

7. My recruit class graduated in June 2005.

8. The first National Fire Prevention Week was proclaimed in 1925 by President Calvin Coolidge. Each year it marks the anniversary of the Great Chicago Fire on October 9 1871 that killed roughly 300 people, left 100,000 homeless, and destroyed more than 17,000 structures.

9. My first hazardous materials book was inspired, in part, by reading about the November 29 1988 incident in which six firefighters in Kansas City, Missouri, were killed fighting a fire involving ammonium nitrate-fuel oil mixture (ANFO).

10. We're here to pay honor to Captain Mark McCormack, who lost his life on February 13 2005 while fighting a residential structure fire in Los Gatos, California.

The Case of the Uninvited Comma

Common Violations

Every comma signals a pause in the sentence, but not every pause requires a comma. It's very common for readers to insert commas where they would normally pause if reading a sentence aloud. Sometimes it's appropriate. Sometimes it's a grammatical error that can make a sentence unclear. Common violations include putting a comma:

- Between subject and a verb (or verb phrase).
- Between a verb and an object.
- Between parts of a compound subject.
- Between parts of a compound object.
- Between parts of a compound predicate.

Crime Prevention

Do not put a comma **between a subject and a verb** (or verb phrase). If you feel compelled to use a comma to provide a pause because the subject and verb are too far apart, rewrite the sentence.

Wrong: *Victims* of a knife attack who attempt to fight off their assailants, *will often have* defensive wounds on their hands and wrists.

Right: *Victims* of a knife attack who attempt to fight off their assailants *will often have* defensive wounds on their hands and wrists.

Better: *Victims* of a knife attack *will often have* defensive wounds on their hands and wrists if they attempt to fight off their assailants.

Do not put a comma **between a verb and an object**. The *object* is the person or thing that receives the action. It could be a single word or a group of words.

Wrong: The district chief *revealed* during the post-fire analysis, *that cleanup crews discovered asbestos in the building.*

Right: The district chief *revealed* during the post-fire analysis *that cleanup crews discovered asbestos in the building.*

Do not separate **parts of a compound subject**—multiple subjects that share the same predicate.

Wrong: The little *girl* who saved her mother by dialing 911, and the *dispatcher* who answered her call will meet this afternoon at police headquarters.

Wrong: The little *girl* who saved her mother by dialing 911 and the *dispatcher* who answered her call will meet this afternoon at police headquarters.

Do not separate **parts of a compound object**—two or more people or things that receive the action of the verb.

Wrong: We seized a briefcase containing 50 dime bags of heroin, and a .357 Magnum revolver.

The Case of the Uninvited Comma (continued)

Although using a comma between parts of a compound object is incorrect, you can run into other problems if you simply remove the comma. The following sentence works only if *both the gun and the drugs* were contained within the briefcase.

Right: We seized a briefcase containing 50 dime bags of heroin and a .357 Magnum revolver.

If the gun was not inside the briefcase, use the sentence below. Both sentences are grammatically correct, but they mean different things. And unfortunately, simple errors like this can come back to haunt a police officer (or anyone in emergency response) years later in court. A clever defense attorney may attempt to undermine an officer's credibility by arguing that there are discrepancies between the report and the officer's testimony. An officer arguing that it's just a punctuation error may only entice the attorney to nitpick every error, from punctuation to evidence collection to arrest and search procedures. Don't give anyone that opening.

Right: We seized a .357 Magnum revolver and a briefcase containing 50 dime bags of heroin.

One more option is to repeat the subject and the verb, resulting in two main clauses separated by a comma and a coordinating conjunction. This option is not as concise as the ones above, but it is grammatically and factually correct.

Right: We seized a briefcase containing 50 dime bags of heroin, and we seized a .357 Magnum revolver.

Do not separate **parts of a compound predicate**—two predicates sharing the same subject.

Wrong: We pulled the victim from his car, and started CPR after checking his pulse.

Although some experts say it is permissible to put a comma between parts of a compound predicate to avoid misreading, most believe it is better to rewrite the sentence. If you want to make it clear that the phrase *after checking his pulse* applies only to starting CPR, you can substitute *then* for *and* to clarify the sequence of events. Or you can repeat the subject (*we*), resulting in two main clauses separated by a comma and a coordinating conjunction. (See also "The Case of the Contrasting Comma" for information on using commas in compound predicates with the word *but*.)

Right: We pulled the victim from his car, then started CPR after checking his pulse.
Right: We pulled the victim from his car, and we started CPR after checking his pulse.

Commas are acceptable in the following sentence because there are three predicates, not two. This is treated like items in a series.

Right: We pulled the victim from his car, checked his pulse, and started CPR.

Alternately, if the pulse was checked before the victim was removed from his car, use something like the following sentence.

Right: After determining that the victim had no pulse, we pulled him from his car and started CPR.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Uninvited Comma

Instructions: Correct the following paragraphs by inserting missing commas, crossing out inappropriate commas, and providing any other punctuation that may be needed. If a paragraph is correct as is, write OK next to it. (Check your answers on page 161.)

Example: We pulled the victim from his car, and started CPR after checking his pulse. Paramedics arrived within three minutes and they took over patient care.

1. The *Emergency Response Guidebook* was developed for use by firefighters, police, and other emergency service personnel, who may be first to arrive on the scene of a transportation incident involving hazardous materials. It contains basic information for the initial response phase of an incident generally described as the first 30 minutes.

2. Your home escape plan should include two exits out of every bedroom, and a meeting place outside. Conduct periodic fire drills with the entire family, to be sure that everyone will respond appropriately if a fire occurs.

3. Safety and survival in an earthquake depend on knowing what to do to protect one's self, and on taking prompt action when the time comes.

4. Do not move seriously injured people, unless necessary to protect them from further harm. Treat them where they are and direct someone to call 911, to request paramedics.

5. Nothing should be stored in the main aisles. In an emergency employees must be able to evacuate quickly and safely. Anything stored in the exit aisles will slow the evacuation process, and present a tripping hazard.

6. It's important to note, that accident investigation is not done to place blame. The purpose is to determine the cause, and the corrective action necessary to prevent a recurrence.

7. The fact that every person has a unique pattern of ridges and depressions on their fingertips, is one of the founding principles of forensic science. It often makes it possible to positively identify victims or criminals, and can help police prove a suspect's presence at the scene of a crime.

8. The medical examiner can sometimes tell by examining bruises, how an attack progressed, and where and how the fatal blow was struck. If an attack was prolonged or a struggle preceded the murder blood samples taken from beneath the skin at the bruise sites, will have differing white cell counts because the body's normal reactions to injury start immediately after the injury is sustained.

9. Defensive actions are done to restrict, slow, or redirect the spread of a hazardous material, and to keep it as close to the source as is safe and practical. By definition, first responders at the operational level, are limited to defensive actions.

10. Under disaster conditions, no water can be presumed safe and all drinking water, except that which has been stored ahead of time must be purified.

The Case of the Abused Abbreviations

Common Violations

Although the title of this case focuses on abbreviations, the case itself encompasses both abbreviations and acronyms. What distinguishes the two is that *acronyms* are pronounced like words, whereas *abbreviations* are pronounced letter by letter. So for example, AIDS, SIDS, FEMA, and OSHA are acronyms, while CPR, LPG, FBI, and EPA are abbreviations.

Used properly, abbreviations and acronyms can be effective tools. However, when used improperly, they can make your document difficult to read and can undermine your credibility as a writer. Common violations include:

- Using excessive abbreviation in documents where it's not appropriate.
- Failing to properly introduce new abbreviations or acronyms.
- Failing to repeat abbreviations where needed for clarity.
- Starting a sentence with inappropriate abbreviations.
- Using contractions instead of abbreviations.

(For information on punctuation problems associated with abbreviations, refer to the following case. For information on forming plurals of abbreviations and acronyms, refer to "The Case of the Mistaken Apostrophe.")

Crime Prevention

Limit the use of abbreviations in ordinary writing. In general, abbreviations are appropriate in "expedient" documents where the emphasis is on communicating information in the briefest manner (for example, in catalogs, forms, invoices, purchase orders, and interoffice memos). However, you should minimize the use of abbreviations in ordinary and formal writing. Using too many abbreviations or using abbreviations inappropriately can give readers the impression that you do not know how to write.

Wrong: I'll meet you in the *a.m.*
Right: I'll meet you in the *morning.*

Of course, some abbreviations, such as *Mr.*, *Mrs.*, and *Dr.*, are appropriate in almost any situation, as are abbreviations and acronyms designed to replace longer, more cumbersome expressions.

We arrested *Mr.* Williams for impersonating an *FBI* agent.

The suspect was traveling excess of 90 *mph* when officers first spotted him.

Abbreviations are also commonly used in technical and scientific writing. Both abbreviations below would be acceptable in a technical journal, for example. However, in ordinary writing, such as in a hazardous materials student manual, the word *minute* should be spelled out instead.

A 30-*min* exposure to hydrogen cyanide at 135 *ppm* may be fatal to humans.

The Case of the Abused Abbreviations (continued)

Sometimes abbreviations, particularly symbols, are used in conjunction with text to help readers comprehend information more quickly. This is appropriate in any type of writing.

> Vapors or gases with vapor densities greater than one *(>1)* are heavier than air. Gases with vapor densities less than one *(<1)* are lighter than air.

Properly introduce new abbreviations and acronyms. If readers might not be familiar with an abbreviation or acronym (or the longer expression it represents), introduce it the first time by putting it in parentheses behind the word or words it represents. Alternatively, you can use the abbreviation or acronym first, with the spelled-out version in parentheses behind it. The abbreviation or acronym can be written alone in subsequent uses.

> I work in the *Intensive Care Unit (ICU)*.

> They were manufacturing *LSD (lysergic acid derivatives)* at a clandestine drug lab.

Repeat abbreviations as needed. It's acceptable to reserve abbreviations for the last of two or more numbers in series if readers will not be confused, as in the first example below. However, if there's any potential for confusion, such as when the two numbers are far apart, the abbreviations should be repeated. Symbols must be repeated with each number.

> The sprinkler head will discharge 22 to 40 *gpm* at initial water pressures of 15 to 50 *psi*.

> Poison gases in Hazard Zone B have an LC_{50} greater than 200 *ppm* and less than or equal to 1000 *ppm*.

> Approximately *75% to 90%* of sex offenders are known to the children they abuse.

Avoid starting sentences with some abbreviations. Starting a sentence with standard abbreviations, such as *Mr.*, *Mrs.*, and *Dr.*, is always acceptable. However, don't start a sentence with an abbreviation if the abbreviation is a partial word, a lowercase letter, or a number.

> *Wrong:* *Approx.* 250 people were injured when the train derailed.
> *Right:* *Approximately* 250 people were injured when the train derailed.

> *Wrong:* *a.k.a.* names are common among criminals.
> *Right:* *Alias* names are common among criminals.

Use abbreviations versus contractions. If you have a choice between using an abbreviation or using a contraction, use an abbreviation (for example, *dept.* versus *dep't*). Abbreviations are easier to read and look better on the page.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Abused Abbreviations

Instructions: Circle the abbreviations and acronyms that should be spelled out in the sentences below. Insert any abbreviations that should be repeated for clarity. If the sentence is acceptable as is, write OK next to it. (Check your answers on page 161.)

(Assume the sentences are part of an ordinary document rather than an "expedient" one where abbreviations and acronyms might be used more often. You can also assume that the abbreviations and acronyms were "properly introduced" and don't need to be clarified for readers.)

Examples: (Approx.) 250 people were injured when the train derailed.

Poison gases in Hazard Zone B have an LC_{50} greater than 200 and less than or equal to 1000 ppm.

1. The injury should be evaluated by a Dr.

2. Capt. Chew coordinates the fire dept. toy drive every Xmas.

3. A combustible liquid is one that has a flash point greater than 141 but below 200˚F.

4. We used the 24-ft. ladder to reach the 2nd-floor window.

5. A CO_2 extinguisher can safely be used on electrical fires.

6. Carbon tetrachloride (CCl_4) was a very effective extinguishing agent. However, *carbon tet*, also known as Halon 1040, had to be taken off the market because it was very toxic.

7. A tipster reported seeing the suspect at a house on Cloverdale Dr. in L.A., Calif.

8. ^{14}C is a naturally occurring radioactive material.

9. The pt. experienced SOB after being hit in the abdomen with a basketball.

10. Chas. coordinates our dept's hazmat emergency response program.

The Case of the Punctuated Abbreviations

Common Violations

This case is a continuation of the previous one. However, now we'll focus on punctuation problems often associated with abbreviations. Common violations include:

- Incorrectly punctuating a sentence or phrase that ends with an abbreviation.
- Incorrectly using or omitting spaces between abbreviations and text next to them.
- Failing to hyphenate numbers and abbreviations used together as compound adjectives.
- Incorrectly using or omitting periods with abbreviations and acronyms.

(For information on forming plurals of abbreviations and acronyms, refer to "The Case of the Mistaken Apostrophe.")

Crime Prevention

Properly punctuate sentences or phrases ending with abbreviations. Use one period at the end of a sentence if the sentence ends with an abbreviation. The final period in the abbreviation also serves as the period for the sentence. However, retain other punctuation as needed.

Wrong: We should have the search warrant by 3 p.m..
Right: We should have the search warrant by 3 p.m.
Right: We can get the search warrant by mid-afternoon (by 3 p.m.).
Right: Can we get the search warrant by 3 p.m.?
Right: If we can't get the search warrant by 3 p.m., please let me know.

Use or omit spaces as appropriate. In general, don't use spaces between *symbols* and the numbers or letters next to them. Symbols used in mathematical expressions (=, +, -, x, and ÷) are an exception. Use spaces to separate other abbreviations from the text around them.

The flash point of gasoline is *-45˚F*.

The child fell down a *2′ x 3′* shaft.

The speed limit in most residential neighborhoods is *25 mph*.

Hyphenate compound adjectives. When numbers and abbreviations are used as compound adjectives before a noun, join them with a hyphen.

Someone stole my expensive 35-mm camera.

Use or omit periods as appropriate. Perhaps the greatest challenge is knowing whether to use or omit periods with abbreviations. Periods are never used with *acronyms*, so that part is easy. However, the rules are not so simple with abbreviations. What makes the rules so challenging?

- The experts don't always agree.
- There are exceptions to many of the rules.
- Some abbreviations can be written either way.
- What might be acceptable in one application (e.g., an address on an envelope) is not acceptable in another (e.g., in the text of the enclosed correspondence).

The Case of the Punctuated Abbreviations (continued)

The trend today is moving away from the use of periods as long as the meaning remains clear. This is partly because periods take up extra space. Abbreviations are supposed to save space. Plus abbreviations are often easier to read without the periods that would otherwise drag out the text.

Many of our conventions regarding the use of periods comes from the desire to prevent misreading. The following examples show how omitting needed periods may cause confusion. However, the context in which the abbreviations are used has a lot to do with the risk of misreading. Most of the examples below can be used without periods in a chart or table without confusing readers.

Original Word	Abbreviation	Possible Confusion If Periods Were Omitted
inches	in.	the preposition *in*
number	no.	the word *no*
company	Co.	the prefix *co*
Washington	Wash.	the word *wash*
Mississippi	Miss.	the title *Miss*
Los Angeles	L.A.	Louisiana (*LA*)
before noon	a.m. or A.M.	the word *am*

The following are some general guidelines on when to use or omit periods. Each is followed by a few examples. Keep in mind that you may see different guidelines in different books because the experts do not always agree. When in doubt, consult a good dictionary.

Use periods in the following situations:

- Abbreviations of titles that precede a name and some that follow a name: *Dr., Lt., Sr., Jr.*
- Some expressions of time: *a.m., p.m., A.D., B.C.*
- Many Latin abbreviations: *e.g., i.e., et al., etc.*
- Many business names: *Co., Corp., Inc., Bros.*
- Street names: *Ave., St., Rd., Ct., Blvd.*
- State names (except when using the preferred two-letter postal abbreviations): *Calif., Colo.*
- Many abbreviations of a single word: *approx., cont., dept., misc.*
- Many abbreviations made up of lowercase initials: *a.k.a., d.b.a.*

Omit periods in the following situations:

- Most abbreviations written in all capital letters: *CPR, ICS, LPG*
- Many military terms: *USCG, POW, APO*
- Television and radio station call letters: *KNTV, KRON, KGO*
- Chemical symbols: H_2O, CO_2, $NaCl$
- Metric units of measure: *mm, cm, kg, cc*
- Compass directions: *N, E, S, W, NE, SW*
- Approved two-letter postal abbreviations for states: *CA, OR, WA*

In some cases, either option is acceptable. It's a matter of preference or how much space you have. However, once you have decided, be consistent—at least within the same document.

- Some titles after a name: *M.D.* or *MD, Ph.D.* or *PhD, C.S.P.* or *CSP*
- The United States: *U.S.* or *US, U.S.A.* or *USA*
- Weights, measures, and time: *lb* or *lb., ft* or *ft., min* or *min.*
- Some abbreviations written in all capital letters: *DOA* or *D.O.A, IOU* or *I.O.U.*

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Punctuated Abbreviations

Instructions: Edit the sentences below to correct errors in the abbreviations and acronyms. Insert or delete spaces, periods, and hyphens as needed. If the sentence is correct as is, write OK next to it. You may need a good dictionary to complete this exercise. If your dictionary indicates that more than one option is acceptable, circle the one that is listed first. (Check your answers on page 161.)

Example: We should have the search warrant by 3p.m.
space

1. We were unable to locate an M.S.D.S. for this product.

2. The victim was attacked while jogging in St James Park.

3. The speed limit is 25 mph near a school while children are outside or crossing the street.

4. The fire department just purchased a new 1500 g.p.m. pumper.

5. We administered 50 mg lidocaine IV push, followed by infusion of 2 mg/min.

6. Flammable liquids are generally defined as those with flash points less than or equal to 141 ˚F (60.5 ˚C).

7. Inadequate documentation of a hazmat incident is one of the most common causes for an O.S.H.A. citation.

8. The patient's blood pressure is 120/80 mm Hg.

9. Paramedics were called after the CEO collapsed during the board meeting.

10. The fire was fanned by 35mph winds.

The Case of the Latin Abbreviations

Common Violations

Three common violations are associated with Latin abbreviations:

- Overusing the abbreviations.
- Confusing *e.g.* and *i.e.*
- Being redundant (for example, using *e.g.* and *etc.* in the same sentence).

Crime Prevention

Use abbreviations in moderation. Some experts recommend using the English equivalents rather than the Latin abbreviations. Yet the abbreviations are frequently used in technical and business writing. They can be extremely helpful when space is limited.

So how do we draw the line between using them appropriately and overusing them? First, consider how formal your document is. The more formal the document, the more you should opt for the English equivalents. Second, consider how the expression fits within the flow of your document. I'll sometimes use *e.g.* and *etc.* because they're shorter and less visible than the English equivalents, and in the spot where I'm using them, I don't want excess words to compete for the reader's attention. Third, avoid using abbreviations out of laziness. Don't, for example, use *vs.* or *v.* in a sentence where you're comparing two people, things, or ideas. It's tacky. Use *versus* instead.

Know the difference between *e.g.* and *i.e.* The following chart shows the Latin abbreviations commonly used in writing.

Abbreviation	Original Expression	English Equivalent
e.g.	exempli gratia	for example
i.e.	id est	that is
etc.	et cetera	and so forth
vs. or v.	versus	against
et al.	et alii	and others
ibid.	ibidem	in the same place
viz.	videlicet	namely

Writers often confuse the abbreviations *e.g.* and *i.e.* However, as you can see, they mean different things. The two are not interchangeable. *For example* (*e.g.*) refers to a sampling of a larger group, whether that sampling contains just one item or several items. *That is* (*i.e.*) identifies something specific; it is the only thing being included. (Notice that the abbreviations are set off with commas just as the English equivalents would be, except where a parenthesis is used instead.)

Make sure all emergency equipment (*e.g.*, fire extinguishers and alarm boxes) are clearly identified and easily accessible at all times.

Make sure the secondary exit, *i.e.*, the fire escape, is clearly identified and easily accessible at all times.

The Case of the Latin Abbreviations (continued)

Avoid being redundant. Since the English equivalents of *et al.* and *etc.* contain the word *and*, do not use *and* with these abbreviations.

Wrong: The patient's vital signs (pulse, respiration, blood pressure, *and etc.*) were all within normal limits.
Right: The patient's vital signs (pulse, respiration, blood pressure, *etc.*) were all within normal limits.

Do not use *etc.* or its English equivalent in conjunction with *e.g., for example,* or *such as*. That would also be redundant.

Wrong: Henry has experimented with several drugs (*e.g.*, methamphetamine, heroin, and cocaine, *etc.*).
Right: Henry has experimented with several drugs (*e.g.*, methamphetamine, heroin, and cocaine).
Right: Henry has experimented with several drugs (methamphetamine, heroin, cocaine, *etc.*).

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Latin Abbreviations

Instructions: Add *e.g.* or *i.e.* as appropriate to the sentences below. Remember, each should be set off with commas and/or parentheses as the English equivalents would be. (Check your answers on page 161.)

Example: Make sure the secondary exit, i.e., the fire escape, is clearly identified and easily accessible at all times.

1. The most common pattern (_____ the loop) comprises approximately 65% of all fingerprints.

2. Police found contraband _____ cocaine, in the suspect's vehicle.

3. Nerve agents (_____ sarin) are similar to organophosphate pesticides, but they are 100 to 500 times more potent.

4. Riot control agents _____ tear gas, mace, and pepper spray, cause temporary incapacitation by irritating the eyes and respiratory system.

5. The most significant indicators of nerve agent poisoning are rapid onset of miosis (_____ pinpoint pupils) and muscular twitching.

6. Flammable liquids (_____ gasoline, acetone, and toluene) are generally defined as those with flash points less than or equal to 141˚F.

7. The medical examiner identified the cause of death as a cerebrovascular accident (_____ a stroke).

8. Class A fires are those involving ordinary combustibles (_____ paper, wood, and clothing).

9. As you approach the scene, look for potential safety hazards _____ fire, leaking fuel, hazardous materials, and downed power lines.

10. The patient has edema _____ fluid in the lungs.

The Case of the Indefinite Article

Common Violations

Writers sometimes incorrectly use the indefinite articles *a* and *an*.

Crime Prevention

Most of the errors happen when people are in a hurry. Careful proofreading will catch most of the errors. So let's focus on the rules. *A* is used before words that begin with a consonant sound, whereas *an* is used before words that begin with a vowel sound. Remember, it's the *sound* of a word, not the first letter itself, that counts. Notice the dictionary pronunciations in parentheses behind four of the examples below.

Begins with a Consonant Sound	Begins with a Vowel Sound
a fire engine	an ambulance
a union (yo͞on´yen)	an MSDS (em)
a hostage (hos´tij)	an honest attempt (on´est)

Note: Many experts say that either *a* or *an* is acceptable before the word *historic* (e.g., *a/an historic occasion*).

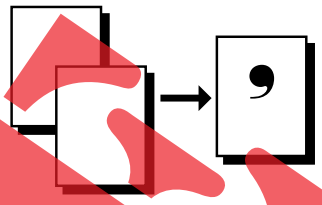
You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Indefinite Article

Instructions: Write the correct article (*a* or *an*) in the sentences below. (Check your answers on page 161.)

Example: We have ___a___ union meeting tonight.

1. Elaine is _____ EMT, not _____ paramedic.
2. Please set up _____ IV.
3. We have _____ hour to find and defuse the bomb.
4. The witness claims he saw _____ UFO.
5. It's _____ oxygen-deficient atmosphere.
6. Have we received _____ RSVP from the chief yet?
7. We have _____ unique opportunity to tour the facility.
8. Do we have _____ SOP for responding to overturned tankers?
9. The woman died of _____ overdose.
10. It was _____ LSD overdose.
11. We have _____ tight deadline.
12. The suspect is _____ minor.
13. Two surfers were rescued by _____ United States Coast Guard vessel.
14. This is now _____ FBI operation.
15. The tipster is _____ Utah woman who saw him on *America's Most Wanted*.
16. Is there _____ NFPA standard for this?
17. Police confirmed that Roy was using _____ alias.
18. I have _____ one-hour air bottle in my SCBA.
19. The plot was discovered by _____ Houston reporter.
20. He was killed because they considered him _____ loose end.

The Case of the Confusing Contractions



Common Violations

One of the most common mistakes writers make is to confuse *its* and *it's* because most of the time adding *'s* indicates the possessive form of a word. The opposite is true with the word *it*. Even people who know the difference between *its* and *it's* periodically use the wrong word because they're in a hurry and fail to catch the error when proofreading. Other common mistakes include confusing *they're* and *their*, *who's* and *whose*, and *you're* and *your*. Some writers also have trouble distinguishing between *there*, *they're*, and *their*.

Crime Prevention

The confusion that writers sometimes experience is due to the similarity between some of the possessive pronouns and a handful of contractions. So let's start by defining the terms.

Most *contractions* are formed by condensing two words into one. One or more letters are removed from the original words, and an apostrophe is added to take their place. Contractions may be used for ease of reading, for effect, or to squeeze more information into a limited space. The following are examples of some contractions and how they're formed.

I	+	am	=	I'm		let	+	us	=	let's
you	+	have	=	you've		he	+	is	=	he's
we	+	are	=	we're		she	+	would	=	she'd
is	+	not	=	isn't		they	+	will	=	they'll

Pronouns (e.g., *me*, *he*, *she*, and *it*) are words that can be used in place of nouns. *Possessive pronouns* (e.g., *my*, *his*, *her*, and *its*) are those that show possession or ownership.

Possessive Noun: I was surprised by the *fire's* intensity.
Possessive Pronoun: I was surprised by *its* intensity.

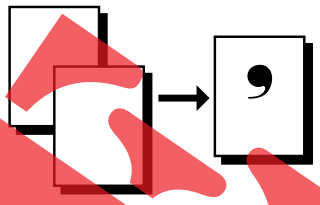
The chart below contains important clues to distinguishing between contractions and possessive pronouns. A simple substitution test reveals the correct choice. If you're unsure which word to use, try substituting the two words from which the contraction is formed (shown in parentheses below). If you can substitute *it is*, for example, you can use *it's* in your sentence. If not, use *its*. The same test applies to the other word choices.

Contraction		Possessive Pronoun
it's	(it is)	its
they're	(they are)	their
who's	(who is)	whose
you're	(you are)	your

The word *there* is neither a contraction (*they're*) nor a possessive pronoun (*their*). *There* is used to identify location (e.g., *over there*) or introduce a sentence (e.g., *there is* ...).

Computer spell checkers won't identify a correctly spelled word used out of context. So a good habit when proofing documents on computer, especially if you're inclined to confuse specific words, is to perform a Find or Search for those troublemakers. For example, you can search for each occurrence of *its* and *it's*, then check that you've used the correct spelling.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Confusing Contractions



Instructions: Circle the correct word in each of the sentences below. (Check your answers on page 161.)

Example: I was surprised by (its) / it's intensity.

1. The car landed on its / it's roof.
2. Their / there / they're home was destroyed by fire.
3. Your / you're never going to believe what caused the fire.
4. Whose / who's in command?
5. Its / It's a good idea to call for mutual aid.
6. Do you know how their / there / they're going to evacuate the hospital?
7. Have you finished your / you're investigation?
8. Whose / who's radio is this?
9. The material is above its / it's flash point.
10. Their / there / they're were no witnesses to the accident.
11. Its / it's going to be difficult to extricate the victims.
12. Let me know when your / you're ready.
13. Cliff said they wasted their / there / they're time on the stakeout.
14. Chlorine is a gas in its / it's natural state.
15. Dennis said their / there / they're are no signs of forced entry.
16. I don't care whose / who's fault it is.
17. The incident commander said its / it's not safe to enter.
18. I'll be your / you're backup.
19. Its / it's not appropriate to release this information to the media.
20. My friend Eric, whose / who's a police officer, ran a background check on him for me.

The Case of the Mistaken Apostrophe

Common Violations

Apostrophes are typically used to form contractions, to show possession, or to form some plurals. Unfortunately, sometimes these uses are at cross purposes with one another.

"The Case of the Confusing Contractions" highlighted a common problem in which writers confuse contractions and possessive pronouns, such as *it's* and *its*, because adding *'s* normally indicates the possessive form of a word. Now we'll focus on some other common violations:

- Using nonstandard contractions that can be misread as the possessive form of a word.
- Confusing the contraction *let's* with the verb *lets*.
- Using apostrophes to form ordinary plurals.
- Omitting apostrophes from the possessive form of a word.
- Using apostrophes where they could create confusion for the reader.

Crime Prevention

Nonstandard contractions. As much as possible, avoid nonstandard contractions. The two sentences below are both acceptable in speech. However, the first one can be confusing in writing because most readers will anticipate that *dog's* is being used in the possessive sense and will expect the sentence to reveal something about the dog's injured nose, paw, or whatever.

Confusing: The *dog's* injured and needs to be taken to the animal hospital.
Clear: The *dog is* injured and needs to be taken to the animal hospital.

Contraction or verb. Don't confuse the contraction *let's* with the verb *lets*. As you saw in "The Case of the Confusing Contractions," a simple substitution test identifies where contractions are appropriate. If you can use the words *let us*, then *let's* is correct. Otherwise, use *lets*.

Contraction: *Let's* (let us) see if the chief will authorize overtime to attend the class.
Verb: If the chief *lets* us attend the class, he'll have to backfill our positions.

Possessives and ordinary plurals. Don't confuse the possessive form of a word with ordinary plurals. Ordinary plurals do not have apostrophes.

Plural: The *Smiths* were not injured.
Possessive: The *Smiths'* car was damaged, however.

Plural: The *boys* were caught shoplifting.
Possessive Singular: We found stolen merchandise in the one *boy's* backpack.
Possessive Plural: We found stolen merchandise in both *boys'* backpacks.

Plural: I've been working on this project for *weeks*.
Possessive Singular: I lost a *week's* worth of work when my computer crashed.
Possessive Plural: I lost several *weeks'* worth of work when my computer crashed.

The Case of the Mistaken Apostrophe (continued)

Use apostrophes sparingly to form the plurals of letters, numbers, acronyms, abbreviations, and other special words. It *is* legitimate to use apostrophes to form *some* plurals. However, there is considerable disagreement among the experts about what is or is not appropriate. I suggest being guided by the following advice:

- Let clarity be your ultimate goal.
- Avoid using apostrophes to form plurals where it is functionally unnecessary or creates confusion.
- Use apostrophes to form plurals where necessary to prevent misreading.

Potential for confusion. Most experts agree that you should use an apostrophe plus *s* (*'s*) to form the plurals of lowercase letters. Imagine how confusing the following examples would be without the apostrophes.

> We need to make sure we dot all our *i's* and cross all our *t's* on this contract.
>
> You had better mind your *p's* and *q's*.

However, the experts do not agree on how to form the plurals of capital letters, acronyms, and abbreviations. Some maintain that you should always use an apostrophe to prevent misreading. Others say that the apostrophe is functionally unnecessary and that you should omit the apostrophe except in situations that might otherwise be confusing.

> I received *As* (or *A's*) on all my quizzes in the academy.
> *(Since the meaning is clear with or without the apostrophe, you could choose either option.)*
>
> If the victim is unconscious, check for *ABCs* (or *ABC's*).
> *(Since the meaning is clear with or without the apostrophe, you could choose either option.)*
>
> The Loma Prieta earthquake postponed Game 3 of the World Series between the San Francisco Giants and the Oakland *A's*.
> *(An apostrophe is needed in this situation because this is the team's name.)*

On the other hand, using an apostrophe to form plurals sometimes creates confusion. An apostrophe generally signals the reader that the word is possessive (providing, of course, that it's not a contraction) and that the possession will be named next. By omitting the apostrophe from the plural form, you can avoid giving the reader mixed signals.

Plural:	The *EMTs* saved her life.
Possessive Singular:	The *EMT's* quick thinking saved her life.
Possessive Plural:	The *EMTs'* quick thinking saved her life.
Plural:	The *BLEVEs* occurred shortly after our arrival.
Possessive Singular:	The *BLEVE's* impact could be felt for miles.
Possessive Plural:	The *BLEVEs'* impact could be felt for miles.

The Case of the Mistaken Apostrophe (continued)

The experts also don't agree on whether apostrophes are needed to form the plurals of numbers and certain short words. Most favor omitting the apostrophe because it is functionally unnecessary, but others insist on using it. In these circumstances, the best advice is to use what you believe is the clearest and to be consistent, at least within the same document.

Count off by *threes* (or *three's*).

Figure *8s* (or Figure *8's*) are the preferred knots.

We responded to several fires here in the *1990s* (or *1990's*).

I weighed the *pros* and *cons* (or *pro's* and *con's*) before deciding on a plan of action.

Let's review the *dos* (or *do's*) and *don'ts*.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Mistaken Apostrophe

Instructions: Circle the correct word in each of the sentences below. (Where the experts consider it acceptable to either use the apostrophe or leave it out, circle the word you feel would create the least confusion for readers.) (Check your answers on page 162.)

Example: The (EMTs) / EMT's / EMTs' saved her life.

1. Witnesses described seeing lots / lot's of black smoke coming from the warehouse.
2. I'm reviewing the last three years / year's / years' worth of injury reports / report's.
3. Follow your department SOPs / SOP's.
4. Everyones / everyone's blood tests / test's came back normal.
5. We try to keep our inspection fees / fee's reasonable.
6. The ERs / ER's / ERs' were overwhelmed with critical patients / patient's.
7. If all gos / go's / goes as planned, we can dedicate the new station on July 23.
8. Both suspects / suspect's / suspects' fingerprints were found at the scene.
9. My CPAs / CPA's office is fully sprinklered.
10. Several custom fishing rods / rod's were stolen.
11. When are the guys / guy's going to court?
12. He'll be arrested if he gets / get's out of line again.
13. Johns / John's car was rear-ended by a large truck.
14. Where do you keep your MSDSs / MSDS's?
15. Several agencies / agencys / agency's are participating in the drill.
16. One persons / person's trash is another ones / one's treasure.
17. Lets / let's examine each of the scenarios / scenario's again.
18. It was three days / day's before we learned the truth.
19. I'd like to discuss some ideas / idea's for improving the academy.
20. The victims / victim's were all found in their beds / bed's.

The Case of the Perplexing Possessives

Common Violations

Although forming possessives is not difficult, there are a few tricky situations that writers may struggle with. Common problems include:

- Confusing plurals and possessives (addressed in "The Case of the Mistaken Apostrophe").
- Incorrectly forming possessives with words ending in the letter *s* or an *s* sound.
- Misplacing the apostrophe plus *s* (*'s*) in compound words.
- Incorrectly forming possessives when two or more people or things are named.

Crime Prevention

Add apostrophe plus *s* (*'s*) to indicate the possessive form of indefinite pronouns and singular or plural nouns that do not end in *s*.

> We need to look out for *each other's* safety.
>
> The *man's* chest is bruised from hitting the steering wheel.
>
> The *children's* father got them out of the house safely.

Exceptions are sometimes made for words ending with an *s* sound, particularly when followed by a word that begins with the letter *s*. These words are often written with an apostrophe only.

> For *convenience' sake*, we'll pretend you've already completed the primary survey. Demonstrate how you would perform a secondary survey on the patient.
>
> We demonstrated it this way for *appearance' sake* only. It's not how we would really do it in the field.

Plural nouns ending in *s* require only an apostrophe at the end to indicate possession.

> The jury was convinced by the *witnesses'* testimony.
>
> Both *suspects'* fingerprints were found in the room.
>
> We revived the *Andersons'* baby.

The experts are very much divided on whether to use an apostrophe plus *s* (*'s*) or an apostrophe alone after singular nouns that end in *s*.

> The crash occurred when the *bus's* (or *bus'*) brakes failed.
>
> *Charles's* or (*Charles'*) breathing was very shallow.

There are three schools of thought on this issue. Many experts prefer adding only an apostrophe to eliminate the awkward *s's* or *ss's* at the end of a word. Others insist that an apostrophe plus *s* (*'s*) is correct in all situations except when the addition of *'s* produces an awkward sound or a visually odd spelling. Thus you would write *bus's brakes* and *Charles's breathing*, but *Achilles' heel* and *for old times' sake* (not *Achilles's* or *times's*).

The Case of the Perplexing Possessives (continued)

Lastly, some experts say that you should write the words the way you pronounce them. For example, if you were talking about the testimony provided by one witness, the possessive form of *witness* would be pronounced with three syllables; hence you would write *the witness's testimony* rather than the *witness'* testimony.

Sometimes an *of* phrase can be used to eliminate an awkward possessive. The first example below is incorrect because it refers to *both* lungs, not a single lung. The spelling *lungs's* in the second sentence is awkward. The spelling *lungs'* is acceptable, but the final sentence reflects the way most experts prefer to write such sentences.

Incorrect: Fluid in the lungs will impair the *lung's ability* to function effectively.
(shifts from plural to singular)
Awkward: Fluid in the lungs will impair the *lungs's ability* to function effectively.
Acceptable: Fluid in the lungs will impair the *lungs' ability* to function effectively.
Better: Fluid in the lungs will impair *the ability of the lungs* to function effectively.

Be careful when forming the possessive of names ending in *s*. Make sure you put the apostrophe in the right location.

Captain *Winters'* badge belongs to Captain *Winters*.

Captain *Winter's* badge belongs to Captain *Winter*.

When writing compound words, add the apostrophe plus *s* (*'s*) to the last word only.

The *jack-o'-lantern's* candle nearly ignited her costume.

My *sister-in-law's* husband is a police officer.

But: My *sisters-in-law's* (plural) husbands are police officers.

When two or people have individual ownership, add the apostrophe plus *s* (*'s*) to each name. However, when two or people or things share ownership or association, add the apostrophe plus *s* (*'s*) to the last name only.

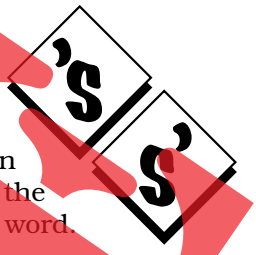
Individual Ownership: *Carol's* and *Sally's* condos (plural) were robbed by the same man.
Shared Ownership: *Carol and Sally's* condo (singular) was robbed last week.

Individual Association: The *driver's* and *passenger's* injuries were not serious.
Shared Association: *Drug and alcohol's* effects can be quite deadly.
(the combined effect of drugs and alcohol)

When you use a possessive pronoun, it's grammatically correct to add an apostrophe plus *s* (*'s*) to the noun also. However, this can be awkward. It's often better to rewrite the sentence.

Awkward: The *chief's* and *your* proposal is a sound one.
Better: *Your* proposal is a sound one.
Or: The proposal I received from you and your chief is a sound one.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Perplexing Possessives



Instructions: Circle the correct word in each sentence below. If more than one option is acceptable, circle both, but put a "P" next to the one that reflects how you would most likely pronounce the word. (Check your answers on page 162.)

Example: Charles / (Charles') / (Charles's P) breathing was very shallow.

1. The bullets came from James / James' / James's gun.
2. It's somebody elses / else's / elses' problem now.
3. The victims / victim's / victims' names are being withheld pending notification of their families.
4. Thomas / Thomas' / Thomas's alibi checks out.
5. The husband / husbands / husband's and wifes / wife's / wive's accounts of their argument vary greatly.
6. We found several womens / women's / womens' stolen purses in the trunk of his car.
7. Jones' / Jones's / Joneses / Joneses' training officer gave him a glowing recommendation.
8. There isn't sufficient clearance around the Rosses / Ross' / Rosses' house to protect it from an urban interface fire.
9. I'm worried about my mother-in-laws / mother's-in-law / mother-in-law's / mother's-in-law's blood pressure being so high.
10. My mother / mothers / mother's and fathers / father's dog is missing.
11. We're fed up with that know-it-alls / know-it-all's / know-it-alls' attitude.
12. Chrises / Chris' / Chris's patient should be transported first.

The Case of the Perfect Prefix

Common Violations

The following are common violations associated with prefixes.

- Changing the spelling when adding a prefix.
- Using an incorrect prefix.
- Using or omitting hyphens inappropriately.

Crime Prevention

Don't change the spelling. When you add a prefix to a word, the spelling of the original word does not change. If the last letter of the prefix is the same as the first letter of the root word, the letter is doubled. Do not double the letter otherwise.

dis + similar = dissimilar	dis + agree = disagree
un + necessary = unnecessary	un + harmed = unharmed

Use the correct prefix. Some prefixes are similar in spelling and pronunciation, but different in meaning. The following are a few examples. Be sure to use the correct prefix.

Prefix	Possible Meanings	Examples
ante	before, prior	antemortem, anteorbital
anti	against, opposite	anticlimactic, antiaircraft
inter	among, between	interfere, interrupt
intra	within	intramuscular, intravenous
inter	inwardly, within	introduce, introspection

Avoid hyphenating when possible. The trend today is toward running prefixes together with the root words that follow them. Sometimes it's acceptable to write compounds either closed (one word) or hyphenated, as in the examples below. However, where hyphens aren't necessary for clarity, they almost become excess noise on the page. When in doubt, check your dictionary. Keep in mind, though, that older dictionaries and the dictionaries built in to many computer spell checkers often don't reflect the current trends in hyphenation. If a particular word isn't listed in your dictionary, look to see how similar words are written and follow that pattern.

cooperate / co-operate	microorganism / micro-organism
preempt / pre-empt	reexamine / re-examine

Use hyphens if needed for clarity. Use a hyphen when adding a prefix results in a compound that is difficult to read or recognize. This sometimes occurs when adding the prefix results in doubling or tripling a letter.

anti-inflammatory de-energize intra-abdominal

Use or omit hyphens based on meaning. Hyphens are sometimes needed to distinguish between two words that are spelled alike but have different meanings. This is most common with the prefix *re-* (meaning "again"). However, other prefixes can cause problems too.

the *re-creation* of a crime	a *recreation* facility
purchased at the *co-op*	hiding in the chicken *coop*

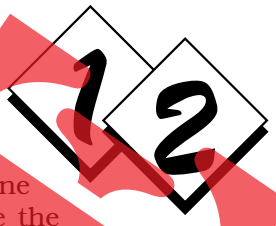
You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Perfect Prefix

Instructions: Circle the correct word in each sentence below. You may need a good dictionary to complete this exercise. If your dictionary indicates that more than one spelling is acceptable, circle the one that is listed first. If a particular word isn't listed in your dictionary, look to see how similar words are written and follow that pattern. (Check your answers on page 162.)

Example: We were asked to recreate / (re-create) the crime for *America's Most Wanted*.

1. Only noncombustible / non-combustible roofing materials are acceptable.
2. Greg is an expert in counterterrorism / counter-terrorism.
3. Please ask the teachers to recount / re-count their students to ensure everyone is present.
4. It's time to update our prefire / pre-fire plans.
5. What are your instructions for postoperative / post-operative care?
6. Rescuers redoubled / re-doubled their efforts when they heard voices from within the collapsed structure.
7. Rescuers had to reinforce / re-inforce the collapsed structure as they continued to search for trapped victims.
8. Who will coteach / co-teach the selfdefense / self-defense class?
9. Fortunately, the suspect's weapon misfired / mis-fired.
10. The occupant is still unaccounted for, so we need to research / re-search the house.
11. The drug has some powerful aftereffects / after-effects.
12. There are no contraindications / contra-indications for administering epinephrine during a life-threatening allergic reaction.
13. They're armed with semiautomatic / semi-automatic weapons.
14. Preexisting / pre-existing conditions can make it harder to get medical insurance.
15. It may be a long time before we can deescalate / de-escalate our operations in Iraq.

The Case of the One-Two Punch



Common Violations

Meanings can change depending on whether expressions are written as one word or two. Writers who are unaware of the differences sometimes use the following expressions incorrectly.

One Word	Two Words	One Word	Two Words
anymore	any more	into	in to
anyone	any one	maybe	may be
anytime	any time	onto	on to
awhile	a while	someday	some day
everyday	every day	someone	some one
everyone	every one	upon	up on

Crime Prevention

Understanding the different definitions of the words is vital. If you don't know the definitions, check your dictionary. Let's look at a couple examples to see how meanings differ. *Anymore* means "any longer" or "presently." *Any more* means "additional."

> It shouldn't rain *anymore* today. However, we may have trouble with flooding if we get *any more* rain this week.

Everyday means "daily, usual, or common." *Every day* means "each day."

> False alarms are an *everyday* occurrence at this building. We've had false alarms almost *every day* since they installed the new alarm system.

To determine whether to write *anyone, everyone,* and *someone* as one word or two, look at the construction of the sentence. If the pronoun is followed by an *of* phrase or is used to mean "one of a number of things," use two words. In all other cases, use one word.

> *Two words:* *Every one* of us was exhausted after fighting the fire.
> *One word:* *Everyone* was exhausted after fighting the fire.
>
> *Two words:* *Any one* of the drums could be leaking.
> *Two words:* *Any one* could be leaking.
> *One word:* Does *anyone* know which drum is leaking?

Finally, with words such as *into, onto,* and *upon*, look to see if part of the word seems to belong to another expression. If so, it should be written as two words.

> *One word:* Engine One's crew went *into* the building.
> *Two words:* Engine One's crew went *in to* search the building.
> *(*In *is part of the verb phrase* went in. To *is part of the infinitive* to search.*)*
>
> *One word:* I'll investigate it *upon* my return.
> *Two words:* I've been assigned to follow *up on* your case.
> *(*Up *is part of the verb phrase* follow up.*)*

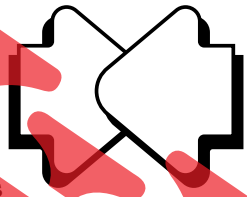
You Be the Detective: The Case of the One-Two Punch

Instructions: In each of the sentences below, determine whether it is appropriate to use one word or two. Circle the correct answer. You may need a dictionary to complete this exercise. (Check your answers on page 162.)

Example: It shouldn't rain (anymore) / any more today.

1. Don't hesitate to call anytime / any time you have a question.
2. I'll be teaching at the academy everyday / every day this week.
3. Everyone / every one of the workers escaped unharmed.
4. I'll follow upon / up on this tomorrow.
5. How did they climb onto / on to the roof without a ladder?
6. I need to set sometime / some time aside to study for the promotional exam.
7. We may need to wait awhile / a while before the kidnappers call again.
8. The injury maybe / may be more serious than it looks.
9. Mark will make a good chief someday / some day.
10. To qualify for the grant money, we need to train everyone / every one in the department.
11. The police are onto / on to us.
12. Did anyone / any one see what happened?
13. We're hoping someone / some one can identify the victim.
14. The fire had been burning for awhile / a while before it was discovered.
15. She slipped into / in to a coma this morning.
16. Do you have anymore / any more questions?
17. The same thing could have happened to anyone / any one of us.
18. Maybe / may be I'll retire this year.
19. Will you have anytime / any time to meet with me today?
20. I'll have to testify in court someday / some day this week.

The Case of the Closing Compounds



Common Violations

In "The Case of the One-Two Punch," we explored some common expressions that have different meanings depending on whether they are written as one word or two. However, that case touched on a very small subset of the bigger topic of compound words. This case will emphasize another small subset of compound words. The violations we'll look at here are:

- Using open or hyphenated compounds when closed compounds are probably better.
- Failing to choose the correct spelling based on meaning or usage.

Crime Prevention

A good dictionary is essential. New words enter our vocabulary on a regular basis. A ten-year-old dictionary won't necessarily reflect these changes. Nor should you totally rely on the spell checkers built into your computer software applications. While they are indispensable for 99% of your spelling needs, they often don't contain the latest information on compound words. My suggestion is to invest in a modern, comprehensive dictionary. Not all dictionaries will agree, by the way, but a good one will be well worth the investment.

The trend is toward closed compounds. The trend today is toward using closed (one word) compounds versus hyphenated ones. Often when expressions are introduced into our vocabulary, they are written as separate words. In time, as these two words begin to gain acceptance as a unit, they may be hyphenated. Finally, depending on how they are used, they may eventually be combined as closed compounds.

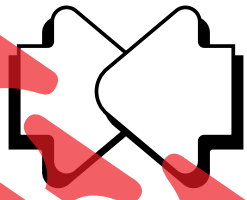
Obviously, not all expressions go through this progression. Some remain open. Some remain hyphenated. Some enter our vocabulary as closed compounds, never going through the open or hyphenated stages.

Clarity is the key. Clarity is an important factor in how an expression is written and whether it changes over time. For example, electronic correspondence was referred to as *e-mail*, not *e mail*, when the term was introduced because the hyphenated expression was much clearer. Now, however, many people write *email* because it's simpler and there's no loss of clarity. Either *e-mail* or *email* is acceptable. (I've been writing it as *email* in recent years because of the trend toward closed compounds and because *email* is clear and simple.)

Spelling may be determined by meaning. As you saw in "The Case of the One-Two Punch," expressions may have different meanings depending on whether they are written as one word or two. A *blackboard* is a *chalkboard*. But what is a *black board*? Perhaps the reader will interpret it to mean a *chalkboard*. However, it can also mean *any* board colored black.

Different options may be acceptable. Many expressions can be written more than one way. Usually the more common spelling is listed first in the dictionary. For example, it's more common today to write *firefighter* as one word than as two (*fire fighter*), so current dictionaries will list *firefighter* before *fire fighter*. Older dictionaries may show the reverse. (When an organization such as the *International Association of Fire Fighters [IAFF]* has adopted a particular spelling in its name, use the organization's correct name regardless of how you might spell *firefighters* in ordinary writing.)

The Case of the Closing Compounds



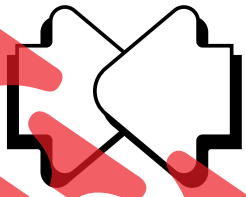
Usage may determine spelling. Some expressions change form when changing from one part of speech to another. For example, they may be written as one word when used as a noun or an adjective, but as two words when written as a verb. Here is another example of how a good dictionary is essential. Computer spell checkers won't identify if you've chosen the wrong spelling based on form of speech.

As a Noun:	I want a good *workout* today.
As an Adjective:	I'll be in the *workout* room.
As a Verb:	I'm going to *work out* for an hour.

As a Noun:	Carol is my *backup*.
As an Adjective:	Carol has been assigned to the *backup* team.
As a Verb:	Carol and her partner will *back up* the entry team.

Dictionaries often don't list industry-specific expressions. Some expressions are so new to our vocabulary or so unique to the emergency services field that they have not been incorporated into the dictionary. For example, we have coined the expression *hazmat* as an abbreviation for *hazardous material*. Standard dictionaries don't list *hazmat, haz mat,* or *haz-mat*. So, what it the correct way to abbreviate *hazardous material*? Whichever way you choose. Just be consistent, at least within the same document or application. (I've been writing *hazmat* in recent years because of the trend toward closed compounds and because *hazmat* is clear and simple.)

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Closing Compounds



Instructions: Circle the correct spelling in the sentences below. You may need a good dictionary for this exercise. If your dictionary indicates that more than one option is acceptable, choose the one listed first. (Check your answers on page 162.)

Example: Carol has been assigned to the (backup) / back up team.

1. We found the patient upstairs / up stairs in the hall.
2. Two policewomen / police women escorted the suspect.
3. The school is conducting a firedrill / fire drill today.
4. You can bring the newborn baby to any firehouse / fire house.
5. This class is designed for healthcare / health care / health-care workers.
6. Where is the shutoff / shut off / shut-off valve?
7. The hostages were blindfolded / blind folded.
8. We were able to knockdown / knock down the fire quickly.
9. The USAR team can be airborne / air borne in four hours.
10. The caller reported hearing a bloodcurdling / blood curdling / blood-curdling scream.
11. We requested mutual aid for the pileup / pile up / pile-up on the freeway.
12. Gang members frequently hangout / hang out there.
13. We had a breakdown / break down in communications.
14. Paramedics were directed to standby / stand by / stand-by until police determined it was safe for them to enter.
15. The boy is a troublemaker / trouble maker / trouble-maker.
16. The kids have been brainwashed / brain washed / brain-washed by what they see on TV.
17. I know a shortcut / short cut through the woods.
18. The teens planned to ripoff / rip off / rip-off a convenience store.
19. Witnesses said he shouted, "This is a holdup / hold up."
20. The evidence points to a blackmail / black mail scheme.

The Case of the Compound Adjective

Common Violations

The rules regarding compound adjectives probably cause as many headaches for grammar experts as do the rules regarding commas. Many experts try to simply compound adjectives by saying that you should hyphenate compound adjectives when they precede the noun, but not when they follow the noun. However, this is not an accurate guideline. The most common violation with compound adjectives is failing to use hyphens when needed. However, writers sometimes use hyphens unnecessarily.

Crime Prevention

Clarity is the ultimate goal. When expressions are written as *open* compounds (two words), it is because the meaning is clear. It is not necessary to write them as closed or hyphenated compounds to show the relation between the words. The expressions are naturally thought of as single units.

When expressions are written as *closed* compounds (one word), it is because the meaning is clear and the closed form is either more desirable or easier to read than an open or hyphenated form.

When expressions are written as *hyphenated* compounds, it is often because the meaning might not be clear if the compounds were open. Hyphens help show the relation between the words.

Open Compounds	Closed Compounds	Hyphenated Compounds
hazardous materials incident	*bloodborne* pathogen	*small-claims* court
criminal justice system	*manslaughter* charges	*white-collar* crime
civil service examination	*statewide* emergency	*high-voltage* wires

Hyphens are to English what parentheses are to math. It may help to think of hyphens as filling a similar role to the one parentheses play in mathematical equations. Parentheses group items together. Notice how shifting the parentheses changes the relation between the numbers and the words below.

(3 x 9) - 5 = 22	3 x (9 - 5) = 12
(small animal) hospital	small (animal hospital)
(second alarm) assignment	second (alarm assignment)

With the hyphen, a *small-animal hospital* clearly refers to a hospital for small animals. Without a hyphen, readers may assume that one is writing about a small facility that cares for animals of any size. With the hyphen, *second-alarm assignment* clearly refers to the crews dispatched on an incident that has gone to at least two alarms because additional resources were needed. Without a hyphen, *second alarm assignment* might be misunderstood to mean the crews dispatched to the second of at least two alarm calls.

Hyphens compensate for changes in form and order. Hyphens are commonly used in compound adjectives because of the way they are formed. A compound adjective is often a shorthand version of an adjective phrase or clause.

Original: It was a situation *that could be the difference between life and death.*
Revised: It was a *life-or-death* situation.

The Case of the Compound Adjective

There are two significant changes in the previous example. First, several words were eliminated. Second, the remaining words were relocated—placed before the noun they modify, as if they were ordinary adjectives. Tying them together with hyphens helps to make the relation clear.

Changes in word order and/or form often signal the need for a hyphen. In the examples below, *threatens* becomes *threatening* (change in form) and moves from before the word *life* to after it.

Original: Doctors say she has an illness *that threatens her life*.
Revised: Doctors say she has a *life-threatening* illness.

Some compound adjectives need to be hyphenated before and after a noun. Hyphens are *generally* not needed *after* the noun—as long as the words play a normal role in a normal order. However, if the compound words that follow a noun exist in an abnormal form or an abnormal order, the expression is still a compound adjective. Most need to be hyphenated whether they come before or after the noun.

Each of the examples below contains an inverted word order. *Knee-deep* water refers to water as deep (or as high) as my knee. *Sweet-smelling* odor refers to an odor that smells sweet. And here there's a change not only in word order but also in form (*smelling* versus *smells*).

Before noun: We waded through *knee-deep* flood water.
After noun: The flood water was *knee-deep*.

Before noun: The chemical has a *sweet-smelling* odor.
After noun: The odor is *sweet-smelling*.

Compound adjectives formed with numbers need to be hyphenated. Most compound adjectives containing a number need to be hyphenated before a noun. This is true whether you are using words or figures to represent the number. When the expression is used after the noun, it is hyphenated if used as a compound adjective, but not if used in a normal manner.

Before noun: The victim had *third-degree* burns.
After noun: The burn was classified as *third-degree*.

Before noun: The fire was fanned by *35-mile-per-hour* winds. (or *35-mph* winds)
After noun: Winds were gusting up to *35 miles per hour*. (or *35 mph*)

When in doubt, check your dictionary. Most dictionaries provide only limited information on how to handle compound adjectives, but they can still be very helpful ... assuming you have a comprehensive, modern dictionary. Older dictionaries and the dictionaries built in to many computer spell checkers often don't reflect the current trends in hyphenation.

Closed compounds will generally be listed in the dictionary, unless they are industry-specific. Hyphenated compounds in common use will also usually be listed in the dictionary. Expressions that are too new to the language or those that aren't in common use won't be listed. However, if a particular expression isn't listed in your dictionary, look to see how similar words are written and follow that pattern. For example, my dictionary does not list *water-reactive* but does list *water-resistant*. Since both are formed by joining a noun and an adjective, it's safe to assume that *water-reactive* should be hyphenated just as *water-resistant* is.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Compound Adjective

Instructions: Indicate where hyphens are needed in the sentences below. If the sentence is correct as is, write OK next to it. (Check your answers on page 162.)

Example: Doctors say she has a life threatening illness.

1. People became disoriented as they tried to escape through the smoke filled hallway.
2. Residents were panic stricken when flood control measures failed.
3. He led officers on a high speed chase.
4. The driver fled on foot when he realized he reached a dead end.
5. An atmosphere is considered oxygen deficient if it contains less than 19.5% oxygen.
6. The command staff was short handed until the off duty chiefs arrived.
7. My grandfather was insulin dependent.
8. A citizen flagged me down to report a drive by shooting.
9. We have a description of the vehicle involved in the hit and run accident.
10. She was taken to an out of the way location, raped, beaten, then left for dead.
11. He was charged with first degree murder.
12. The patient has a partially amputated finger.
13. Long term exposure to the chemical may cause central nervous system disorders.
14. It was a fast moving fire.
15. We need a cost effective alternative.
16. She is in a drug induced coma.
17. It was an ill fated journey.
18. A Class A fire is one involving ordinary combustibles.
19. The 9 year old girl was kidnapped at gunpoint.
20. He is a well known drug dealer.

The Case of the Homonym High Jinks

Background

Homonyms are words that sound alike but are spelled differently and have different meanings. In some cases, the pronunciation of homonyms is not precisely alike, but is similar enough that only clear enunciation makes them distinguishable. A good example are the words *assure*, *ensure*, and *insure*.

Common Violations

Writers often use the wrong word when having to chose between homonyms. The following is a very brief list of words that are often used incorrectly. Notice how sometimes a single letter is all that differentiates between the words.

Difference: One Vowel

adapt	adopt
affect	effect
altar	alter
allusion	illusion
breach	breech
capital	capitol
coarse	course
miner	minor
shear	sheer
steal	steel
stationary	stationery

Difference: Misc.

accept	except
allude	elude
brake	break
conscience	conscious
council	counsel
elicit	illicit
eminent	imminent
personal	personnel
principal	principle
role	roll
undo	undue
weather	whether

Difference: Single or Double

chose	choose
desert	dessert
lose	loose

Difference: ice or ise

advice	advise
device	devise

Difference: ce or ts

incidence	incidents
patience	patients
presence	presents

Difference: Plain or with "e"

aid	aide
breath	breathe
envelop	envelope
loath	loathe

Triplets

assure	ensure	insure
cite	sight	site
to	too	two
vain	vane	vein

Crime Prevention

Computer spell checkers won't identify when you've used the wrong word, so it's vital to understand the differences between homonyms. We'll go over a few particularly troublesome homonyms from the lists above. However, a good dictionary will be your best weapon against mistakenly using the wrong word. Careful proofreading is also important, since it's easy to use the wrong word when writing quickly.

The Case of the Homonym High Jinks (continued)

Assure, ensure, and insure. *Assure, ensure,* and *insure* all mean "to make secure or certain." However, there are significant differences between them. *Assure* refers to persons, with the sense of setting a person's mind at rest. *Ensure* means to "make sure" or "make safe." *Insure* is used only when referring to insurance. Many people mistakenly use *insure* when they should use *ensure.*

The homeowner *assured* us that everyone was out.

Overhaul is done to *ensure* that the fire is extinguished and that there are no hidden hot spots.

Did they *insure* the home against fire?

Affect and effect. Most people are familiar with the common meanings of *affect* and *effect. Affect* is usually a verb meaning "to influence or change." *Effect* is usually a noun referring to a result or state of being operational.

Alcohol can quickly *affect* a person's ability to drive safely.

With some people, the *effects* of alcohol impairment can be seen after only one drink.

However, *affect* and *effect* have less familiar meanings too. *Effect* is sometimes used as a verb meaning "to produce a result." *Affect* is used as a noun only in the field of psychiatry. It refers to an expressed or observed emotional response.

We must *effect* a quick rescue.

The *affect* is typical of a schizophrenic individual.

Principal and principle. Many people remember the difference between *principal* and *principle* by citing an old familiar saying that "the (school) principal is your pal." However, the noun *principal* has several definitions. It can refer to the person in charge of an organization, to the primary person responsible for something, or to a capital sum of money.

The *principal* found a gun in the boy's locker.

These students are accessories to the crime. The *principal* is still at large.

What is the total loan amount with *principal* and interest?

Principal is also used as an adjective meaning "primary or most important."

My *principal* complaint is that we didn't get enough hands-on training.

A *principle* is a fundamental rule, a code of conduct, or a natural tendency.

We operate under the *principle* that a person is considered innocent until proven guilty.

It is a *principle* of nature that gases expand when heated.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Homonym High Jinks

Instructions: Circle the correct word in each of the sentences below. You may need a dictionary to complete this exercise. (Check your answers on page 163.)

Example: Overhaul is done to assure / (ensure) / insure there are no hidden hot spots.

1. The incident commander requested an aid / aide to assist him.
2. Someone planted an explosive device / devise in the lobby.
3. The principal / principle hazard associated with this chemical is toxicity.
4. Police anticipate that she will return to the cite / sight / site of the crime.
5. Both drivers suffered only miner / minor injuries.
6. The chemical affects / effects the central nervous system.
7. The bomb squad will advice / advise us how far to evacuate.
8. We've seen a high incidence / incidents of arson fires in this neighborhood.
9. Paramedics transported nine patience / patients complaining of respiratory distress.
10. The suspect may try to altar / alter his appearance.
11. Another body was found in the desert / dessert last night.
12. How long before the gas cloud envelops / envelopes the neighborhood?
13. They are in eminent / imminent danger.
14. A break in the weather / whether allowed us to gain control of the fire.
15. Police found elicit / illicit drugs in the glove compartment.
16. Everyone accept / except the driver was wearing seat belts.
17. Detectives uncovered a plot to bomb the state capital / capitol.
18. We'll have an officer tail / tale the suspect.
19. Do you have the correct personal / personnel protective equipment?
20. Is the victim conscience / conscious?

(continued next page)

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Homonym High Jinks
(continued from the previous page)

21. The plane lost power during its ascent / assent.
22. We waited with baited / bated breath.
23. The suspected alluded / eluded capture.
24. The children coward / cowered in the corner.
25. I learned about his sordid / sorted history by searching through public records.
26. The suspect waived / waved his right to an attorney.
27. Are you willing to accept / except responsibility if something goes wrong?
28. We have nothing left to lose / loose.
29. They've consumed to / too / two much alcohol.
30. She gave her heart and sole / soul to the guy, and he betrayed her trust.
31. I was unable to hear / here anything for hours after the explosion.
32. We pride / pried the door with the Halligan.
33. The body was washed ashore during high tide / tied.
34. It's easier to hit a stationary / stationery target than it is to hit a moving one.
35. You're liable / libel to get hurt if you lift with your back.
36. I'd like some incite / insight on what to expect.
37. Who's the heroin / heroine of the story?
38. He lead / led us on a wild goose chase.
39. Nothing we can do will lessen / lesson your grief.
40. The injury is to the lumbar / lumber region.

The Case of the Wrong Denotation

Common Violations

Writers sometimes use words that are close to the intended word but that have different denotations (dictionary definitions). "The Case of the Homonym High Jinks" on the previous pages provided examples of words that are often confused because they sound so much alike. This case includes some word pairs that sound alike and some that don't. Nonetheless, they are words easily confused by writers.

Crime Prevention

Once again, a good dictionary is your best weapon against mistakenly using the wrong word. Computer spell checkers won't help you if you've correctly spelled a word whose denotation is wrong for the context of the sentence.

Be aware of words with similar spellings that are often confused. Take, for example, *prostate* and *prostrate*. The *prostate* is a gland in the male body. *Prostrate* means "lying face down (prone) on the ground." It can also mean "helpless, tired, worn, or utterly dejected."

> Beverley was *prostrate* with grief after her husband died of *prostate* cancer.

Some words may be used interchangeably in colloquial speech, but there are distinctions between them that should be observed in writing. For example, both *hanged* and *hung* are used to describe "death by hanging." However, *hanged* is the preferred form when referring to a legal execution, while *hung* is more common when referring to suicide. *Hung* is also used for all meanings other than "death by hanging."

> Wilson was *hanged* for his crimes. Three days later, his former cellmate *hung* himself.
>
> I *hung* the rope from a tree.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Wrong Denotation

Instructions: Circle the correct word in each of the sentences below. You may need a dictionary to complete this exercise. (Check your answers on page 163.)

Example: Gary was diagnosed with (prostate) / prostrate cancer.

1. Dr. Smith would say only that the patient is suffering an infirmary / infirmity.
2. We dragged / drug the victim out of the burning building.
3. The large amount / number of patients justified activating the mass casualty incident plan.
4. We have fewer / less police officers than do comparable cities our size.
5. The hostage crisis came to a climactic / climatic ending when police stormed the building just after midnight.
6. Negotiators were unable to diffuse / defuse the tense situation.
7. The driver was transporting military ordinance / ordnance in an unmarked vehicle.
8. We worked feverishly in the torturous / treacherous heat to contain the fire.
9. I respectfully / respectively request your assistance.
10. Alcohol is a factor in a large percent / percentage of all fatal automobile accidents.
11. The suspect inferred / implied that she intended to kill her husband.
12. John preceded / proceeded me into the room.
13. A disinterested / an uninterested third party may be able to help us resolve this dispute.
14. I gave him explicit / implicit instructions to remain outside.
15. They were fortuitous / fortunate that no one was seriously injured.
16. The power of the hurricane was incredible / incredulous.
17. We won't have our biannual / biennial employee recognition dinner this year because we had one last year.
18. It's a moot / mute point now that the damage is done.
19. We must continually / continuously be alert for safety hazards.
20. The sheriff's department has collaborating / corroborating evidence that will make our case stronger.

The Case of the Wrong Connotation

Common Violations

Words that have similar denotations (dictionary definitions) often have different connotations (additional implications or emotional overtones). Writers who are unaware of these different connotations sometimes use words that are wrong for the context of the sentence.

Crime Prevention

Words with the wrong connotation can be misleading or distracting. The examples below refer to a prisoner facing the death penalty. While the prisoner will be dead no matter how you look at it, the word that most accurately conveys how the prison system will carry out the death penalty is *executed*. If the word *killed* or *murdered* is used instead, it suggests something more fiendish, such as being stabbed by a fellow inmate.

Wrong: The prisoner will be *killed* at midnight.
Right: The prisoner will be *executed* at midnight.

Different words can suggest images that evoke different emotions, positive or negative. For example, readers are likely to picture an *obese* patient as heavier than a *large* patient. If the patient is truly very heavy and your goal is accuracy, the word *obese* may be more appropriate. However, if you need to minimize the emotional overtone to avoid offending someone, the word *large* may be sufficient. Or unless there's a reason not to do so, perhaps the best approach is to cite the actual or approximate weight (if known).

Milder: We needed additional personnel to assist with lifting the *large* patient.
Stronger: We needed additional personnel to assist with lifting the *obese* patient.
Neutral: We needed additional personnel to assist with lifting the *400-pound* patient.

Once again, a good dictionary is invaluable. Avoid putting too much trust in a thesaurus, which doesn't distinguish between the additional implications and emotional overtones that different words can convey.

Sometimes it's difficult, if not impossible, to please everyone. Is someone in a wheelchair *handicapped*, *disabled*, or *physically impaired*? Ask three different people in wheelchairs, and you may get three different answers. If your employer has a policy on what language to use, follow it. If not, ask people who will be reading your documents (e.g., people in your department or community who use wheelchairs). They may not all agree, but they will respect you more for asking.

Connotation is directly related to imagery. *Storming* out of a room suggests a more intense departure than *stomping* out of a room. However, neither is as descriptive as the final version below, which demonstrates a principle particularly important when writing fiction: *Show, don't tell*. Whether this level of detail is appropriate for your documents will depend largely on the type of document you're writing and how that document will be used.

Milder: Claire *stomped* out of the room.
Stronger: Claire *stormed* out of the room.
Descriptive: Claire shoved her mother aside and shouted "I hate you" as she slammed the front door on her way out.

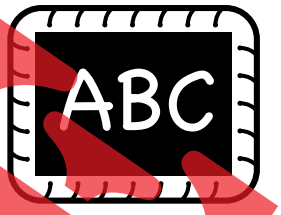
You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Wrong Connotation

Instructions: Circle the appropriate word in each sentence below. You may need a dictionary to complete this exercise. (Check your answers on page 163.)

Example: The prisoner will be killed / (executed) at midnight.

1. The building was demolished / destroyed by fire.
2. He confessed to blowing up the building because he was angry / mad at the government.
3. I am anxious / eager to start paramedic training.
4. Who will man / staff the brush patrol on July 4?
5. AIDS is a serious health plight / problem.
6. The suspect was seen arguing / disagreeing with the victim before the murder.
7. The story they told us in the academy left an endless / a lasting impression.
8. Dwayne's daring / reckless behavior nearly cost him his life.
9. The little girl was abducted / seized as she played in front of her house.
10. First examine / survey the scene for potential hazards.
11. The public information officer must be perceptive / sensitive to media deadlines.
12. Nerve agents are organophosphate compounds that assault / attack the nervous system.
13. We use foam to penetrate / pierce a deep-seated fire.
14. The balcony caved in / collapsed because it was overcrowded.
15. Emergency responders can be sued for negligence if acting beyond the range / scope of employment.

The Case of the Spelling Slip-Ups



Common Violations

Most readers will forgive an occasional spelling error. However, excessive spelling errors are distracting and may cause readers to doubt the accuracy of your information. And spelling errors can have dire consequences when it comes to drugs, poisons, and hazardous materials. It's beyond the scope of this book to cover spelling rules. However, we'll look at the following common violations:

- Failing to use spell checkers.
- Relying too much on spell checkers and not understanding their limitations.
- Spelling words correctly, but using the wrong words.
- Writing compound words incorrectly.
- Using British spellings instead of American spellings.
- Making spelling errors due to pronunciation or mispronunciation.
- Using the wrong form of a word.

Crime Prevention

Use spell checkers, but understand their limitations. Most computer programs have built-in spell checkers. Some alert you to errors as you type; others are not active until you select them from a menu. Most also allow users to customize the dictionary to add terms that would otherwise be flagged as errors.

It should be no surprise that spell checkers won't flag words that are spelled correctly but used incorrectly. That requires careful proofreading. However, keep in mind that many computer spell checkers are not as comprehensive nor as accurate as an authoritative printed dictionary.

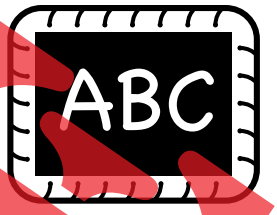
One of the biggest problems with using a dictionary is that you need to have some idea how to spell a word in order to look it up. Even spell checkers won't help you if you aren't somewhat close. However, a bad speller's dictionary lists words in order by common misspellings, so if spelling is one of your weaknesses, a bad speller's dictionary could be a tremendous asset.

Pay particular attention to frequently confused words. Many spelling errors are really errors in word choice instead. Because spell checkers won't catch these errors, writers must be vigilant in checking for them. Two previous cases dealt with those problems:

- "The Case of the Confusing Contractions" highlights a very common error—confusing contractions (e.g., *it's* and *you're*) with possessive pronouns (e.g., *its* and *your*).
- "The Case of the Homonym High Jinks" looks at homonyms—words that sound alike but are spelled differently and have different meanings (e.g., *affect* and *effect*).

Pay particular attention to compound words. Compound words can have different meanings depending on whether they are written closed (one word), open (two words), or hyphenated. Two previous cases ("The Case of the One-Two Punch" and "The Case of the Closing Compounds") gave examples. Obviously, a spell checker won't know if you've used the correct form. Beyond that, however, many computer spell checkers don't reflect the current trends in forming compound words. It's not uncommon for them to suggest hyphenating words that are found as closed compounds in authoritative printed dictionaries.

The Case of the Spelling Slip-Ups (continued)



Use American spellings. The differences between American and British spellings can cause confusion. Unless you are writing for a predominantly British audience, use the American spellings.

American Spelling	British Spelling
theater	theatre
canceled	cancelled
analyze	analyse

Pronounce words properly. Not all words are spelled the way they are pronounced. However, mispronouncing words can lead to further misspellings. The following are examples of words that are commonly mispronounced and thus often misspelled.

Correct	Incorrect
aspirin	asprin
disastrous	disasterous
frustrate	fustrate
incidentally	incidently
nuclear	nucular

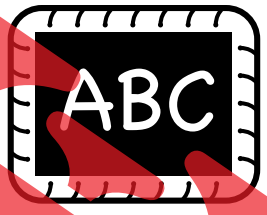
Recognize when words are not spelled the way they are pronounced. While careful pronunciation can help you spell better, it does not solve all spelling problems. Many words are not spelled the way they sound. Some words have silent letters, for example, the final *b* in *bomb* or the *p* and the *e* in *pneumonia*.

Some sounds can be created by more than one letter combination. For example, *snuff* and *rough* are pronounced similarly, even though they are spelled quite differently. Conversely, the words *cough*, *enough*, *though*, and *through* all contain the *ough* letter combination, but each is pronounced differently.

Use the correct form of a word. It's also possible to use the wrong form of a word, as illustrated in the first example below. Often the writer knows the correct word, but he or she is working quickly and fails to catch the error in the proofing stage. And because the word is correctly spelled, the spell checker won't catch it either.

Wrong: *In additional*, he was driving a stolen vehicle.
Right: *In addition*, he was driving a stolen vehicle.
Right: *Additionally*, he was driving a stolen vehicle.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Spelling Slip-Ups



Instructions: Identify and correct any spelling errors in the sentences below. You may need a dictionary to complete this exercise. (Check your answers on page 163.)

Example: The nucular power plant is well-protected from the threat of terrorism.
nuclear

1. It was a mischievious prank that turned deadly.

2. We received mutual aid from the Sunnyvale Department of Pubic Safely.

3. The elderly driver accidently put her car in drive instead of reverse and crashed into the side of the restrant.

4. Saturday's concert was cancelled after police recieved what they considered to be a credible threat of a terrorist attack.

5. Use a 0.5% solution of hypochlorate (bleach) fro emergency decon.

6. The diver was complaining of head and neck pane after his care was struck from behind.

7. I considered a offensive fire attack to dangerous, specially after the business owner showed me the chemical inventory.

8. If the hazardous material poses a threat to life, begin emergincy decon imediately.

9. Life safety takes precedents over enviormental protection.

10. The house sustained allot of damage becauze the boys displayed such poor judgement.

The Case of the Good and Bad Options

Common Violations

Three sets of adjectives and adverbs are commonly used incorrectly. They are:

- Bad and badly
- Good and well
- Real and really

Crime Prevention

Bad or badly. *Bad* is an adjective meaning "not good." *Badly* is an adverb meaning "in a defective, incorrect, or undesirable way."

She was *badly* injured in a *bad* accident.

If you remember that adjectives are used to describe nouns and that adverbs are used to describe verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs, you should have no trouble choosing between *bad* and *badly* in most situations. However, *bad* is also used after a *linking verb*, one that expresses a state of being. The most common linking verbs are *be* and its various forms (*am, are, been, being, is, was,* and *were*). Others include *become, appear, look, feel,* and *seem*. A common error is to use *badly* instead of *bad* with linking verbs. Other verbs of the senses (such as *smell, taste,* and *sound*) also commonly require *bad* versus *badly*.

The key is that *bad* is used to describe the subject of the sentence (the noun), not an action the subject is engaged in. In the example below, *bad* is used to describe me (my emotion), not a tactile activity, such as touching with my fingers.

I feel *bad* (not *badly*) about what happened.

Good or well. *Good* is an adjective meaning "satisfactory, commendable, favorable, or reliable." *Well* is an adverb meaning "in a good or satisfactory manner" or "to a considerable extent or degree."

We have a *good* crew that works *well* together.

When referring to the state of one's health, it is possible to use either *good* or *well*. To *feel or look well* means "to be in good health," whereas to *feel good* generally means "to be in good spirits." To *look good* means "to look pleasing in appearance."

Real or really. *Real* is an adjective meaning "true, actual, or genuine." *Really* is an adverb meaning "truly, actually, or genuinely."

Those look like *real* injuries. You do a *really* good job of applying moulage.

Real is often used informally as an adverb in colloquial speech: *You do a real good job.* However, you should avoid using *real* as an adverb in writing.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Good and Bad Options

Instructions: Circle the correct word in each of the sentences below.
(Check your answers on page 163.)

Example: I feel (bad) / badly about what happened.

1. Karen was hurt bad / badly.
2. We have a real / really strong case against the suspect.
3. The situation looks bad / badly.
4. The driver claims his car was running bad / badly before the accident.
5. Most of the recruits are performing good / well in the academy.
6. One recruit has scored bad / badly on most of the quizzes.
7. My vacuum smelled bad / badly before I noticed the motor smoking.
8. The operation is real / really dangerous.
9. They look good / well in their Class A uniforms.
10. Laura complained that the medication tasted bad / badly.
11. She reacted bad / badly to the medication.
12. Maureen hadn't been feeling good / well for several days before she was hospitalized.

The Case of the Transitive Tricksters

Common Violations

This case examines a handful of verbs that writers sometimes use incorrectly because of not understanding the differences between them. All three sentences below *look* reasonable, but the verbs *lay*, *raises*, and *set* are wrong for the context in which they're used. Writers commonly confuse *lay* and *lie*, *raise* and *rise*, and *set* and *sit*.

Incorrect: Please *lay* still while I check for injuries.

Incorrect: Our aerial ladder *raises* to a height of 100 feet.

Incorrect: The defendant's story doesn't *set* well with me.

Crime Prevention

The first key to avoiding these common violations is to understand the difference between transitive verbs and intransitive verbs. A *transitive verb* requires a direct object (something being acted upon) to complete its meaning. An *intransitive verb* does not.

Some verbs are strictly transitive or intransitive. However, some can be either, depending on how they are used. In the examples below, the verbs are transitive when there's an object being acted upon (e.g., *the fire engine* or *the story*). Otherwise, they are intransitive.

Transitive: to *drive* the fire engine
Intransitive: to *drive* to the fire

Transitive: to *stop* the story
Intransitive: to *stop* talking

Lay or lie. Let's look at *lay* and *lie*. *Lay* means "to put or place" someone or something. *Lie* means "to rest or recline." *Lay* is primarily transitive; *lie* is intransitive. In other words, you can *lay* something, but you cannot *lie* anything.

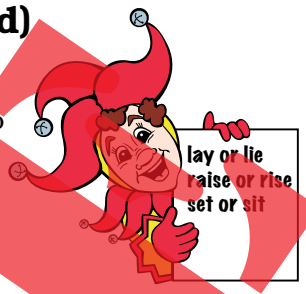
Transitive: Please *lay* the backboard next to the patient.
Intransitive: Please *lie* still while I check for injuries.

Lay also has many intransitive uses (e.g., *to lay back*, *to lay off*, and *to lay over*). Common sense often helps writers know whether *lay* or *lie* is correct in these situations. One says *lay off* versus *lie off* and *lay over* versus *lie over*. Sometimes either word works (e.g., *to lay back* or *lie back* and *to lay in wait* or *to lie in wait*). However, many experts say that in these instances you should choose *lay* only if you can substitute the word *put* or *place*; otherwise, you should use *lie*.

Raise or rise. *Raise* (transitive) and *rise* (intransitive) are similar to *lay* and *lie*. You can *raise* something, but you cannot *rise* anything.

Transitive: Please *raise* the aerial ladder to its full height.
Intransitive: Our aerial ladder *rises* to a height of 100 feet.

The Case of the Transitive Tricksters (continued)



Set or sit. *Set* is primarily a transitive verb used when the meaning is "to put or place" something. *Sit* is chiefly an intransitive verb used when one means "to be seated."

Transitive: Please *set* the chairs in a circle.
Intransitive: Please *sit* down so we can begin.

Both *set* and *sit* have several other meanings. *Set* is relatively easy. For example, one *sets* goals, *sets* things on fire, or *sets* traps. *Sit*, however, is used in other circumstances where one might mistakenly use *set*. Use *sit* when you mean "to cause to be seated," "to remain quiet or inactive," or "to be accepted as indicated."

I'd like to *sit* him down and talk to him.

Let's *sit* on this for a few days before making a decision.

The idea doesn't *sit* well with me.

Other tenses. So far we've looked only at the present tense of each verb. However, most of these are irregular verbs; they don't follow the normal pattern of adding *d* or *ed* when forming the past tense and past participle. Notice, also, that the past tense of *lie* is *lay*. These irregular patterns can add to the confusion. Unfortunately, there's no easy way to deal with it. It's a matter of memorizing the words.

Present	Past	Present Participle	Past Participle
lay	laid	laying	(had) laid
lie	lay	lying	(had) lain
raise	raised	raising	(has) raised
rise	rose	rising	(has) risen
set	set	setting	(has) set
sit	sat	sitting	(has) sat

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Transitive Tricksters

Instructions: Circle the correct word in each sentence below. (Check your answers on page 163.)

Example: Please lay / (lie) still while I check for injuries.

1. The reporting party said the patient is laying / lying in the street next to his motorcycle.
2. Direct the walking wounded to set / sit on the bleachers while we triage everyone else.
3. Keith quickly raised / rose through the ranks to become chief of our department.
4. I don't remember where I laid / lay my keys.
5. This is important. I don't want to set / sit on it too long.
6. I was raising / rising the flag in front of the station when I heard the explosion.
7. Drew set / sat his helmet on the tailboard of Engine 6.
8. The patient should be laying / lying in the left lateral position.
9. Set / sit tight until I give the signal.
10. Her blood pressure dropped when she sat / set up.
11. I ordered him to lay / lie the gun down.
12. The new fire station will set / sit on five acres donated by the late Mr. Winchester.
13. The new conference table can easily set / sit twenty people.
14. The child's temperature is raising / rising rapidly.
15. It's time to set / sit the plan in motion.

The Case of the Deciding Who(m)

Common Violations

Writers sometimes use *who* and *whom* incorrectly. The same is true for *whoever* and *whomever*. Even the experts sometimes struggle to determine the correct word. Incorrect usage doesn't affect the clarity of the message, but it can be distracting to readers who are more familiar with the rules.

Crime Prevention

Let's start by showing how *who, whom, whoever,* and *whomever* are related to other pronouns. Those in the left column are called *nominative* (or *subjective*) pronouns; they indicate *who* is doing the action. Those in the right column are *objective* pronouns; they reflect *who* is being acted upon (the object of the verb).

Nominative (or Subjective) Pronouns	Objective Pronouns
I	me
we	us
you	you
he	him
she	her
it	it
they	them
who	*whom*
whoever	*whomever*

If you're not sure which pronoun to use (*who, whom, whoever,* or *whomever*), try substituting one of the other personal pronouns. If the nominative form works, use *who* or *whoever*. If the objective form is required, use *whom* or *whomever*. (Sometimes the substitution test requires mentally rearranging the sentence, as in the second example below.)

Who reported the accident. (*She* reported the accident.)

Whom did you report the accident to? (I reported the accident to *her*.)

When more than one person is referred to in the sentence, the substitution test can be trickier. Focus your attention on the words introduced by *who, whom, whoever* or *whomever*, as underlined in the sentences below.

The captain from Rescue 14 is the one *who* called for the second alarm. (*He* called for the second alarm.)

I want to know *whom* we are transporting by helicopter. (We are transporting *him*.)

The chief will promote *whoever* is best for the position. (*She* is best for the position.)

We will save *whomever* we can. (We can save *them*.)

The Case of the Deciding Who(m) (continued)

This is not always as easy as it looks. Sometimes it's downright tricky.

The media want a picture of *whoever* participated in the rescue. (*We* participated in the rescue. The media may want a picture of *us*, but *we* participated in the rescue.)

Everyone wants to know *who* you think will be promoted first. (You think *she* will be promoted first.)

Everyone wants to know *whom* you think the chief will promote first. (You think the chief will promote *her* first.)

Who should I say witnessed the accident. (*They* witnessed the accident.)

Whom did you say paramedics wanted to transport first. (You said paramedics wanted to transport *her* first.)

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Deciding Who(m)

Instructions: Circle the correct pronoun in each sentence below. (Check your answers on page 163.)

Example: Who / (whom) did you report the accident to?

1. Who / whom did you arrest this morning?
2. Have you identified who / whom needs to be decontaminated?
3. I'd like to interview whoever / whomever witnessed the accident.
4. Rick will interview whoever / whomever he can.
5. The matter of who / whom is responsible for cleanup has not been determined.
6. The suspect who / whom officers were chasing eluded capture.
7. Whoever / whomever shot the victim is long gone.
8. Who / whom found the body?
9. To who / whom did you give the evidence?
10. Evacuate whoever / whomever is still in the building.
11. Start treating whoever / whomever has been triaged as "immediate."
12. Start extricating whoever / whomever you can remove most easily.
13. Who / whom did you say has a fractured femur?
14. Do you remember who / whom you transported to Stanford Medical Center?
15. Can you tell me who / whom was transported in the first ambulance?

The Case of the Relative Pronouns

Common Violations

Writers sometimes struggle to determine the correct relative pronoun (*who, that,* or *which*) when faced with a choice.

Crime Prevention

Who or that. Use either *who* or *that* when referring to people. *Who* (or *whom*) is more personal; it is appropriate when referring to an individual or group of individuals. *That* is more impersonal; it is more appropriate when referring to types or classes of people. If it's difficult to choose between *who* and *that*, even with these guidelines, chances are that either one is acceptable.

Jeff is someone *who* can keep his cool in an emergency.

Becky is the kind of paramedic *that* I want working on me if I ever get hurt.

That or which. Use *that* or *which* when referring to objects, places, or animals. Many experts recommend using *that* for essential clauses and *which* for nonessential ones. (A *nonessential element* is one that can be deleted without changing the meaning of the sentence or leaving the sentence structurally incomplete. A nonessential element is set off by commas. An *essential element*, on the other hand, cannot be deleted from the sentence. An essential element is *not* set off by commas.)

Essential: The fire *that* we responded to this morning was caused by children playing with matches.
Nonessential: This fire, *which* was caused by children playing with matches, must have been smoldering for hours.

Some experts are more flexible, saying that *which* can be used in both essential and nonessential clauses. In fact, *which* may be better than *that* if *that* has already been used in the sentence.

That is the vehicle *which* ran the red light.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Relative Pronouns

Instructions: Circle the preferred pronoun in each sentence below. (Check your answers on page 164.)

Example: The fire that / which we responded to this morning was caused by children playing with matches.

1. Patricia is the only one on my crew that / who is bilingual.
2. That is the exit door that / which needs to be repaired.
3. The epicenter of the Loma Prieta earthquake, that / which occurred in 1985, was only a few miles from my home.
4. The epicenter of the earthquake that / which did so much damage in San Francisco was located in the Santa Cruz mountains, roughly 50 miles away.
5. David is someone that / who can make a class entertaining even when the subject is not.
6. Morgan is the type of storyteller that / who makes every fire sound like a conflagration.
7. The patient that / which / whom we transported to Valley Medical Center had third-degree burns on both hands.
8. The fingerprints that / which we found on the knife don't match our suspect's prints.
9. These fingerprints, that / which we lifted from the murder weapon, don't match anything in AFIS.
10. Our new contract, that / which the union and administration agreed to late last night, requires us to pay more for our health coverage than the previous contract did.

The Case of the Inappropriate Pronoun

Common Violations

This case addresses the common error of using either a nominative pronoun (e.g., *I*) or an objective pronoun (e.g., *me*) when the other one is called for.

Crime Prevention

A *nominative* (or *subjective*) *pronoun* is one that indicates who is doing the action (the subject of the sentence). Nominative pronouns are also used as *subject complements*. (A subject complement follows a linking verb, such as *be, seem,* or *appear*, and refers to the subject of the sentence.) An *objective pronoun* is one that reflects who or what is being acted upon (the object of the verb).

Nominative (Subjective) Pronouns	Objective Pronouns
I	me
we	us
you	you
he	him
she	her
it	it
they	them

A third type of pronoun, the *possessive pronoun*, is addressed very briefly on the next page.

Sentences with compound subjects. Compound subjects (two subjects sharing the same predicate) require nominative pronouns.

He and I rescued the woman from her burning home. (not *him and me*)

Patrick and I treated the patient for smoke inhalation. (not *Patrick and me*)

If you are unsure which type of pronoun to use, try using the pronouns alone. You could not say "*him* rescued" or "*me* rescued." Therefore, *he and I* is correct in the first sentence.

Pronouns following a form of the verb *be*. When a pronoun follows a form of the verb *be* (*be, am, are, is, was, were, been,* or *being*), it is being used as a subject complement. The nominative form is required. Notice that each sentence could be rewritten to make the pronoun the subject of the sentence. Mentally rearranging sentences like this can help you choose between nominative and objective pronouns.

It could have been *we* who were killed. *(We could have been the ones who were killed.)*

It was *I* who found the victim. *(I am the one who found the victim.)*

Two objects of a verb. Objective pronouns are used when the pronoun serves as the object of a verb (the person being acted upon).

I want to thank the firefighters who rescued my daughter and *me*.

This becomes clearer if you mentally omit the noun: *I want to thank the firefighters who rescued me* (not *I*).

The Case of the Inappropriate Pronoun

Object of a preposition. Objective pronouns are also used when the pronoun serves as the object of a preposition. A preposition is a connecting word; it connects a noun or pronoun to another word in the sentence. Examples of prepositions include *to, from, in, on, at, by, for, of, with, after, before,* and *between.*

Between you and me, I think he is guilty. (not *you and I*)

The chief wants to talk *to you and me*. (not *you and I*)

In the second sentence above, you can mentally eliminate the first pronoun to see that *me* is correct. *The chief wants to talk to me.*

Note: The word *of* can be used as a preposition, or it may be used to show possession. The usage determines the correct pronoun (objective or possessive).

The chief spoke highly of *her*.
(The pronoun is the object of a preposition; thus her *is correct.)*

The chief is a strong supporter of *hers*.
(The pronoun is used in the possessive sense—her supporter; thus hers *is correct.)*

Pronouns used in comparisons. When a pronoun is used after *than* or *as* in a comparison, the correct form (nominative or objective) can be determined by supplying any missing words.

Penny is more qualified than *I*. *(more qualified than I am)*

We have a better chance of saving this patient than *him*. *(than we have of saving him)*

While it isn't necessary to include those missing words to be grammatically correct, doing so often makes the sentences clearer.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Inappropriate Pronoun

Instructions: Circle the correct pronoun in each sentence below.
(Check your answers on page 164.)

Example: The chief wants to talk to you and I / (me).

1. Bryan and I / me searched the house thoroughly.
2. I'm more comfortable being tested by you than he / him.
3. Please check with the information officer and I / me before saying anything to the media.
4. Let's keep this between you and I / me for now.
5. Would it be all right if Robert and I / me arrange a shift trade for Saturday?
6. This suspect is a known associate of him / his.
7. When will they / them and I / me be expected to testify in court?
8. I bet it will be she / her who solves the mystery.
9. I am higher on the promotional list than he / him.
10. I don't want the incident commander to think that she / her and I / me were freelancing.

The Case of the Difficult Gender

Common Violations

We can debate at great length about which gender is the most "difficult," but in truth, gender issues are often at the heart of grammatical problems. Common violations include:

- Referencing only one gender (most often the male gender).
- Overusing *he or she* to avoid referencing only one gender.
- Inappropriately shifting from singular to plural to avoid referencing only one gender.

Crime Prevention

For years it was considered acceptable to use *he*, *him*, and *his* as generic pronouns referring to both males and females. However, when referring to occupations or roles predominantly associated with women, most writers used *she*, *her*, or *hers* instead. This kind of writing is seldom considered politically or socially correct anymore, because it excludes one gender or the other and serves to reinforce stereotypes.

Unless your audience is 100% male and that won't change over the life of your documents, it's not recommended that you use male pronouns. (One can sometimes get away with it following a disclaimer that *he* is being used for simplicity and is not meant to exclude women, but this is not the best solution.) Writers sometimes use *he or she*, *his or her*, or *him or her* to avoid referencing only one gender. This is acceptable if you don't have to use it too often, but it becomes annoying and distracting if used in excess. The other common error is to shift from singular to plural, as in the third example below that shifts from *firefighter* (singular) to *their*. People often speak this way, but it's not correct, either in speech or in writing.

Incorrect: A firefighter should be able to don *his* SCBA in less than a minute.
Awkward: A firefighter should be able to don *his or her* SCBA in less than a minute.
Incorrect: A firefighter should be able to don *their* SCBAs in less than a minute.

Often the best solution is to make everything plural. However, sometimes you can avoid the pronoun by replacing it with an article (*a*, *an*, or *the*) or rewording the sentence slightly.

Revised: *Firefighters* should be able to don *their* SCBAs in less than a minute.
Revised: Firefighters should be able to don *an* SCBA in less than a minute.

These errors also occur when using both personal pronouns and indefinite pronouns. *Anyone* is singular, so the first example below is incorrect because it involves a needless shift in number. The second example singles out the male gender.

Incorrect: If *anyone* asks what started the fire, tell *them* we're still investigating it.
Incorrect: If *anyone* asks what started the fire, tell *him* we're still investigating it.
Revised: If *anyone* asks what started the fire, *just say that* we're still investigating it.

Many other indefinite pronouns are also singular. Examples include *each*, *everybody*, *someone*, and *no one*. It's easy to assume that words such as *everyone* and *everybody* are plural because they convey the idea of multiple people, but the pronouns themselves are singular in meaning. They refer to one collective group. You'll learn more about this in the following case.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Difficult Gender

Instructions: Edit each of the sentences below to avoid referencing only one gender or incorrectly using plural personal pronouns. (Check your answers on page 164.)

Example: Every firefighter should be able to don ~~his SCBA~~ an SCBA in less than a minute.

1. Every emergency responder should know his blood type.

2. A manager is responsible for the safety of his employees.

3. Everyone washed his hands after coming in contact with the victim's blood.

4. Any patient who has been contaminated must go through decon before he can be treated by EMS personnel.

5. Each of our officers has a dash-mounted camera in his patrol car.

6. If a person inhales too much smoke, he is likely to become disoriented and have difficulty finding his way out of the building.

7. We need to know if anybody is trapped inside the building and where they are located.

8. For every drug dealer we put behind bars, there are a hundred others eager to move in on his territory.

9. Each of the boys are being punished for their bad behavior.

10. The first-arriving first responder at the operations level should establish command. He should locate the command post at a safe distance upwind, uphill, and upstream from the incident.

The Case of the Indefinite Pronoun

Common Violations

Indefinite pronouns—pronouns that do not refer to a specific person or thing—sometimes cause confusion for writers. The most common violation is for writers to treat singular indefinite pronouns as if they were plural.

Crime Prevention

Recognize which indefinite pronouns are singular and which are plural. The following indefinite pronouns are singular in meaning; they refer to a single unspecified person or thing or to one collective group.

another	either	much	one
anybody	every	neither	somebody
anyone	everybody	nobody	someone
(*or* anyone)	everyone	no one	(*or* some one)
anything	(*or* everyone)	nothing	something
each	everything		

The indefinite pronouns *both, few, many, others,* and *several* are always plural. The indefinite pronouns *all, any, more, most, none,* and *some* may be singular or plural, depending on the context of the sentence.

Use the correct verb. Use singular verbs with singular indefinite pronouns and plural verbs with plural indefinite pronouns.

Singular: *Everyone is* worried about aftershocks.
Plural: *Several were* almost as strong as the initial quake. (*several aftershocks*)

Some of the singular indefinite pronouns listed above confuse writers because they *appear* to refer to a plural subject. However, substituting the word *one* for another noun can help you see that the indefinite pronoun is indeed single.

Each of the victims *requires* medical attention. (*Each one requires medical attention.*)

Neither of the victims *wants* to go to the hospital. (*Neither one wants to go to the hospital.*)

With the indefinite pronouns that can be either singular or plural, you must look at the context of the sentence. The first two examples below refer to things that can be counted: *several windows* (plural) and *one building* (singular). The last example refers to something that cannot be counted. It requires a singular verb.

Plural: *Most* of the windows *were* broken. (*refers to several windows*)
Singular: *Most* of the building *is* damaged. (*refers to one building*)
Singular: *Most* of the damage *was* minor. (*refers to something that cannot be counted*)

The Case of the Indefinite Pronoun

Pay close attention to *one of* phrases. Although the indefinite pronoun *one* is always singular, when the word *one* is used in a phrase beginning with *one of*, the phrase may be either singular or plural, depending on the context of the sentence. Look for the telltale phrases listed below:

singular verb required	plural verb required
one of	one of (those) who
one of the	one of the (things) that
the only one of	only one of

The following examples show how to apply this information. The key is being able to recognize which noun or pronoun the verb refers to.

Singular: *One* of the sprinkler heads *is* leaking.
(*One sprinkler head is leaking.*)
Plural: This is one of the *sprinkler heads* that *are* leaking.
(*Two or more sprinkler heads are leaking. This is one of them.*)

Singular: *He* is the only one of the defendants who *was* found guilty.
(*Of the defendants, he was the only one found guilty.*)
Plural: He is only one of the *defendants* who *were* found guilty.
(*Two or more defendants were found guilty. He is one of them.*)

Use the correct personal pronoun. The same singular indefinite pronouns that *appear* to want plural verbs also *appear* to want plural personal pronouns. The first example below is very common in speech, but it's grammatically incorrect both in speech and in writing because the word *everyone* is singular. Sometimes the best fix is to reword the sentence.

Incorrect: Everyone feared for *their* lives.
Awkward: Everyone feared for *his or her* life.
Better: All the hostages feared for *their* lives.

The previous example was reworded to get rid of the indefinite pronoun *everyone*. The example below eliminates the personal pronoun *their*. Both are effective ways of fixing the problem.

Incorrect: Everyone had *their* hotel room broken into.
Revised: Everyone's hotel room was broken into.

This very common grammatical error of using plural personal pronouns with singular indefinite pronouns is something called a *needless shift*. Other examples of needless shifts can be found in "The Case of the Needless Shifts."

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Indefinite Pronoun

Instructions: Circle the correct word in the sentences below. If neither word is correct, identify how you would reword the sentence. (Check your answers on page 164.)

Example: Each of the victims require / (requires) medical attention.

1. Are / is everyone accounted for?
2. Both of the guns are / is loaded.
3. One of us need / needs to log in the evidence collected.
4. Neither of the officers speak / speaks Spanish.
5. None of the containers has / have ruptured.
6. This is one of the vehicles that was / were burning.
7. Every man, woman, and child has / have been triaged.
8. One of the passengers was / were ejected from the vehicle.
9. Neither of the paramedics had his / their latex gloves on.
10. Every one of us appreciate / appreciates the additional police patrols.
11. More than one witness recall / recalls seeing him drive erratically before the crash.
12. Everyone has to discipline himself / themselves to study hard during probation.
13. Each of these alarm systems has / have its / their advantages and disadvantages.
14. If anyone know / knows where the suspect might be hiding, have him / them call me at police headquarters.
15. She is one of those who doesn't / don't get offended when someone uses the word *guys* to address a group.

The Case of the Faulty Pronoun Reference

Common Violations

Faulty pronoun reference occurs when a writer uses pronouns without clearly distinguishing what the words refer to. The reference may be clear to the writer who knows what he or she is trying to communicate, but it is not necessarily clear to the reader. Common violations include:

- Having multiple antecedents without clearly identifying which one the pronoun refers to.
- Allowing the antecedent to be implied rather than stated directly.
- Using pronouns such as *it*, *they*, or *you* without reference.

Crime Prevention

Clearly identify the antecedent. If you have more than one antecedent in the sentence, you must clearly identify which one the pronoun refers to; otherwise, your readers may become confused. (An antecedent is the noun or phrase to which a pronoun refers.) When in doubt, reword the sentence.

Charlie rescued his son. (*Charlie* is the antecedent of the pronoun *his*.)

Being the wife of a police officer has its drawbacks.
(*Being the wife of a police officer* is the antecedent of the pronoun *its*.)

The first example below may not be confusing to law enforcement and fire department personnel, but someone else might question what you turned over to the property owner (the house or the evidence). Even when the general public is not that naïve, if you're writing reports that may be used in court someday, you run the risk that some defense attorney will pick apart such sentences to attack your credibility and create reasonable doubt or have vital evidence ruled inadmissible. Like it or not, these kinds of mistakes can hurt an otherwise solid case. Write defensively. Leave no doubt as to your meaning.

Confusing: I removed the evidence from the house and turned *it* over to the property owner.
Clear: I removed the evidence from the house and turned *the house* over to the property owner.
Clear: I turned the house over to the property owner after removing the evidence.

Be explicit. When you do not clearly identify to whom or what the pronoun refers, readers are left to form their own conclusions. Make your antecedents explicit rather than implicit.

Confusing: She fell two days ago, but *it* was minor.
Clear: She fell two days ago, but *her injuries* were minor.
Clear: She fell two days ago, but *she sustained* only minor injuries.

The Case of the Faulty Pronoun Reference (continued)

Sometimes the pronouns *this, that, it,* or *which* refer to a whole idea or situation described earlier in the sentence or paragraph. The pronoun makes a broad reference to prior information. However, unless it is unmistakably clear what the pronoun is referring to, you should either substitute an appropriate noun or rewrite the sentence.

Confusing: Our fire department now serves Campbell, Cupertino, Los Altos, Los Altos Hills, Los Gatos, Monte Sereno, Morgan Hill, Saratoga, and unincorporated areas of Santa Clara County. *It* has almost doubled in size since I first became a firefighter. *(What does* it *refer to?)*

Clear: Our fire department now serves Campbell, Cupertino, Los Altos, Los Altos Hills, Los Gatos, Monte Sereno, Morgan Hill, Saratoga, and unincorporated areas of Santa Clara County. *The department* has almost doubled in size since I first became a firefighter.

This can be a particular problem with training materials and other documents containing titles and subtitles. Most people do not read everything on the page. They often skim the page instead. It's not uncommon for readers to skip over titles and subtitles, even inadvertently, because they expect the body of the text to contain the same information. If you proceed directly from a title or subtitle to a pronoun, readers may get lost.

Confusing: ***Report on Conditions***
Provide *it* as soon as possible ...

Clear: ***Report on Conditions***
Provide *a report on conditions* as soon as possible ...

Avoid the proverbial *they*. Some people use the pronouns *it, they,* and *you* quite casually in daily conversation: *They say a moving target is harder to hit.* However, it's important to identify the antecedent in writing. Who says a moving target is harder to hit?

Confusing: *They* say nicotine isn't addictive.
Clear: *Some people* say nicotine isn't addictive.
Clear: *Some tobacco companies* insist nicotine isn't addictive.

Likewise, don't use *you* unless you are specifically addressing the reader.

Confusing: When I first joined the fire department, *you weren't* issued two sets of turnouts.

Clear: When I first joined the fire department, *I wasn't* issued two sets of turnouts.

Clear: When I first joined the fire department, *firefighters weren't* issued two sets of turnouts.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Faulty Pronoun Reference

Instructions: Edit the sentences below to make them clear. More than one option may be possible. (Check your answers on page 165.)

Example: I removed the evidence from the house and turned *it* over to the property owner.

I turned the house over to the property owner after removing the evidence.

1. Kevin told Tom that he needed to report to the command post.

2. Karen found a candle on the electric blanket that may have started the fire.

3. Nick handed the resuscitator to Bruce, and he took over compressions.

4. After removing the gun from a briefcase, the suspect threw it out the passenger window.

5. He was arrested on suspicion of burglary, but it was dismissed the next day.

6. They say that a person is generally protected from liability for emergency care provided in good faith unless their actions constitute gross negligence.

7. Vehicle A hit Vehicle B head-on when it crossed the median.

8. Remove the liner from your coat and send it in for repairs.

9. Some of my fellow firefighters won't stop at an accident scene while off duty because you can be sued if something goes wrong.

10. Warrick informed Gil that his evidence collection kit was stolen from his vehicle.

The Case of the Prepositional Ending

Common Violations

Once upon a time, it was considered almost an unforgivable sin to end a sentence with a preposition. Thankfully, common sense prevailed. Ending a sentence with a preposition is no longer a crime, but it is sometimes frowned upon in formal writing. Perhaps worse, however, is trying so hard to avoid ending the sentence with a preposition that you end up with an awkward sentence instead.

Crime Prevention

Winston Churchill once poked fun at the old misconception that one shouldn't end a sentence with a preposition when he remarked, "This is the sort of English with which I will not put." It is acceptable to end a sentence or a question with a preposition, particularly when the alternative would result in an awkward sentence.

Awkward: It took a long time to determine *in* which room the victims were trapped.
Better: It took a long time to determine which room the victims were trapped *in*.

However, if you can find a better way to write the sentence, do so, particularly in formal writing. Either move the preposition, or find a way to eliminate it.

Informal: Bill is the one I submitted my proposal *to*.
Formal: Bill is the one *to whom* I submitted my proposal.
Better: I submitted my proposal to Bill.

Informal: What was he arrested *for*?
Better: Why was he arrested?

Omit prepositions that add nothing to the sentence.

Where is the chief ~~at~~?

Where did the suspect go ~~to~~?

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Prepositional Ending

Instructions: If possible, rewrite the sentences below to avoid ending with a preposition. (Ending with a preposition is not wrong, but it's not recommended in formal writing.) If there is no good way to rewrite the sentence, write OK next to it. (Check your answers on page 165.)

Example: Bill is the one I had submitted my proposal to.

I had submitted my proposal to Bill.

1. Which room did the fire start in?

2. The danger is over with.

3. What floor is the detective bureau located on?

4. We have nothing to worry about.

5. Forensic science is something I have a lot of interest in.

6. Where is the smoke coming from?

7. Where is the shutoff valve located at?

8. What is this week's drill on?

9. This is something we can do without.

10. What major intersection is the accident near?

The Case of the Subjunctive Mood

Common Violations

There are three moods in the English language—*indicative*, *imperative*, and *subjunctive*—each of which is explained below. The subjunctive mood sometimes causes problems for writers because the verbs do not always take the same forms that they do in other moods. Consequently, writers sometimes use the wrong words.

Crime Prevention

Let's start by defining the indicative and imperative moods. These are the easy ones. The *indicative mood* is used to state a fact, to express an opinion, or to ask a question.

Fact: Three people were killed in the accident.
Opinion: It was a terrible accident.
Question: What caused the accident?

The *imperative mood* is used to give a command or to give directions.

Command: Call 911.
Direction: Tell the dispatcher we have two people with major injuries.

Now, for the tougher one. The *subjunctive mood* is used to express a hypothetical situation, a suggestion, or a requirement or to express desires (wishes) or conditions that are contrary to fact. Expressions such as *ask that, insist that, recommend that, require that, request that, it is necessary that,* and *it is important that* are often signals that the subjunctive mood is required.

Hypothetical: If I *were* to find additional patients, we'd need another ambulance.
Suggestion: I suggest that Robert *go* with the paramedics to the hospital.
Requirement: We require that he *sign* a release if he decides not to go to the hospital.
Desire: I wish I *knew* what to say to convince him to go to the hospital.
Condition: If I *were* him, I would go to the hospital.

Compare the underlined verbs above with those below. In most sentences, we would write *I was, Robert goes, he signs,* etc. However, it would be incorrect in the subjunctive mood. If the sentence calls for the present tense of a verb, we use the base form, regardless of the subject's number (singular or plural) or person (first, second, or third). That's why *Robert go* instead of *Robert goes*, for instance. Another distinction is that the verb form *were* is always used in place of *was*.

Wrong: If I *was* to find ...
Wrong: I suggest that Robert *goes* ...
Wrong: We require that he *signs* ...
Wrong: I wish I *know* ...
Wrong: If I *was* him ...

While the subjunctive mood is used for conditions that are highly improbable, doubtful, or contrary to fact, it is not used with conditions that are possible or highly likely.

Subjunctive: If he *weren't* mentally competent (but he is), we'd assume implied consent.
Indicative: If he *is* mentally competent (and he is), he *has* a right to refuse transport.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Subjunctive Mood

Instructions: Circle the correct word in each sentence below. (Check your answers on page 165.)

Example: If I was / (were) him, I would go to the hospital.

1. I insist that I am / be allowed to ride in the ambulance with my baby.
2. Can you tell me if I am / be allowed to ride in the ambulance with my baby?
3. I recommend that Andrea be / is sentenced to life in prison.
4. It's required that the hotel post / posts emergency procedures in the guest rooms.
5. The doctor feels Will require / requires knee surgery.
6. The doctor suggested that Will continue /continues physical therapy for a while longer.
7. It is important that Will allow / allows the knee a chance to heal.
8. I wish I was / were on the SWAT team.
9. I wouldn't get too close if I was / were you.
10. If I knew / know where to find Rod, I would tell you. But I don't know where he is.
11. Georgia talks as though she knew / knows who killed Mac, but she is clearly bluffing.
12. Georgia talks as though she knew / knows who killed Mac. She may be able to help us find the killer.

The Case of the Redundant Modifier

Common Violations

Many writers, this author included, sometimes use *redundant modifiers* without realizing it. A *modifier* is a word, phrase, or clause that qualifies or limits the meaning of another word or group of words. The modifiers we'll look at in this case are all simple adjectives or adverbs that fail to contribute anything to the words they are meant to modify.

Crime Prevention

If you look at the expressions below, you will see that each adjective or adverb adds nothing to the word that follows it. What distinguishes an *advance warning* from a *warning*, for example? Or *totally demolished* from *demolished*? Nothing at all.

intentional sabotage	tightly clenched
flaming inferno	totally demolished
advance warning	exactly identical
unexpected surprise	absolutely essential
true facts	possibly may

Is using redundant modifiers a serious crime? No. But good writing is concise, which means using words economically and omitting words that don't add value. So why use redundant modifiers when the English language contains so many other wonderful adjectives and adverbs to choose from?

There are often subtle differences between a redundant modifier and one that serves a purpose. For example, *toxic poison* is redundant because *toxic* means *poisonous*. However, *deadly poison* is *not* redundant. By definition, a *poison* is a substance with an inherent property to destroy life *or impair health*. So, for example, a *mild poison* might be one that causes harmful effects to the body, but does not ordinarily cause death. A *deadly poison*, by comparison, would be one that easily causes death upon minimal exposure.

The best weapon in the fight to prevent redundant modifiers is a good dictionary. A thesaurus, while often helpful, is far less precise and may mislead you into using the wrong words.

Don't be afraid to be colorful and creative in your writing, but be on the lookout for redundant modifiers, and experiment with different adjectives and adverbs as appropriate.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Redundant Modifier

Instructions: Circle any redundant modifiers in the sentences below. If a sentence is correct as is, write OK next to it. (Check your answers on page 165.)

Examples: She ingested a (toxic) poison liquid.

1. The building was totally engulfed in flames.
2. Are you absolutely certain that everyone is accounted for?
3. I'll return again next week to confirm that the violations have been corrected.
4. A lifeless corpse was discovered on the steps of the homeless shelter.
5. Please tell me about the mutual aid agreement with your neighboring jurisdictions.
6. We have a serious crisis on our hands.
7. I closely scrutinized that crime scene three times before I found the shell casing.
8. The patient has a past history of angina.
9. We can't fully eliminate him as a suspect yet.
10. Carter was arrested in front of a gambling casino in Las Vegas.
11. Deputy Hickman silently signaled me to clear the room.
12. Mary Kay has previous experience in emergency management.
13. What you're proposing is exceedingly dangerous.
14. What will be the end result of doing nothing and allowing the incident to self-mitigate?
15. We have a puzzling mystery on our hands.
16. We go by the basic principle that a person is innocent until proven guilty.
17. EMT training is a necessary prerequisite for this course.
18. The boys were charged with malicious mischief.
19. It should be clearly apparent that we need additional resources to mitigate the hazard.
20. Santa Clara County Fire Department was known as the Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District when it was originally founded in 1947.

The Case of the Wasted Words

Common Violations

Most writers, this author included, sometimes allow empty words and phrases to creep into their documents without realizing it. Common violations include:

- Wordy phrases.
- Careless repetition.
- Lengthy modifiers.
- Negative sentences.

Crime Prevention

Replace wordy phrases. Avoid using wordy phrases when one or two words can accomplish the same thing. The following are common examples.

Wordy	Concise
because of the fact that	because
in the event that	if
during the course of	during
it would appear that	it seems
at a later date	later

Eliminate unnecessary repetition. The key to eliminating unnecessary repetition is identifying words that don't add value to the sentence.

Repetitious: The placard was *orange in color.*
Revised: The placard was *orange.*

Repetitious: Her *fractured* clavicle *was broken* in two places.
Revised: Her clavicle *was broken* in two places.

Rewording a sentence is sometimes an alternative to simply eliminating words. In the example below, it would be sufficient to say "firefighting is dangerous." However, if such a short sentence seems stilted and choppy, the suggested revision might be preferable.

Repetitious: Firefighting is *dangerous by nature.*
Revised: Firefighting is *a dangerous activity.*

Sometimes we encounter idiomatic expressions where repetition is acceptable. For example, we often refer to patients as being *alert and oriented*. *Alert* and *oriented* mean the same thing, yet emergency responders are so accustomed to using the words together that it would seem incomplete to use either one alone. However, this should be the exception rather than the rule. Instead of referring to patients as *awake and conscious*, for example, use either *awake* or *conscious*. There's no value in using both.

The Case of the Wasted Words (continued)

Condense your modifiers. Sentences can often be made more concise by reducing the modifiers—the descriptive phrases or clauses—to one or two words and repositioning them within the sentence.

Wordy: I found the knife, *which was covered with blood*, in a trash can behind the house.
Revised: I found the *bloody* knife in a trash can behind the house.

Wordy: The earthquake, *which was terrifying and occurred without warning,* left hundreds *of people displaced from their homes.*
Revised: The *sudden, terrifying* earthquake left hundreds *homeless.*

Use positive expressions if possible. Negative sentences are generally wordier and less direct than positive ones.

Wordy: The driver *did not obey* the speed limit.
Concise: The driver *exceeded* the speed limit.

The word *not* is often a signal that there may be a clearer and more economical way to phrase the sentence. *Not guilty* means *innocent*. *Did not die* means *survived*.

Not all negative sentences are bad, however. Of the two sentences below, the second one (the negative expression) is clearer and preferable to the first.

Acceptable: We *have transported no one* to the hospital yet.
Clearer: We *have not transported anyone* to the hospital yet.

You Be the Detective: The Case of the Wasted Words

Instructions: Rewrite the sentences to make them clearer and more concise. If the only correction necessary is to delete the wasted words, draw a line through them. (Check your answers on page 166.)

Example: I found the knife, which was covered with blood, in the trash can.

I found the bloody knife in the trash can.

1. We will need additional resources in the event that it becomes necessary to evacuate residents from the neighborhood.

2. I momentarily lost sight of the suspect for an instant.

3. The protective clothing that has been contaminated needs to be replaced.

4. We shut down the highway because of the fact that there was an accident involving an overturned gasoline tanker.

5. We don't have enough money in the budget at the present time.

6. The jury has reached a consensus of opinion.

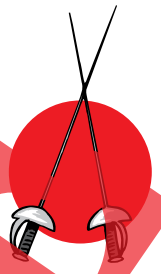
7. Several individuals who have been convicted of child molestation are known to live in the area.

8. We chose to have residents shelter in place rather than evacuate for the reason that we expected the vapor cloud to dissipate within 30 minutes.

9. My feeling about that candidate is that he's not old enough and does not yet have the maturity to be a police officer.

10. The blow to her head, which is what we know killed her, was inflicted by a blunt object.

The Case of the Weak and Wimpy



Common Violations

This case is similar to the previous one in that it also involves wasted words that can keep your writing from being as clear and concise as it can be. However, here we'll look at weak and wimpy expressions that can dilute the power of your sentences and make your writing less interesting. Common violations include:

- Weak verbs.
- Wishy-washy qualifiers.
- Unnecessary expletives.
- Needless discretionary expressions.

Crime Prevention

Use strong verbs. Strong verbs get directly to the point. Weak verbs de-energize your writing.

Weak: Firefighters *managed to force* entry using a Halligan tool.
Strong: Firefighters *forced* entry using a Halligan tool.

"Weak verbs," in the context of being concise, has nothing to do with choice of verb (e.g., *scares, frightens*, or *terrifies*). This is about how verbs are used. Weak verbs are disguised as nouns and tucked into phrases, as in the left-hand column below.

Weak	Strong
managed to *force*	forced
reached an *agreement*	agreed
came to the *realization*	realized

Don't be wishy-washy. Many writers use wishy-washy qualifiers such as *a little, sort of, really, quite, somewhat, more or less, actually, essentially*, and *very*. These qualifiers dilute the power of the sentence.

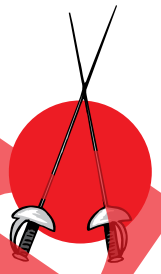
Wishy-Washy: Parents need to be *somewhat cautious* about where they let their children play.
Revised: Parents need to be *cautious* about where they let their children play.

In the first example above, what's the difference between *somewhat cautious* and *cautious*? There's a difference between being cautious and paranoid. There's a difference between giving children free reign and restricting them to the immediate neighborhood. But grammatically, there's no difference between *somewhat cautious* and *cautious*.

Use fewer expletives. Sentences that begin with expletives—*there is* or *it is*—are wordier and less dynamic than other sentences. Expletives have their place, such as when introducing a subject for the first time or when indicating a change in direction. However, you should eliminate expletives that merely postpone getting to the subject of the sentence.

Wordy: *There were* three children *who* perished in the fire.
Concise: Three children perished in the fire.

The Case of the Weak and Wimpy (continued)



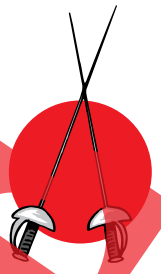
Eliminate unnecessary discretionary expressions. Discretionary expressions can often be eliminated without sacrificing clarity. Consider the expression *it is my opinion that*. If you are making a statement, does it not imply that this is your opinion? If you need to clarify that this is your opinion versus someone else's, the expression may be important. Otherwise, why not leave it out?

Discretionary: *It is my opinion that* we should inspect the facility more often.
Revised: We should inspect the facility more often.

Let's look at another discretionary expression that not only wastes words but also raises questions. What do we mean by *all things considered*? The sentence might be appropriate if it follows one that identifies problems encountered at the fire. If not, however, it's better to eliminate the phrase or replace it with specific information.

Discretionary: *All things considered*, we made a good stop on the fire.
Revised: We made a good stop on the fire.
Revised: Despite delays due to difficult access and poor hydrant pressure, we made a good stop on the fire.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Weak and Wimpy



Instructions: Edit the following sentences to make them more powerful and more concise. (Check your answers on page 166.)

Example: There were three children who perished in the fire.

Three children perished in the fire.

1. The chief made the decision to cut it from the budget.

2. It is the minister's daughter who was struck by a hit-and-run driver.

3. I conducted an investigation of the explosion at the factory and made the determination that it resulted from careless handling of an organic peroxide.

4. The investigation is complete, for all intents and purposes.

5. Volunteers made a thorough search of the camp grounds with the hope that they would find the boy before nightfall.

6. I intended only to issue him a citation, but when he became violent, I placed him under arrest.

7. To be honest, I don't think the recruits are ready to be put to the test yet.

8. There are four of us who will be attending the forensic science conference next week.

9. I came to the conclusion that the patient was not a danger to himself or others.

10. I made contact with the reporting party and made a point to assure her that she did the right thing by calling 911.

The Case of the Superfluous Text

Common Violations

The previous cases focused on simple violations that are easy to identify and correct. In more extreme cases, the superfluous text makes entire documents unclear and difficult to read. Readers may find themselves having to read the material several times to understand it. People quickly become frustrated with such garbled writing and may even question the credibility of the document and its author. As I look at the example below (which was written by someone else), I'm reminded of the phrase *verbal diarrhea*. Imagine having to read an entire document filled with sentences like this.

> If special assistance is required for the evacuation of disabled persons, assist as necessary with "buddies" or Emergency Response Teams if the evacuation buddies are unable to accomplish the action. (30 words)

Legal documents are some of the worst offenders. The attorneys and bureaucrats who write like this are overly concerned about addressing every minute detail from a legal standpoint. They seldom consider the individuals who must read the documents and implement the programs. I'd like to think we'd see greater compliance if all this legalese didn't make it so difficult to read and understand the laws. The following wordy example comes from *29 CFR 1910.120, Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response*.

> All suspected conditions that may pose inhalation or skin absorption hazards that are immediately dangerous to life or health (IDLH), or other conditions that may cause death or serious harm, shall be identified during the preliminary survey and evaluated during the detailed survey. (43 words)

Crime Prevention

Cut words that don't add value. Notice how much clearer the following sentence is than the 30-word original above. It's a poignant example of how "less is more."

> Assign personnel to assist with the evacuation of disabled persons as needed. (12 words)

I don't know if I can ever convince attorneys to drop their legalese in favor of plain English that a layperson can read easily. However, the 16-word sentence below is far easier to comprehend than the 43-word original. The words *all potential hazards* cover everything the superfluous text did in the original sentence. Enough said.

> All potential hazards shall be identified during the preliminary survey and evaluated during the detailed survey. (16 words)

If more detail is required to CYA ... cover your assets ... a clearer way to do it than was done in the original version is to start with the sentence above. Then add a sentence that says, "Such potential hazards include conditions that are immediately dangerous to life or health (IDLH) via inhalation or skin absorption and other conditions that may cause death or serious harm." Hit the main point clearly and concisely first. Relegate the rest to a supporting role.

You Be the Detective: The Case of the Superfluous Text

Instructions: Rewrite the sentences below to make them clearer and more concise. Many options are possible. (Check your answers on page 166.)

Example: If special assistance is required for the evacuation of disabled persons, assist as necessary with "buddies" or Emergency Response Teams if the evacuation buddies are unable to accomplish the action. (30 words)

Assign personnel to assist with the evacuation of disabled persons as needed. (12 words)

1. The operations concepts addressed in this plan allow for the emergency response and mitigation efforts relating to a broad spectrum of hazards with which the site could be faced. (29 words)

2. Consuming excessive amounts of alcohol and then getting behind the wheel of a car is a combination that all too often can have fatal results. (25 words)

3. Use the proper containers appropriate for collecting whatever types of evidence you need to collect. Some of the evidence you might collect at a crime scene can potentially dry out or spoil in a way that destroys its value or can be damaged or destroyed in other ways if it is not packaged properly for preserving evidence. (57 words)

4. It is generally considered that the only time members of television, radio, or print media may be denied the right of access at an incident is if the incident has been determined to be a legitimate crime scene, if the incident is located on private property versus public property, or when members of the media are interfering in any way with the incident operations and creating what could be a life safety hazard to themselves, emergency responders, or the public. (80 words)

The Case of the Needed Words

Common Violations

The last several cases focused on being more concise in your writing. However, one can go too far, eliminating little words necessary for grammatical or logical completeness. This case covers three common violations:

- Omitting words needed to prevent misreading.
- Omitting words needed to complete compound structures.
- Omitting words needed for logical and complete comparisons.

Crime Prevention

Retain words needed to prevent misreading. The word *that* can often be omitted without sacrificing clarity. However, if there's a possibility readers may misread the sentence, do not omit the word *that*. In reading the first sentence below, readers will expect you to identify what you heard Bill say. Using the word *that* prevents confusion.

Confusing: I just heard Bill, our former fire marshal, died while I was out of town.
Clear: I just heard *that* Bill, our former fire marshal, died while I was out of town.

Although the first sentence above would eventually become clear, good writing is clear *as the reader is reading it*. Good writing doesn't require the reader to reread a sentence before understanding it.

Retain words needed to complete compound structures. When words are common to both parts of a compound structure, such as the word *who* below, it's permissible to omit the second occurrence.

Danny is the one officer in our department *who* is the most familiar with clandestine drug lab operations and *[who]* is most qualified to teach this section of the academy.

If the word is not common to both parts of the compound structure, however, omitting it will cause the sentence to be grammatically incorrect. In the first example below, you cannot say *have never take*. Therefore, you must include the word *taken*.

Incorrect: I *have never* and *will never take* illicit drugs.
Correct: I *have never taken* and *will never take* illicit drugs.

Retain words needed for logical and complete comparisons. Be sure you are comparing two like items. The first sentence below illogically compares *damage* to *fire*.

Illogical: There was more *smoke damage* than *fire*.
Logical: There was more *smoke damage* than *fire damage*.

Be sure comparisons are complete enough for readers to understand what is being compared.

Incomplete: Laura is more proficient. *(More proficient that what?)*
Complete: Laura is more proficient *than she used to be.*
Complete: Laura is more proficient *than Mary is.*

You Be the Detective: The Case of the Needed Words

Instructions: Add any words necessary for grammatical or logical completeness. If the sentence is acceptable as is, write OK next to it. (Check your answers on page 166.)

Example: I have never and will never take illicit drugs.
taken

1. Our officers feared the suspect, who allegedly stabbed his neighbor, would escape.

2. We are more worried about the children than their parents.

3. Our department believes and uses the Incident Command System.

4. I read another child was kidnapped last night.

5. This year's injury statistics are better than last year.

6. I think whenever possible, we should flush hydrants before connecting the fire hose.

7. The Figure 8 is a stronger knot.

8. Captain Innis heard the chief's presentation on Friday had to be rescheduled.

9. We have and still are requiring applicants to submit to drug screening.

10. Flammable liquids have lower flash points than combustible liquids.

The Case of the Missing Details

Common Violations

Just as failure to be concise can interfere with the clarity of the message, so can failure to provide sufficient details. Common violations include:

- Using general words when specific words would be more appropriate.
- Not providing sufficient details to paint a complete picture.
- Omitting critical details—things that readers won't necessarily know.
- Failing to cite a source when doing so would add credibility.

Crime Prevention

Be specific, if possible. Words can be described as either general or specific. *General words* are broader in scope; *specific words* are more focused and precise. General words are not inherently bad or wrong, but they are more open to interpretation by the reader. They lack details that may be important. Notice how the sentences below become clearer with more specific words. Particularly with documents that may end up in court someday, it's essential to be specific.

General: The suspect threatened officers with a *weapon*.
Specific: The suspect threatened officers with a *butcher knife*.

General: We searched the *residence* at 37 Montclair Drive.
Specific: We searched the *mobile home* at 37 Montclair Drive.

Of course, general words are appropriate in the right context. For example, if writing about the importance of searching a suspect for concealed weapons, don't narrow your focus to only one type of weapon. However, when documenting that a specific suspect was carrying a concealed weapon, identify what type of weapon it was.

Paint a clear picture with details. The first sentence below leaves unanswered questions. Which direction of the highway was shut down? Where was it shut down? What did the writer mean by "bad accident"? The second sentence neatly answers those questions without any wasted words. The writing is complete but concise.

General: The highway patrol shut down Interstate 280 because of a bad accident.
Detailed: The California Highway Patrol shut down southbound Interstate 280 at the Highway 85 interchange due to a five-car pileup in which three people were killed and nine others were injured.

As you're writing, ask yourself if the sentence (or paragraph or document) paints a complete picture for someone who wasn't there. Then ask yourself if it contains enough details to withstand scrutiny in court years later when your memory of the incident is no longer fresh. It should not only paint a clear picture for you but also save you the discomfort and embarrassment of having to defend an incomplete report when a zealous defense attorney tries to attack your credibility.

The Case of the Missing Details (continued)

Ensure that critical details are included. It's particularly important when writing instructions or training materials to ensure that nothing is taken for granted. The mental picture that writers have in their heads often is not the same mental picture that readers are working with. And a reader's subconscious mind won't necessarily fill in missing details the way a content expert's subconscious mind will. So sometimes we have to assume the reader knows very little. See if you can identify the critical detail missing from the following sentence.

> Sometimes the best option when dealing with an acid or alkali spill is to neutralize the material with a corrosive of the opposite pH.

All that's missing is one word, the word *weak*. Neutralize the material with a *weak* corrosive of the opposite pH. Using strong acids or bases (alkalis) to neutralize a corrosive spill can cause a very dangerous chemical reaction.

It's easy for people with some knowledge and experience in a field to forget what it's like to be brand new and not know the little details that others now take for granted. Unfortunately, you almost have to write defensively, as if you can expect the one reader who doesn't know this material to make a mistake in the field, get hurt, and attempt to sue you for negligence.

Cite sources if appropriate. The following example also lacks critical information:

> Never attempt to fight a fire involving explosives. Evacuate to a safe distance and let the fire burn.

What constitutes a safe distance? And what if the reader's best guess turns out not to be enough? When you provide a specific distance and cite your source(s), as in the example below, the reader doesn't have to guess. It also gives some credibility to the information and takes the monkey off your back. If there's ever a problem in which someone is hurt, you've cited sources considered the standard of care in the emergency response industry.

> Never attempt to fight a fire involving explosives. Evacuate to a safe distance and let the fire burn. The NFPA *Fire Protection Handbook* suggests evacuating to a distance of at least 2000 feet. The *Emergency Response Guidebook* recommends distances up to one mile.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Missing Details
Part 1: Interpreting the Brief Narrative

Instructions: The following paragraph represents a brief narrative from an incident report. Read the narrative, then identify the statements that follow as being true (T), false (F), or unclear (U) without more information. Some of the information might be covered elsewhere in a report, but that is beyond the scope of this exercise. (Check your answers on page 167.)

The Narrative: Responded to a reported vehicle versus bicyclist accident. Treated patient for possible fractures and assisted paramedics, who transported patient to hospital.

Example: T F (U) The vehicle was a pickup truck.

The Statements:

1. T F U The injured party was a bicyclist who had been hit by a car.
2. T F U Only one person was injured.
3. T F U The patient was alert and oriented.
4. T F U Firefighters and/or paramedics did a secondary survey on the patient.
5. T F U The patient appeared to have a possible fractured leg.
6. T F U Firefighters and/or paramedics took cervical spine precautions.
7. T F U Circulation, sensation, and motor function were normal distal to the injury.
8. T F U The patient was transported to Valley Medical Center.
9. T F U Firefighters and/or paramedics examined the driver of the vehicle.
10. T F U The driver of the vehicle refused service and signed an AMA form.

You Be the Detective: The Case of the Missing Details Part 2: Filling in the Gaps

Instructions: Rewrite the sentences below to provide specific details. Use your imagination as needed to draw a more complete picture. Many solutions are possible. (Check your answers on page 167.)

Example: The highway patrol shut down Interstate 280 because of a bad accident.

The California Highway Patrol shut down southbound Interstate 280 at the Highway 85 interchange due to a five-car pileup in which three people were killed and nine others were injured.

1. Upon arrival, I observed heavy smoke coming from windows on the top floor of the chemical warehouse.

2. Although the fire was confined to one room, there was heavy damage throughout the building.

3. Engine 3 assisted paramedics, and the patient was transported to the hospital.

4. Please maintain adequate clearance around the safety equipment.

5. Mr. Harrison was arrested after a brief altercation with police.

6. We estimate the victim had been dead approximately 36 hours.

The Case of the Vibrant Voice

Common Violations

Some writers use the passive voice far more often than they should, perhaps out of a reluctance to name "who done it." However, the passive voice is generally less powerful, less interesting, and less concise than the active voice. The passive voice is also often less clear than the active voice, compromising the reader's ability to comprehend the message.

Crime Prevention

There are two voices in sentence structure: *active* and *passive*. The active voice emphasizes the one doing the action. The passive voice emphasizes the one being acted upon. The one doing the action may or may not be mentioned in the passive voice. The passive voice requires a form of the verb *be* plus the past participle of the main verb (*was dislodged, was treated*).

Active: Linda dislodged the object using the Heimlich maneuver.
Passive: The object was dislodged (by Linda) using the Heimlich maneuver.

Active: Ed treated the homeowner for smoke inhalation.
Passive: The homeowner was treated for smoke inhalation (by Ed).

Your writing will generally be more effective if you write in the active voice rather than the passive voice. Therefore, use the active voice as much as possible, unless you have good reason to do otherwise. What are some good reasons? Let's look at a few.

The passive voice is useful when the one doing the action is either unknown or less important than the one being acted upon. Notice how the passive voice in second sentence below puts greater emphasis on Susan and what happened to her.

Active: A man attacked Susan in the parking lot of her apartment complex.
Passive: Susan was attacked in the parking lot of her apartment complex.

Sometimes it is desirable not to disclose the identity of the one doing the action—even when the identity is known. For example, it might be important to protect the identity of a witness. The examples below show two ways to reword the original sentence. One retains the active voice, substituting the words *a witness* for the person's identity. The second switches to the passive voice. Using the active voice is preferable, but the passive voice is certainly acceptable.

Active: The bartender reported seeing the suspect with the victim before the shooting.
Active: A witness reported seeing the suspect with the victim before the shooting.
Passive: The suspect was seen with the victim before the shooting.

The passive voice is often used to sound more diplomatic, to soften the impact of a strong statement, or to avoid sounding bossy.

Active: You must bring the building up to code within 60 days.
Passive: The building must be brought up to code within 60 days.

The Case of the Vibrant Voice (continued)

The passive voice is often used in scientific and technical writing where the emphasis is once again on the action being taken rather than the one doing the action.

Active: Several scientists across the country are conducting studies to identify a suitable replacement for Halon extinguishing agents.

Passive: Several studies are being conducted across the country to identify a suitable replacement for Halon extinguishing agents.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Vibrant Voice

Instructions: Identify each of the following sentences as either active (A) or passive (P), then rewrite each in the opposite voice. You may need to invent some details when rewriting the sentence. (Check your answers on page 167.)

Example: __P__ The object was dislodged using the Heimlich maneuver.

Linda dislodged the object using the Heimlich maneuver.

1. _____ OSHA had previously cited the building owner for safety violations.

2. _____ The child was discovered under the wreckage by firefighters.

3. _____ Search and rescue efforts were begun immediately.

4. _____ We did CPR on the victim for more than 20 minutes.

5. _____ A candle was left burning unattended by the homeowner.

6. _____ The incident was captured by a hidden surveillance camera.

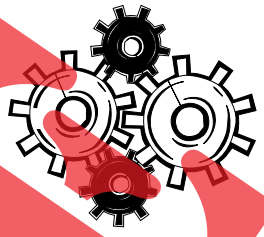
7. _____ A black SUV struck the pedestrian as he entered the intersection.

8. _____ The suspect was read his Miranda rights.

9. _____ She was arrested for child abuse.

10. _____ I dusted the desk for prints.

The Case of the Needless Shifts



Common Violations

A *needless shift* is a change in structure or style midway through a sentence or paragraph that can best be described as changing gears on your reader. Needless shifts often result in confusing or awkward sentences. Common violations include shifts in:

- Tense (e.g., from past tense to present tense) without a corresponding change in time frames.
- Number (e.g., from singular to plural).
- Person (e.g., from third person to second person).
- Voice (e.g., from active to passive).
- Discourse (e.g., from an indirect question to a direct question).
- Point of view (e.g., from the writer's point of view to someone else's).

Needless shifts are relatively easy to spot when they occur within a single sentence. However, it's not uncommon for violations to span several sentences or paragraphs.

Crime Prevention

The key to preventing needless shifts is to examine your writing for consistency. Is your writing consistent, or have you inadvertently changed gears on your readers? Is there anything that might be confusing?

Some of the following violations reflect not only how people write but also how they speak. Consequently, it may be easy to miss them. Clearly, this is one example of where the advice to "write like you speak" can lead writers astray.

Shifts in tense are appropriate if actions take place in different time frames. Such is the case below where we want to show how an event in the future relates to one in the past.

> The patient *will have* a better chance of survival if we can get him to the hospital within one hour of when the accident *occurred*.

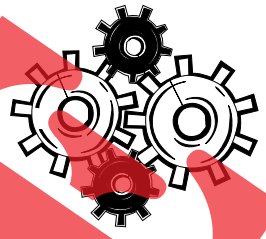
However, when actions take place in the same time frame, the tense must be consistent. The first example below inappropriately shifts from past tense to present tense.

> *Inconsistent:* The man *robbed* the bank and *steals* ten thousand dollars.
> *Revised:* The man *robbed* the bank and *stole* ten thousand dollars.

Needless **shifts in number** are common as writers struggle with gender issues. The first sentence below is an example of shifting from singular (*a person*) to plural (*they*) to avoid using *he* or the sometimes awkward *he or she*. Making everything plural is an effective way to correct the violation. However, rewriting the sentence to eliminate the pronoun is often best, especially if it makes the sentence more concise.

> *Inconsistent:* If *a person* mixes drinking and driving, *they* may end up in jail.
> *Revised:* If *a person* mixes drinking and driving, *he or she* may end up in jail.
> *Better:* If *people* mix drinking and driving, *they* may end up in jail.
> *Even Better:* People who mix drinking and driving may end up in jail.
> *Best:* People who drink and drive may end up in jail.

The Case of the Needless Shifts (continued)



Needless **shifts in person** (first, second, third) are also common, with gender issues being a frequent cause. Again there are several possible fixes, with the best option often being to rewrite the sentence to eliminate the pronoun.

Inconsistent: If *a person* stops breathing, *you* can suffer brain damage in four to six minutes.
Revised: If *a person* stops breathing, *he or she* can suffer brain damage in four to six minutes.
Revised: If *you* stop breathing, *you* can suffer brain damage in four to six minutes.
Best: A person who stops breathing can suffer brain damage in four to six minutes.

The first example below is more subtle. It shifts from first person (*I*) to second person (*you*) as the writer tries to state an opinion without being too "me-oriented." Yet the sentence is not necessarily wrong. One must know what the writer intends. For instance, if a fire chief is expressing satisfaction with the helmets because they provide his or her firefighters better protection, the sentence is grammatically correct. The sentence is not correct, however, if the writer is expressing satisfaction with the protection he or she gets from the new helmets. The solution calls for either changing or eliminating the pronoun.

Inconsistent: *I* like the new helmets because they give *you* better protection.
Revised: *I* like the new helmets because they give *me* (or *us*) better protection.
Better: I like the new helmets because they provide better protection.

A **shift in voice** is acceptable as long as the subject remains the same. The following example shifts from active voice to passive voice, but the subject, *fire*, remains the same. Active and passive voice were defined in "The Case of the Vibrant Voice."

The *fire burned* out of control for hours, but *was extinguished* by morning.

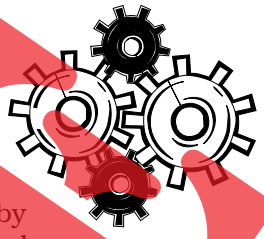
If a shift in voice also involves a shift in subject (for example, from *we* to *the children*), the resulting sentence can be awkward and confusing. Needless shifts in voice can be avoided by staying focused on the same subject throughout.

Inconsistent: As *we pulled up* to the burning structure, *the children* inside *could be heard* screaming for help.
Revised: As *we pulled up* to the burning structure, *we could hear* the children inside screaming for help.

Discourse refers to how things are phrased when relating what someone has said or written. Avoid **shifts in discourse** by using either direct or indirect quotes throughout. The revisions below illustrate first an indirect question, then a direct question.

Inconsistent: I asked if the product is flammable and, if so, is it within its flammable range.
Revised: I asked if the product is flammable and, if so, whether it is within its flammable range.
Revised: I asked, "Is the product flammable and, if so, is it within its flammable range?"

The Case of the Needless Shifts (continued)

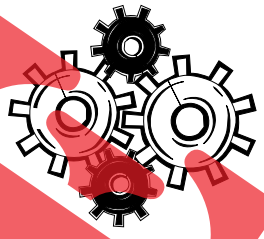


A **shift in point of view** is one that changes the person through whose eyes the story is told. The first example below begins with an observation made by rescue workers, then abruptly switches to the driver's point of view, one that can only be guessed at by rescue workers. Avoid shifts in point of view by remaining in one person's head. Adding the word *apparently* to the revision below communicates that we're still seeing this through the writer's eyes, even if the writer is making an assumption about the driver's state of mind.

Inconsistent: We found the vehicle resting on its roof at the bottom of the embankment. The driver struggled to crawl out through a broken window, afraid the leaking gasoline would ignite.

Revised: We found the vehicle resting on its roof at the bottom of the embankment. The driver struggled to crawl out through a broken window, *apparently* afraid the leaking gasoline would ignite.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Needless Shifts



Instructions: Edit the sentences or paragraphs below to eliminate needless shifts. More than one solution may be possible. (Check your answers on page 167.)

Example: If a person mixes drinking and driving, they may end up in jail.

People who drink and drive may end up in jail.

1. If a person inhales chlorine gas, you can develop pulmonary edema.

2. Employees started decontamination right away, but the patient isn't feeling any relief prior to our arrival.

3. We followed the suspect by helicopter, and his position was radioed to officers on the ground.

4. When a homeowner asks us how they can make their homes more secure, one of the first things we suggest is to install deadbolt locks.

5. Steve said that we need to shock the patient and could I get the defibrillator ready.

6. The hazmat technician must remember that many materials have more than one hazard. They must properly assess the hazards so they can determine the appropriate protective clothing.

7. Catherine examined the crime scene, and nothing was found to indicate a sign of struggle.

8. The chief's secretary said, "He's in a meeting" and would I like her to take a message.

9. I ordered an evacuation because you never knew when the wind would shift and drive the fire toward these homes.

10. As Engine 3 left the station, a heavy column of black smoke could be seen against the predawn sky.

The Case of the Nonparallel Structure

Common Violations

When two or more items or ideas are presented in the same sentence or list, the wording should be similar. However, writers sometimes lose track of this concept, ending up with *nonparallel structure*. Notice the dissimilar wording, highlighted by italic type, in the examples below. None of these violations is severe enough to make the sentence unclear, but they can be distracting to readers.

I like *fighting fires*, but not *to find* burn victims.

I want to stress the importance of:
- *Maintaining* ABCs
- *Treating* for shock
- *Call* 911 as soon as possible

Crime Prevention

Two of the previous violations can be easily corrected by using all *-ing* verbs (known as *present participles*). Often it's this simple to ensure parallel structure.

I like *fighting fires*, but not *finding* burn victims.

I want to stress the importance of:
- *Maintaining* ABCs
- *Treating* for shock
- *Calling* 911 as soon as possible

Even if you don't know the grammatical terms, you should be able to recognize when different parts of speech are dissimilar. The first sentence below compares one option written as a verb phrase and one written as a noun. You can achieve parallel structure by using either two verb phrases or two nouns.

Nonparallel: The district attorney will probably recommend *sending him to jail* rather than *probation*.

Parallel: The district attorney will probably recommend *sending him to jail* rather than *releasing him on probation*.

Parallel: The district attorney will probably recommend *jail* rather than *probation*.

Nonparallel structure is not always easy to spot. The first sentence below doesn't stand out as being a significant problem. It even sounds reasonable when read aloud. However, *intelligent* and *compassionate* are adjectives, whereas *perform well under pressure* is a verb phrase. Changing the verb phrase to an adjective phrase (*able to perform well ...*) provides parallel structure.

Nonparallel: Our dispatchers are *intelligent*, *compassionate*, and *perform well under pressure*.

Parallel: Our dispatchers are *intelligent*, *compassionate*, and *able to perform well under pressure*.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Nonparallel Structure

Instructions: Edit each of the sentences below to provide parallel structure. More than one solution may be possible. (Check your answers on page 168.)

Example: I like fighting fires, but not ~~to find~~ burn victims.
finding

1. Playing with fireworks can lead to fires and getting burned.

2. At this station, students need to perform a preliminary and secondary survey, report their findings, and they need to identify the appropriate course of treatment.

3. Stacey decided to become a police officer rather than a career in the fire service.

4. The patient closed his eyes and his breathing stopped.

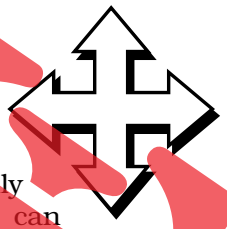
5. The suspect was belligerent, argumentative, and he was evasive in his answers.

6. Our objectives are to:
   - Ensure our safety
   - Isolate the area
   - Identifying the hazardous material

7. Assistant Safety Officer—Hazardous Materials Checklist
   A. Check in and obtain a briefing from the incident safety officer and the hazardous materials group supervisor.
   B. Participate in preparing and implementing a written site safety plan.
   C. Advises the hazardous materials group supervisor or incident commander of any unsafe situations.
   D. Has full authority to alter, suspend, or terminate any activity deemed unsafe.

8. If the patient is complaining of pain, try to identify the following:
   - What provokes the pain and if anything makes it better or worse.
   - What does the pain feel like?
   - Where is the pain, and does it radiate anywhere else?
   - The severity of the pain, on a scale of 1 to 10.
   - How long the patient has had the pain and whether it comes and goes.

The Case of the Misplaced Modifier



Common Violations

Readers generally associate modifiers with the *nearest* words they might logically modify. So when writers put these modifiers where they don't belong, it can change the meaning of the sentence or result in confusing, amusing, or embarrassing sentences. (A *modifier* is basically an adjective or adverb—whether a single word, a phrase, or a clause—that qualifies or limits the meaning of another word or group of words.)

Crime Prevention

Let's look at two sentences that surely don't reflect what the writer intended.

Misplaced: The fire was extinguished before any significant damage was done *by the fire department.*
Revised: The fire was extinguished *by the fire department* before any significant damage was done.

Misplaced: The following are some tips for protecting your home *from the police department.*
Revised: *The police department offers* the following tips for protecting your home.

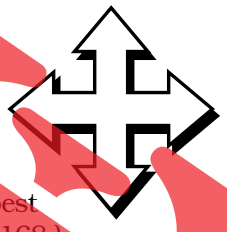
Did you catch the problems? The first sentence implies that the fire was extinguished before *the fire department* could do any significant damage. The second implies we need to protect our homes *from the police department.* Avoid misplaced modifiers by proofing your sentences carefully to ensure they convey the intended meaning. If they don't, move the modifier or rewrite the sentence.

A spring 2005 newspaper headline regarding the exploits of a serial killer provides another poignant example of how embarrassing misplaced modifiers can be. The headline displayed on every major television network in the United States read "21st Body of Child Found." Unless the corpse was the twenty-first clone of the same murdered child, the headline should have read "Body of 21st Child Found." There's a difference.

Pay careful attention to *limiting modifiers* because they're subtle and the potential confusion associated with them often escapes notice. Limiting modifiers (such as *almost, even, exactly, hardly, just, merely, nearly, only, scarcely,* and *simply*) modify the word or words that immediately follow them. Notice how changing the position of the modifier changes the meaning of the following sentences.

Version 1: We *just* found one victim. *(We found a victim just now.)*
Version 2: We found *just* one victim. *(We found only one victim.)*

You Be the Detective: The Case of the Misplaced Modifier Part 1: Limiting Modifiers



Instructions: For each of the sentences below, identify the option that best matches the intended meaning. (Check your answers on page 168.)

Example: Which sentence indicates that we found only one victim?

a. We <u>just</u> found one victim.
(b.) We found <u>just</u> one victim.

1. Which sentence indicates that very little of the victim's body was not burned?

   a. He was <u>almost</u> burned over his entire body.
   b. He was burned over <u>almost</u> his entire body.

2. Which sentence implies that the man may have escaped injury?

   a. He was <u>almost</u> burned over his entire body.
   b. He was burned over <u>almost</u> his entire body.

3. Which sentence indicates that the thief stole almost all their money?

   a. The thief <u>nearly</u> escaped with all their money.
   b. The thief escaped with <u>nearly</u> all their money.

4. Which sentence implies that the thief was caught attempting to steal all their money?

   a. The thief <u>nearly</u> escaped with all their money.
   b. The thief escaped with <u>nearly</u> all their money.

5. Which sentence indicates that I searched only the upstairs bedrooms and nowhere else?

   a. I <u>only</u> searched the upstairs bedrooms.
   b. I searched <u>only</u> the upstairs bedrooms.

6. Which sentence implies that I did nothing more than search the upstairs bedrooms?

   a. I <u>only</u> searched the upstairs bedrooms.
   b. I searched <u>only</u> the upstairs bedrooms.

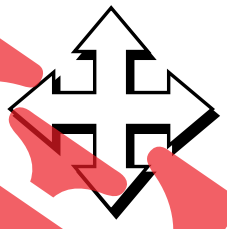
7. Which sentence implies that we ruled out our primary suspect moments only ago?

   a. We <u>just</u> ruled out our primary suspect.
   b. We ruled out <u>just</u> our primary suspect.

8. Which sentence indicates that we ruled out only our primary suspect and no one else?

   a. We <u>just</u> ruled out our primary suspect.
   b. We ruled out <u>just</u> our primary suspect.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Misplaced Modifier
Part 2: Misplaced Modifiers



Instructions: Rewrite the sentences below to eliminate the misplaced modifiers. (Check your answers on page 168.)

Example: The fire was extinguished before any significant damage was done by the fire department.

The fire was extinguished by the fire department before any significant damage was done.

1. The patient is being evaluated by a paramedic with third-degree burns.

2. Some of the people were killed by the passing tornado who did not seek shelter.

3. The children testified in court against the man who had molested them bravely.

4. Engine 11 responded for a report of a man on the trail that had suffered a seizure.

5. I put the evidence in the storage locker found at the crime scene.

6. We can't disclose the name of the woman who was shot on orders from the chief.

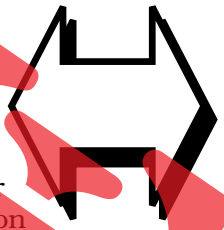
7. The annual tenth reunion was disrupted by a bomb threat.

8. The recruits became more proficient at raising ladders over time.

9. Many of the patients were in the front of the bus that were badly injured.

10. The teens set off fireworks that they bought illegally in Kyle's backyard.

The Case of the Squinting Modifier



Common Violations

Writers sometimes create ambiguity with *squinting modifiers*—adjectives or adverbs positioned where they can conceivably modify the words or phrases on either side of them. Or writers may incorrectly punctuate a sentence, hoping to avoid that ambiguity.

Crime Prevention

Unlike the misplaced modifier that is clearly in the wrong spot, squinting modifiers can conceivably modify the information on either side of them, thus confusing readers. In the first sentence below, is the writer concerned about a sudden collapse? Or did the writer have a sudden realization that collapse was possible? Repositioning the modifier where it can't create ambiguity provides a simple fix.

Squinting: The possibility of the roof collapsing *suddenly* worries me.
Revised: The possibility of the roof *suddenly* collapsing worries me.

The examples below illustrate another violation that often accompanies squinting modifiers—the insertion of a comma that doesn't belong in the sentence. When you say a sentence aloud, you can use pauses and vocal inflection to make your meaning clear: *People who drink and drive—pause—frequently cause accidents.* However, someone *reading* the same sentence cannot hear your pauses and vocal inflection, so they may interpret the sentence differently: *People who drink and drive frequently—pause—cause accidents.* While every comma signals a pause, not every pause warrants a comma. Inserting a comma between a subject and verb, as in the second example below, is grammatically incorrect.

Squinting: People who drink and drive *frequently* cause accidents.
Wrong: People who drink and drive, *frequently* cause accidents.
Revised: *Frequently,* people who drink and drive cause accidents.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Squinting Modifier

Instructions: Edit the sentences below to eliminate the squinting modifier. Either reposition the modifier or rewrite the sentence as appropriate. (Check your answers on page 168.)

Example: The possibility of the roof collapsing *suddenly* worries me.

The possibility of the roof suddenly collapsing worries me.

1. The smoke I inhaled *briefly* irritated my throat.

2. The couple claim that the nanny they hired *wrongly* accused them of child abuse.

3. The knife that penetrated his chest *deeply* concerns me.

4. The suspects we tailed *covertly* gave us the slip.

5. Patients deteriorating *rapidly* need transport to a trauma center.

6. Someone who drives Code 3 *often* may become impatient with traffic when driving in his or her personal vehicle without the red lights and sirens.

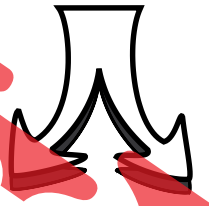
7. We decided *tonight* to arrest him.

8. Evacuating the neighborhood *immediately* requires additional resources.

9. Anyone who drove that ambulance *routinely* complained about steering problems.

10. What you said *first* made sense to me when I thought about the potential liability.

The Case of the Split Infinitive



Common Violations

An *infinitive* is a phrase that consists of the word *to* plus a verb: *to rescue, to breathe, to shoot.* Because an infinitive is generally thought of as a single unit, splitting an infinitive (putting a modifier between *to* and the verb) was once considered grammatically incorrect. That is no longer the case. Writers need not live in fear of splitting infinitives. However, there are two common problems writers must be careful to avoid:

- Creating awkward sentences by splitting infinitives.
- Creating unclear sentences by not splitting infinitives when it would be better to do so.

Crime Prevention

Don't split infinitives when doing so would create more awkward sentences. (The infinitives are underlined in the examples that follow.)

Awkward: We need *to before nightfall find* the child.
Revised: We need *to find* the child *before nightfall.*

The first example below avoids splitting the infinitive, but it appears as if the sentence refers to *wounds* that are *thoroughly contaminated.* Instead, we want the adverb *thoroughly* to clearly modify the verb *clean.* We can accomplish that by splitting the infinitive or by rewriting the sentence slightly.

Ambiguous: We need *to clean* any wounds that are contaminated *thoroughly.*
Clear: We need *to thoroughly clean* any wounds that are contaminated.
Clear: We need *to clean* any contaminated wounds *thoroughly*

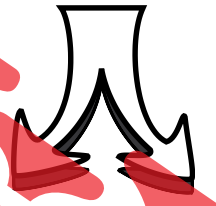
The following is another example where splitting an infinitive is preferable to the alternatives. Only in the last sentence does *quickly* clearly modify the verb *evacuate.* The first sentence can be misunderstood to mean that the plant manager *spoke in a quick manner.* A person reading the second sentence might assume that *he acted quickly after hearing about the bomb threat.* It should be clear that his goal was to get everyone out of the building *without delay.*

Ambiguous: The plant manager directed everyone *quickly to evacuate* the building after the switchboard operator advised him of the bomb threat.
Ambiguous: The plant manager directed everyone *to evacuate* the building *quickly* after the switchboard operator advised him of the bomb threat.
Clear: The plant manager directed everyone *to quickly evacuate* the building after the switchboard operator advised him of the bomb threat.

Consider splitting an infinitive when doing so would provide a more concise sentence.

Acceptable: We expect *to increase* our call volume *by more than one hundred percent* now that we are providing EMS services.
Revised: We expect *to more than double* our call volume now that we are providing EMS services.

You Be the Detective: The Case of the Split Infinitive



Instructions: Select the best sentence in each set below. (Check your answers on page 169.)

Example:

____ We need to clean any wounds that are contaminated thoroughly.
__✔__ We need to thoroughly clean any wounds that are contaminated.

1. a. ____ The captain warned us to not get too close to the tanker.
   b. ____ The captain warned us not to get too close to the tanker.

2. a. ____ We need to accurately identify the product before we plan our response.
   b. ____ We need to identify the product accurately before we plan our response.

3. a. ____ We need to quickly evacuate the building.
   b. ____ We need to evacuate the building quickly.
   b. ____ We quickly need to evacuate the building.

4. a. ____ The witness was instructed to truthfully answer the questions.
   b. ____ The witness was instructed to answer the questions truthfully.

5. a. ____ We stopped to briefly reassess the situation.
   b. ____ We stopped to reassess the situation briefly.
   c. ____ We stopped briefly to reassess the situation.

6. a. ____ Officers must be prepared to without hesitation shoot if the situation demands it.
   b. ____ Officers must be prepared to shoot without hesitation if the situation demands it.
   c. ____ Officers must be prepared to shoot if the situation demands it without hesitation.

7. a. ____ I warned Mike to cautiously approach the boy threatening to commit suicide.
   b. ____ I warned Mike to approach cautiously the boy threatening to commit suicide.
   c. ____ I warned Mike to approach the boy threatening to commit suicide cautiously.
   d. ____ Cautiously, I warned Mike to approach the boy threatening to commit suicide.

8. a. ____ The hospital is required to at least once a quarter conduct fire drills.
   b. ____ The hospital is required to conduct fire drills at least once a quarter.

9. a. ____ The safety officer has authority to immediately suspend or terminate any activities that present imminent danger.
   b. ____ The safety officer has authority to suspend or terminate immediately any activities that present imminent danger.
   c. ____ The safety officer has authority to suspend or terminate any activities that present imminent danger immediately.

10. a. ____ Direct the children to quickly and quietly exit the building and report to their assembly areas outside.
    b. ____ Direct the children to exit the building quickly and quietly and report to their assembly areas outside.
    c. ____ Direct the children to exit the building and report to their assembly areas outside quickly and quietly.

The Case of the Dangling Modifier

Common Violations

The *dangling modifier* is another common violation associated with phrases and clauses used as adjectives and adverbs. A dangling modifier is one that does not *clearly* describe anything in the sentence. Although the connection may be clear to the writer, it is not necessarily clear to the reader. It's a bit like presenting evidence in court without illustrating how the evidence relates to the case. Dangling modifiers often result in very awkward sentences. Even though readers may eventually figure out the intended message, it's a disservice to the readers if they must stop and reread a sentence several times to understand it.

Crime Prevention

Notice how easily the sentences with dangling modifiers can be misread. What these examples have in common is that readers will expect the introductory phrase (the stuff in front of the comma) to pertain to the first noun they encounter, which is not what the writer intended. The key to preventing dangling modifiers is to make sure the modifier clearly relates to the subject of the sentence.

Dangling: *Engulfed in flames*, the chief decided to let the building burn and protect exposures instead.
(Was the chief engulfed in flames when he made his decision?)
Revised: Because *the building* was engulfed in flames, the chief decided to let it burn and protect exposures instead.

Dangling: *When a baby*, my mother died in a plane crash.
(If my mother died when she was a baby, who gave birth to me?)
Revised: When *I* was a baby, my mother died in a plane crash.

Although dangling modifiers occur most often at the beginning of a sentence, they can occur in other places. In the following example, the modifier at the end of the sentence does not clearly relate to the subject introduced in the beginning of the sentence.

Dangling: The damage was visible *entering the building.*
(Can damage enter a building as if it's an entity capable of walking?)
Revised: The damage was visible *to us* as we entered the building.

Dangling modifiers are more likely to happen when sentences are written in the passive voice rather than in the active voice. So to prevent dangling modifiers—and to write more powerful and more interesting sentences—use the active voice instead. (Refer to "The Case of the Vibrant Voice" for more information on active and passive voice.)

Dangling: *After searching for hours*, the victim trapped beneath the rubble was found.
(Who did the searching? The victim?)
Revised: After searching for hours, rescue workers found the victim trapped beneath the rubble.

Dangling: The damage was visible *entering the building.*
Revised: We observed the damage as we entered the building.

The Case of the Dangling Modifier

Something that might look like a dangling modifier, but isn't, is an *absolute phrase*. Absolute phrases modify the sentence as a whole, rather than a specific word or group of words in the sentence. Readers don't have to make any connections because the meaning is clear as written.

Considering how badly the building was damaged, it's a miracle that no one was killed.

That mystery solved, maybe we can get some real work done.

You Be the Detective: The Case of the Dangling Modifier

Instructions: Edit the sentences below to eliminate the dangling modifiers. Several options may be possible. (Check your answers on page 169.)

Example: After searching for hours, the victim trapped beneath the rubble was found.

After searching for hours, rescue workers found the victim trapped beneath the rubble.

1. If still impaled in the patient, you should stabilize the knife in place.

2. To be ruled admissible in court, you must ensure the chain of custody is unbroken.

3. Kidnapped during the night, Diane's parents were distraught.

4. As a known sex offender, the police department will be watching him closely.

5. While inspecting the building, several safety violations were noticed.

6. As women, some men think we are not strong enough to do the job.

7. To stop the bleeding, direct pressure is applied.

8. Three minutes after rescuing the last victim, the structure collapsed.

9. Not finding evidence to support arson, the cause of the fire was ruled accidental.

10. Being old and not up to current standards, I took the helmets out of service.

11. The high-pressure hose burst and splashed hydraulic fluid in my face while working with the Hurst tool.

12. Assessing the patient, he suddenly became combative and struck me in the face.

The Case of the Faulty Construction

Common Violations

The notion of "faulty construction" encompasses many problems identified in this book. However, here we'll focus on three common violations:

- Mixed construction (trying to make groups of words function as the subject of the sentence when they cannot serve that purpose).
- Faulty predication (using a subject and a predicate that don't make sense together).
- Faulty definitions (using *is where* or *is when* to define something).

Crime Prevention

Avoid mixed constructions. The first sentence below is one in which the writer has changed gears midway through. What readers are expecting is something like the second example. Instead, they find a prepositional phrase trying to function as the subject of sentence when it's not capable of doing so. Make sure your sentences have a subject.

Mixed: By doubling your distance from a radioactive source reduces your risk of exposure by 75%.
Revised: By doubling your distance from a radioactive source, you reduce your risk of exposure by 75%.
Revised: Doubling your distance from a radioactive source reduces your risk of exposure by 75%.

Make logical connections. When a subject and predicate do not make sense together, it results in something called *faulty predication*. In the first example below, it is *Shelly*, not her *welfare*, who is possibly being abused.

Faulty: It was a math teacher who first suspected that *Shelly's welfare* was being abused by her stepfather.
Revised: It was a math teacher who first suspected that *Shelly* was being abused by her stepfather.
Revised: A math teacher first suspected that *Shelly* was being abused by her stepfather.

Some faulty predications are more subtle. In the example below, we can say that *deciding* to close the highway caused problems for commuters. However, it is really the *act* of closing the highway, not the *decision* to close it, that caused the problems. You can *decide* all you want, but nothing happens until you *act*.

Faulty: *Deciding to close* the highway caused problems for commuters all evening.
Revised: *Closing* the highway caused problems for commuters all evening.

Avoid faulty definitions. When you define something, put nouns on both sides of the verb *is* or *are*. Avoid using *is where* or *is when* to complete your definitions. The first sentence below is faulty because *lividity* is an observable sign, not a place.

Faulty: Lividity *is where* there is a bluish red discoloration caused by blood pooling in the dependent parts of the body after death.
Revised: Lividity is a bluish red discoloration caused by blood pooling in the dependent parts of the body after death.

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Faulty Construction

Instructions: Edit the sentences below to eliminate the faulty construction. Several options may be possible. (Check your answers on page 170.)

Example: By doubling your distance from a radioactive source reduces your risk of exposure by 75%.

Doubling your distance from a radioactive source reduces your risk of exposure by 75%.

1. In response to our community's concern about the increase in gang violence is the reason that we are implementing several programs aimed at getting teenagers involved in after-school activities.

2. The use of smoke detectors is designed to provide early warning of smoke and other products of combustion.

3. Incorporating proper safety precautions and a contingency plan for unexpected emergencies into your action plan.

4. Hypothermia is when the body core temperature cools.

5. My investigation determined that the victim died from smoke inhalation.

6. To check capillary refill by pressing on the fingernail, then watch for return of color once you release pressure.

7. A stoma is where there is a surgical opening into the neck and trachea.

8. By evaluating your progress throughout the incident to make sure your efforts are successful and that everyone is operating safely.

9. Assigning personnel to observe for possible criminal activities and secondary devices will help ensure responder safety at a suspicious event.

10. Do you have some form of emergency decon in place, which must be set up prior to performing any rescue for your protection as well as for the patients' protection?

The Case of the Capital Titles

Common Violations

Professional titles are often capitalized. However, there are times when it's not appropriate or when people capitalize far more than necessary, calling too much attention to the capitalized words and detracting from the message.

Crime Prevention

Note: This case covers only a few simple rules regarding capitalization of professional titles. Greater detail on the rules and exceptions is beyond the scope of this book.

Titles before and after a name. Professional titles are generally capitalized before a proper name but not after.

Title Before Name: I reported to *Captain* Shawn Stevenson.
Title After Name: I reported to Shawn Stevenson, the *captain* on Engine 10.

One common exception to the guideline above is when titles are used after a name in an introduction, an acknowledgment, or a list.

The award goes to Ken Waldvogel, *Assistant Fire Chief*, Santa Clara County Fire Department, for his tireless efforts.

Occupational (descriptive) titles are normally lowercased whenever they are used. Occupational titles differ from official titles in that only official titles can be used with a last name alone; occupational titles cannot.

The report writing class will be taught by *author* Jill Levy.

Titles used alone. Titles used alone are normally lowercased.

The *chief* authorized overtime for anyone who wants to attend the training.

Titles used in apposition to a name. When names and titles are used together, with one or the other being set off by commas, the title is being used generically and should be lowercased. Whether the title comes before or after the name, one or the other is considered nonessential. The first tells *who*. The second explains or clarifies the first; it is used "in apposition."

Title Before Name: My *captain*, Kelly Seitz, asked me to help plan the WMD exercise.
Title After Name: Kelly Seitz, my *captain*, asked me to help plan the WMD exercise.

Titles used as a form of address. Capitalize a title used alone as a form of address.

What have you found so far, *Detective*?

The Case of the Capital Titles (continued)

Titles of high ranking officials. Titles of very high rank are normally capitalized even when used after the name. However, the trend is changing. Many authorities now recommend lowercasing the titles instead.

> Bill Clinton and Al Gore, *President and Vice President of the United States,* waved to the firefighters as their motorcade drove past Los Gatos Station.

The same is true of high-ranking state, national, and international titles when used alone. Where once it was standard practice to capitalize these titles, many authorities now recommend lowercasing them.

> We saw the *President and Vice President* (or *president and vice president*) up close when we responded to an EMS call at the restaurant where they were eating.

Note: While *President of the United States* is considered to be a very high rank, *president of the union* is not—grammatically speaking. The latter is generally lowercased.

It's customary to lowercase titles of local government officials and those of lesser federal and state officials when they follow or replace a personal name. However, the titles are sometimes capitalized in documents with limited readership. The sentence below is an example of general writing where lowercase letters are more appropriate.

> The *mayor* and *city manager* have agreed to participate in the tabletop exercise.

The title of *mayor* could be either capitalized or lowercased in a letter to the mayor's office. Capitalizing it, as in the first example below, simply adds a touch of formality that conveys additional respect. The titles in the second example could also be either capitalized or lowercased. Capitalizing them in a policy manual or emergency response plan puts greater emphasis on the individuals with the authority for declaring a state of emergency.

> I'd like to request an appointment with the *Mayor* to discuss his role in the upcoming tabletop exercise. *(used in a letter to the mayor's office)*

> The *Mayor* or *City Manager* shall have the authority to declare a state of emergency if appropriate. *(used in a policy manual or emergency response plan)*

Flexibility in the rules. Capitalization gives importance, emphasis, and distinction to a title; thus many people capitalize titles out of honor and respect to the individuals in those positions. Yet, as indicated earlier, excessive capitalization can detract from the message.

Where the rules allow for flexibility, one must determine what is clearest and what is best for getting the message across. For example, one might capitalize professional titles for internal policy manuals or rules and bylaws, but lowercase those same titles in general correspondence. One might capitalize titles in position descriptions, where the emphasis is on the positions, the responsibilities of the positions, and the reporting structure associated with those positions. Those same titles, however, might be lowercased in an incident report or magazine article where the emphasis is on the event.

You Be the Detective: The Case of the Capital Titles

Instructions: Circle the most appropriate option (capitalized or lowercased) in each sentence. Where the type of document might affect your answer, the document is identified in parentheses after the sentence. (Check your answers on page 170.)

Example: I reported to Shawn Stevenson, the captain / Captain on Engine 10.

1. The chief / Chief praised lieutenant / Lieutenant Walker for his heroic efforts.

2. How severe is the injury, doctor / Doctor?

3. Art Marshall, president / President of Local 1165, will meet with the governor / Governor regarding the proposed cutbacks to retirement benefits for public safety employees.

4. The training center has been renamed in honor of the late / Late captain / Captain Mark McCormack.

5. The medical unit leader / Medical Unit Leader may assist operations / Operations in supplying medical care and transportation to civilian casualties, but his or her primary responsibility is caring for incident personnel. *(used in an incident command system position description)*

6. The secretary of homeland security / Secretary of Homeland Security recommended raising the nation's terror alert status for the pope's / Pope's first visit to the United States. *(used in a press release)*

7. I've referred the case to senior crime scene analyst / Senior Crime Scene Analyst Daniel Holstein.

8. Among those leading the tsunami relief efforts are former / Former presidents / Presidents Clinton and Bush.

9. Because the incident safety officer / Incident Safety Officer has authority to alter, suspend, or terminate unsafe acts or conditions when imminent danger is involved, it's conceivable that he or she may override the incident commander's / Incident Commander's decisions. *(used in a magazine article)*

10. I loved reading about the exploits of amateur sleuth / Amateur Sleuth Nancy Drew.

Solutions to the Cases

The Case of the Fragmented Sentence
(Page 8)

1. ... her eye is irritated.
2. ... from the wreckage five days after ...
   (A comma is appropriate between *wreckage* and *five* if writing about something that just happened. Otherwise, omit the comma.)
3. OK as is
   Alternatively, the questions can be expanded. *What time did it occur? How strong was it?*
4. I'll testify against him if you give me ...
5. ... searching the house because we ...
6. OK as is
7. The sentence requires a subject (e.g., *I, the officer,* or *John*).
8. ... fifteen minutes, after paramedics ...
   (Note the comma between *minutes* and *after*. Nonessential elements are set off with commas. The text after the comma is considered nonessential because *about fifteen minutes* tells when. The rest merely provides additional clarification.)
9. OK as is
10. Is it true that the residents ... in their basement?

The Case of the Sentence Splices
(Page 10)

The following are suggested revisions. Other options may be appropriate.

1. RO (run-on sentence)
   Correct by putting a period after *cycles* and capitalizing *this*.
2. OK as is
3. CS (comma splice)
   Correct by replacing the comma with a period and capitalizing *she*, or correct by writing *and she was complaining* ...
4. OK as is
5. RO (run-on sentence)
   Correct by putting a period after *just in time* and capitalizing *the*. The comma after *ruptured* is correct.
6. CS (comma splice)
   Correct by putting a period after *safely* and capitalizing *however*. The comma after *however* is correct.
7. OK as is
   Note: Unlike in the previous sentence, the word *however* serves as a nonessential element that merely interrupts the flow of one complete sentence. Item 6 was a comma splice because the word *however* cannot be used like the word *but* to join two sentences.
8. RO (run-on sentence)
   Correct by putting a period after *scuffle* and capitalizing *his*.
9. CS (comma splice)
   Correct by replacing the comma with a period and capitalizing *it*.
10. RO (run-on sentence)
    Correct by putting a period after *house* and capitalizing *we*. The comma after *inhalation* is correct.

The Case of the Questioning Mark
(Page 12)

1. a
2. a
3. b
4. a
5. a
6. b
7. a
8. b
9. b
10. b
11. a
12. b

The Case of the Careless Colon
(Page 14)

1. C (a one-item list)
2. I
3. C
4. I
5. C
6. I
7. C
8. I
9. I
10. I
11. C
12. I
13. C
14. I
15. C

The Case of the Saucy Semicolon
(Page 17)

1. Replace comma with a semicolon, or create two separate sentences.
2. OK as is.
3. Replace comma after *grenades* with a semicolon, or create two separate sentences.
4. OK as is.
5. Use semicolons instead of commas after *California* and *Colorado*.
6. OK as is, but can be written as two sentences.
7. Replace comma with a semicolon, or create two separate sentences.
8. Delete the semicolon.
9. OK as is, but can be written as two sentences.
10. Keep commas after *eyes* and *nose*, but replace all others with semicolons. Doing so will clearly communicate that *irritation* applies to *eyes, nose,* and *throat*, but not to the text that follows it.

Solutions to the Cases (continued)

The Case of the Direct Quotations
(Page 20)

1. a
2. b
3. a
4. b
5. b
6. a
7. b
8. a
9. d
10. a

The Case of the Misplaced Quotes
(Page 23)

1. b
2. a
3. a
4. b
5. b
6. a
7. b
8. a
9. a
10. b

The Case of the Two-Clause Comma
(Page 26)

1. comma between *control* and *and*
2. no comma between *nozzle* and *and*
3. comma between *wife* and *and*
4. comma between *away* and *but*
   no comma between *but* and *he*
5. no comma between *training* and *and*
6. comma between *gun* and *but*
7. no commas — OK as is
8. This sentence can be fixed either by replacing the comma with a period (and capitalizing *they*) or by inserting the word *but* between the comma and *they*.
9. comma between *transport* and *and*
   comma between *emergency* and *and*
   (Or make two sentences. Put a period after *emergency*, omit *and*, and capitalize *since*.)
10. comma between *serious* and *but*
11. This sentence could be fixed either by putting a comma between *fingers* and *nor* or by making these separate sentences.
12. comma between *burn* and *for*

The Case of the Introductory Comma
(Page 29)

1. comma between *hospitals* and *I*
2. comma after *nevertheless*
3. optional comma after *in the afternoon*
4. comma between *bleeding* and *apply*
5. comma after *when the wind shifts*
6. OK as is
7. comma between *crew* and *Ryan*
8. comma after *if you can*
9. comma between *details* and *we*
10. comma after *if possible*
11. comma between *caught* and *we*
12. comma after *before we leave*

The Case of the Nonessential Elements (Part 1: Essential or Nonessential?)
(Page 33)

1. a
2. a
3. b
4. b
5. a
6. b
7. a
8. a
9. b
10. b

The Case of the Nonessential Elements (Part 2: Commas or Not?)
(Page 34)

1. comma between *hours* and *minutes*
2. comma between *Station* and *who*
3. OK as is
4. OK as is
5. comma between *Tuesday* and *the*
6. comma between *Sue* and *who*
7. OK as is
8. comma between *Blair* and *who*
   comma between *occurred* and *hurried*
9. OK as is
10. comma between *agents* and *also*
    comma between *vesicants* and *are*

The Case of the Cited Examples
(Page 37)

1. comma between *behavior* and *such as*
   (examples are nonessential)
2. comma after *for example*
3. comma between *liquids* and *like*
   comma between *toluene* and *in*
   (examples are nonessential because the point is to expect *any* flammable liquids, not just those that are similar to the ones named)
4. OK as is
   (*like the ones sold for home use* is essential to the meaning of the sentence)
5. commas before and after *for instance*
   comma between *spray* and *cause*
6. comma after *e.g.*
7. comma between *conditions* and *particularly*
8. comma between *entry* and *including*
9. OK as is
10. commas before and after *that is*
    comma between *reaction* and *is*

Solutions to the Cases (continued)

The Case of the Serial Comma
(Page 40)

1. ... stop, drop, and roll.
   (optional comma after *drop*)
2. ... alter, suspend, or terminate ...
   (optional comma after *suspend*)
3. ... breathing, circulation, and mental status.
   (optional comma after *circulation*)
4. ... time, distance, and shielding ...
   (optional comma after *distance*)
5. ... hazardous material, protect themselves, call for trained personnel, and secure the area.
   (optional comma after *personnel*)
6. ... ensure your safety, treat the injured, and protect the evidence ...
   (optional comma after *injured*)
7. ... hose lays, using hand tools, and deploying tent shelters.
   (optional comma after *tools*)
8. ... (defensive, offensive, and nonintervention), possible action options for each, and a process for determining ...
   (optional comma after *each*)
9. ... flammable solids, liquids, and gases; oxidizers; organic peroxides; and corrosive materials. *
10. ... recognizing, responding to, and defusing domestic violence calls; knowing how to initiate a restraining order; and knowing how to properly question and care for ... *

* The last two questions use a combination of commas (to separate words *within* the first item of the series) and semicolons (as "super commas" to make clearer the separation between each item in the series).

The Case of the Consecutive Adjectives
(Page 43)

1. steep, treacherous terrain
2. OK as is
3. dark, stormy night
4. frightened, injured teens
5. calm, orderly manner
6. OK as is
7. pale, cool, clammy skin
8. Slow, shallow, irregular breathing
9. OK as is
10. toxic, flammable gases
11. Sharp, jagged, or pointed objects
    (comma after *jagged* is optional because these adjectives are used as items in a series)
12. OK as is
13. remote, uninhabited area
14. quiet, polite manner
15. weak, ineffective cough
16. sudden, unexpected storm
17. OK as is
18. torn, bloodstained clothing
19. senseless, brutal crime
20. slow, painstaking process

The Case of the Contrasting Commas
(Page 46)

1. comma between *in* and *last*
2. commas before and after *not the fire itself*
3. comma between *stairwells* and *not*
4. comma between *flash point* and *the*
5. comma between *safest* and *though*
   optional comma between *expedient* and *way*
6. comma between *hostages* and *but*
7. comma between *legs* and *not*
8. OK as is
   (commas are usually omitted in sentence containing *not ... but* before a verb)
9. comma between *academy* and *not*
   comma between *skills* and *but*
10. OK as is
    (commas are not used in *not only-but also* constructions)
11. comma between *as* and *if*
    optional comma between *than* and *the*
12. commas before and after *not your strategy*

The Case of the Dated Comma
(Page 48)

1. OK as is
2. September 11, 2001,
3. OK as is
4. May 13 through May 20, 2006,
5. OK as is
6. Sunday, June 5,
7. OK as is
8. October 9, 1871,
9. November 29, 1988,
10. February 13, 2005,

Solutions to the Cases (continued)

The Case of the Uninvited Comma
(Page 51)

1. delete comma after *personnel*
   insert comma between *incident* and *generally*
2. delete comma after *bedroom*
   delete comma after *family*
3. delete comma after *self*
4. delete comma after *people*
   insert comma between *are* and *and*
   delete comma after *911*
5. insert comma between *emergency* and *employees*
   delete comma after *process*
6. delete comma after *note*
   delete comma after *cause*
7. delete comma after *fingertips*
   delete comma after *criminals*
8. delete comma after *bruises*
   delete comma after *progressed*
   insert comma between *murder* and *blood*
   delete comma after *sites*
   delete comma after *counts*
9. delete comma after *material*
   delete comma after *level*
10. insert comma between *safe* and *and*
    delete comma after *water* *

* The clause *except that which has been stored ahead of time* is essential to the meaning of the sentence because it clarifies that not *all* drinking water must be purified. As such, it would not be set off with commas. However, the rules do include some flexibility where the desired effect is to make readers pause and take notice (e.g., to say that stored water doesn't have to be purified like tap water does). Therefore, you could set off the expression with commas *both before and after*. Putting it in parentheses is another valid option.

The Case of the Abused Abbreviations
(Page 54)

1. doctor
2. Captain, department, Christmas
3. 141˚F
4. 24-foot, second-floor
5. *Carbon dioxide* may be spelled out or abbreviated as CO_2, depending on how formal the document is.
6. OK as is
7. Drive in Los Angeles, California
8. Carbon-14 (^{14}C)
9. patient, shortness of breath
10. Charles, department's
    Hazardous materials can be spelled out or shortened to *hazmat*, depending on how formal the document is.

The Case of the Punctuated Abbreviation
(Page 57)

1. MSDS (no periods)
2. St. James (period)
3. OK as is
4. 1500-gpm (hyphen, no periods)
5. OK as is
6. 141˚F (60.5˚F) (no spaces)
7. OSHA (no periods)
8. mm Hg *or* mmHg (space is optional)
9. CEO *or* C.E.O. (periods are optional)
10. 35-mph (hyphen)

The Case of the Latin Abbreviations
(Page 60)

1. i.e.,
2. contraband, i.e.,
3. e.g.,
4. agents, e.g.,
5. i.e.,
6. e.g.,
7. i.e.,
8. e.g.,
9. hazards, e.g.,
10. edema, i.e.,

The Case of the Indefinite Article
(Page 62)

1. an, a
2. an
3. an
4. a
5. an
6. an
7. a
8. an
9. an
10. an
11. a
12. a
13. a
14. an
15. a
16. an
17. an
18. a
19. a
20. a

The Case of the Confusing Contractions
(Page 64)

1. its
2. their
3. you're
4. who's
5. it's
6. they're
7. your
8. whose
9. its
10. there
11. it's
12. you're
13. their
14. its
15. there
16. whose
17. it's
18. your
19. it's
20. who's

Solutions to the Cases (continued)

The Case of the Mistaken Apostrophe
(Page 68)

1. lots
2. years', reports
3. SOPs *
4. everyone's, tests
5. fees
6. ERs *, patients
7. goes
8. suspects'
9. CPA's
10. rods
11. guys
12. gets
13. John's
14. MSDSs *
15. agencies
16. person's, one's
17. let's, scenarios
18. days
19. ideas
20. victims, beds

* Many experts prefer forming the plurals of acronyms and abbreviations with only an *s* to avoid confusion. However, others insist that an apostrophe is permissible. This author prefers to omit the apostrophe because it is functionally unnecessary. However, you would not be wrong if you wrote *SOP's, ER's,* and *MSDS's* instead.

The Case of the Perplexing Possessives
(Page 71)

1. James' or James's (P)
2. else's
3. victims'
4. Thomas' or Thomas's (P)
5. husband's and wife's
6. women's
7. Jones' or Jones's (P)
8. Rosses'
9. mother-in-law's
10. mother and father's
11. know-it-all's
12. Chris' or Chris's (P)

The Case of the Perfect Prefix
(Page 73)

The following are the preferred spellings based on usage and the guidelines in my dictionary. However, since not all dictionaries agree, you may come up with a few different answers.

1. noncombustible
2. counterterrorism
3. re-count
4. prefire
5. postoperative
6. redoubled
7. reinforce
8. coteach, self-defense
9. misfired
10. re-search
11. aftereffects
12. contraindications
13. semiautomatic
14. preexisting
15. de-escalate

The Case of the One-Two Punch
(Page 75)

1. anytime
2. every day
3. every one
4. up on
5. onto
6. some time
7. awhile
8. may be
9. someday
10. everyone
11. on to
12. anyone
13. someone
14. a while
15. into
16. any more
17. any one
18. maybe
19. any time
20. some day

The Case of the Closing Compounds
(Page 78)

The following are the preferred spellings based on usage and the guidelines in my dictionary. However, since not all dictionaries agree, you may come up with a few different answers.

1. upstairs
2. policewomen
3. fire drill
4. firehouse
5. healthcare
6. shutoff
7. blindfolded
8. knock down
9. airborne
10. bloodcurdling
11. pileup
12. hang out
13. breakdown
14. stand by
15. troublemaker
16. brainwashed
17. shortcut
18. rip off
19. holdup
20. blackmail

The Case of the Compound Adjective
(Page 81)

1. smoke-filled
2. panic-stricken
3. high-speed
4. OK as is
5. oxygen-deficient
6. short-handed, off-duty
7. insulin-dependent
8. drive-by
9. hit-and-run
10. out-of-the-way
11. first-degree
12. OK as is
13. long-term
14. fast-moving
15. cost-effective
16. drug-induced
17. ill-fated
18. OK as is
19. 9-year-old
20. well-known

Solutions to the Cases (continued)

The Case of the Homonym High Jinks
(Pages 84 and 85)

1. aide
2. device
3. principal
4. site
5. minor
6. affects
7. advise
8. incidence
9. patients
10. alter
11. desert
12. envelops
13. imminent
14. weather
15. illicit
16. except
17. capitol
18. tail
19. personal
20. conscious
21. ascent
22. bated
23. eluded
24. cowered
25. sordid
26. waived
27. accept
28. lose
29. too
30. soul
31. hear
32. pried
33. tide
34. stationary
35. liable
36. insight
37. heroine
38. led
39. lessen
40. lumbar

The Case of the Wrong Denotation
(Page 87)

1. infirmity
2. dragged
3. number
4. fewer
5. climactic
6. defuse
7. ordnance
8. torturous
9. respectfully
10. percentage
11. implied
12. preceded
13. disinterested
14. explicit
15. fortunate
16. incredible
17. biennial
18. moot
19. continually
20. corroborating

The Case of the Wrong Connotation
(Page 89)

1. destroyed
2. angry
3. eager
4. staff
5. problem
6. arguing
7. lasting
8. reckless
9. abducted
10. survey
11. sensitive
12. attack
13. penetrate
14. collapsed
15. scope

The Case of the Spelling Slip-Ups
(Page 92)

1. mischievous
2. Public
3. accidentally, restaurant
4. canceled, received
5. hypochlorite, for
6. driver, pain, car
7. an, too, especially
8. emergency, immediately
9. precedence, environmental
10. a lot, because, judgment

The Case of the Good and Bad Options
(Page 94)

1. badly
2. really
3. bad
4. badly
5. well
6. badly
7. bad
8. really
9. good
10. bad
11. badly
12. well

The Case of the Transitive Tricksters
(Page 97)

1. lying
2. sit
3. rose
4. laid
5. sit
6. raising
7. set
8. lying
9. sit
10. sat
11. lay
12. sit
13. sit
14. rising
15. set

The Case of the Deciding Who(m)
(Page 100)

1. whom
2. who
3. whoever
4. whomever
5. who
6. whom
7. whoever
8. who
9. whom
10. whoever
11. whoever
12. whomever
13. who
14. whom
15. who

Solutions to the Cases (continued)

The Case of the Relative Pronouns
(Page 102)

Listed below are the preferred pronouns based on the guidelines provided for this case. However, there is enough flexibility to allow for other options in many of the sentences.

1. who
2. that or which
3. which
4. that
5. who
6. that
7. whom
8. that
9. which
10. which

The Case of the Inappropriate Pronoun
(Page 105)

1. I
2. him (by him)
3. me
4. me
5. I
6. his
7. they and I
8. she
9. he (he is)
10. she and I

The Case of the Difficult Gender
(Page 107)

The following are suggested revisions. Other options may be appropriate.

1. All emergency responders should know their blood types.
2. Managers are responsible for the safety of their employees.
3. All personnel washed their hands ...
4. All contaminated patients must go through decon before being treated by EMS personnel.
5. All of our officers have dash-mounted cameras in their patrol cars.
   or ... All our patrol cars have dash-mounted cameras.
6. People who inhale too much smoke are likely to become disoriented and have difficulty finding their way out of the building.
7. ... we need to know if people are trapped ...
8. ... eager to move in on his or her territory.
9. The boys are being punished for their bad behavior.
   or ... Each of the boys is being punished for his bad behavior. (The pronoun *his* is acceptable because the sentence is about boys only. However, the verb *are* must be changed to *is* because *each* is singular. Think of the sentence as reading *each <u>one</u> is* ...)
10. (It would be awkward to make these two sentences plural, so replacing *he* with *he or she* is acceptable. Or you could replace it with a noun, such as *that responder*.)

The Case of the Indefinite Pronoun
(Page 110)

1. is
2. are
3. needs
4. speaks
5. have
6. were
7. has
8. was
9. (delete the pronoun *)
10. appreciates
11. recalls
12. (reword the sentence **)
13. has, its
14. knows, (reword the rest ***)
15. don't

* The pronoun *his* may be correct if both paramedics are male, but this sentence can be easily fixed by deleting the pronoun.

** The pronoun *himself* may be correct if everyone on probation is male. However, the pronoun can be eliminated by writing "Everyone must be disciplined to study hard" or "Everyone must study hard."

*** The verb *knows* is right, but neither pronoun is correct. Fix by using *him or her* or something singular and gender-neutral like *that person*.

Solutions to the Cases (continued)

The Case of the Faulty Pronoun Reference
(Page 113)

The following are suggested revisions. Other options may be appropriate.

1. Kevin told Tom that he (Tom) needed to report to the command post. (or Kevin)
   or ... Kevin told Tom, "You need to report to the command post." (or I)
2. Karen found a candle that may have started the fire on the electric blanket.
   or ... On the electric blanket, Karen found a candle that may have started the fire.
3. Nick handed the resuscitator to Bruce, then took over compressions.
4. ... the suspect threw the gun out the passenger window.
5. ... but the charge was dismissed the next day.
6. Good Samaritan laws generally protect a person from liability ...
7. Vehicle A crossed the median and hit Vehicle B head-on.
8. ... send the coat (or the liner) in for repairs.
9. ... while off duty for fear of being sued if something goes wrong.
10. Warrick told Gil, "My (or your) evidence collection kit was stolen from my (or your) vehicle."
    (It would be awkward to rewrite the original sentence by putting names in parentheses behind both instances of the pronoun *his*. If it's not appropriate to use a direct quotation, as shown above, it may be best to leave the original sentence as is. There is no ideal fix for this one, and the original is not that bad unless it truly causes confusion.)

The Case of the Prepositional Ending
(Page 115)

1. OK as is
   or ... Where did the fire start?
2. The danger is over (or past).
3. OK as is
   or ... On what floor is the detective bureau located?
   or ... Where is the detective bureau located?
4. OK as is
5. I have a lot of interest in forensic science.
6. OK as is
7. Where is the shutoff valve located?
8. What is the topic of this week's drill?
9. OK as is
   or ... We can do without this.
10. OK as is
    or ... What is the nearest major intersection to the accident?

The Case of the Subjunctive Mood
(Page 117)

1. be
2. am
3. be
4. post
5. requires
6. continue
7. allow
8. were
9. were
10. knew
11. knew
12. knows

The Case of the Redundant Modifiers
(Page 119)

1. ~~totally~~ engulfed
2. ~~absolutely~~ certain
3. return ~~again~~
4. ~~lifeless~~ corpse
5. OK
6. ~~serious~~ crisis
7. ~~closely~~ scrutinized
8. ~~past~~ history
9. ~~fully~~ eliminate
10. ~~gambling~~ casino
11. OK
12. ~~previous~~ experience
13. OK
14. ~~end~~ result
15. ~~puzzling~~ mystery
16. ~~basic~~ principle
17. ~~necessary~~ prerequisite
18. OK
19. ~~clearly~~ apparent
20. ~~originally~~ founded

Solutions to the Cases (continued)

The Case of the Wasted Words
(Page 122)

The following are suggested revisions. Other options may be appropriate.

1. We'll need additional resources if it's necessary to evacuate residents from the neighborhood.
2. I momentarily lost sight of the suspect.
3. The contaminated clothing needs to be replaced.
4. We shut down the highway because of an accident involving an overturned tanker.
5. We don't have enough money in the budget.
6. The jury has reached a consensus.
7. Several convicted child molesters live in the area.
8. We had residents shelter in place rather than evacuate because we expected the vapor cloud to dissipate within 30 minutes.
9. I feel that candidate is too young and lacks the maturity to be a police officer.
10. The fatal blow to her head was inflicted by a blunt object.

The Case of the Weak and Wimpy
(Page 125)

The following are suggested revisions. Other options may be appropriate.

1. The chief decided to cut it from the budget.
   or ... The chief cut it from the budget.
2. The minister's daughter was struck by a hit-and-run driver.
3. I investigated the factory explosion and determined it resulted from careless handling of an organic peroxide.
4. The investigation is complete.
   (If you need to call attention to something significant that hasn't been completed, don't allude to it with *for all intents and purposes*. Instead, spell it out. *The investigation is complete, pending the insurance company's confirmation of the dollar loss.*)
5. Volunteers thoroughly searched the camp grounds, hoping to find the boy before nightfall.
6. I intended only to cite him, but when he became violent, I arrested him.
7. I don't think the recruits are ready to be tested.
   (*To be honest* isn't necessary unless you have a history of lying. However, if the expression was used in place of something else [e.g., *I didn't want to say this in front of the chief, but* ...], that alternate text might be important to include.)
8. Four of us will attend the forensic science conference next week.
9. I concluded that the patient was not a danger to himself or others.
10. I spoke with the reporting party and assured her that she did the right thing by calling 911.
    or ... I reassured the reporting party that it was right to call 911.

The Case of the Superfluous Text
(Page 127)

The following are suggested revisions. Many other options are possible.

1. This plan contains guidelines for responding to a variety of emergencies that could occur at the site. (17 words)
2. Drinking and driving can be a deadly combination. (8 words)
3. Use proper evidence collection containers. Evidence can dry out, spoil, or otherwise be destroyed if not packaged properly. (18 words)
4. Generally, the only times the media may be denied access is at a legitimate crime scene, at an incident on private property, or when they are interfering with operations and creating a life safety hazard. (35 words)

The Case of the Needed Words
(Page 129)

1. Our officers feared *that* the suspect ...
2. ... than we are about their parents.
   or ... than their parents are.
3. ... believes *in* and uses ...
4. I read *that* another ...
5. ... last *year's*.
   or ... last *year's* statistics.
6. I think *that* whenever possible ...
7. ... stronger knot *than the bowline*.
   (or some other knot)
8. Captain Innis heard *that* the ...
9. We have *required* and still are requiring ...
10. ... than combustible liquids *do*.
    or ... than *do* combustible liquids.

Solutions to the Cases (continued)

The Case of the Missing Details
(Part 1: Interpreting the Brief Narrative)
(Page 132)

All ten statements are unclear based on the limited information in the narrative. Some of the information may be contained elsewhere in the report, but that was beyond the scope of this exercise.

The Case of the Missing Details
(Part 2: Filling in the Gaps)
(Page 133)

Instead of suggesting revisions for this exercise, I've listed details that might be appropriate to incorporate into the sentences. You might think of others. Some of this information might appear elsewhere in your document, but the point of this exercise is to get you thinking about details that may be important.

1.
   - color of the smoke
   - how many windows and on what side(s) of the building
   - height of the building (how many floors)
2.
   - which room the fire was confined to
   - type of damage (smoke, heat, water)
   - type of building (e.g., house, apartment, office complex)
3.
   - how Engine 3's crew assisted paramedics
   - which paramedic unit
   - hospital the patient was transported to
   - code of transport (code 2, code 3)
4.
   - definition of adequate clearance (e.g., 36 inches)
   - what safety equipment (fire extinguishers, alarm boxes, etc.)
   - applicable code section
5.
   - details about the altercation
   - detention facility he was taken to
   - whether suspect or police were injured
   - which police agency
6.
   - identity of person(s) making the estimate
   - what the estimate is based on

The Case of the Vibrant Voice
(Page 136)

1. Active
   Passive: The building owner had previously been cited for safety violations by OSHA.
2. Passive
   Active: Firefighters discovered the child under the wreckage.
3. Passive
   Active: We began search and rescue efforts immediately.
4. Active
   Passive: CPR was performed on the victim for more than 20 minutes.
5. Passive
   Active: The homeowner left a candle burning unattended.
6. Passive
   Active: A hidden surveillance camera captured the incident.
7. Active
   Passive: The pedestrian was struck by a black SUV as he entered the intersection.
8. Passive
   Active: I read the suspect his Miranda rights.
9. Passive
   Active: Police arrested her for child abuse.
10. Active
    Passive: The desk was dusted (by me) for prints.

The Case of the Needless Shifts
(Page 140)

The following are suggested revisions. Other options may be appropriate.

1. A person who inhales chlorine gas can develop pulmonary edema.
2. Employees started decontamination right away, but the patient felt no relief prior to our arrival.
3. We followed the suspect by helicopter and radioed his position to officers on the ground.
4. When homeowners ... (plural)
5. Steve said that we needed to shock the patient and asked me to get the defribillator ready.
6. Hazmat technicians ... (plural)
7. Catherine examined the crime scene and found no sign of struggle.
8. The chief's secretary said, "He's in a meeting. Can I take a message?"
   or ... The chief's secretary said that he was in a meeting and offered to take a message.
9. I ordered an evacuation knowing that an unexpected wind shift could drive the fire toward these homes.
10. As Engine 3 (or *we*) left the station, we could see a heavy column of black smoke against the predawn sky.

Solutions to the Cases (continued)

The Case of the Nonparallel Structure
(Page 142)

The following are suggested revisions. Other options may be appropriate.

1. ... fires and burn injuries.
2. ... and ~~they need to~~ identify ...
3. ... rather than a firefighter.
   or ... Stacey decided on a career in law enforcement rather than in the fire service.
4. ... eyes and stopped breathing.
5. ... and ~~he was~~ evasive ...
6. ... identify the hazardous material
7. A. Check in and obtain ...
   B. Participate in preparing ...
   C. Advise the hazardous ...
   D. Alter, suspend, or terminate ...
   (Delete *has full authority to*)
8. *Use all questions ...*
   - What provokes the pain? Does anything make it better or worse?
   - What does the pain feel like?
   - Where is the pain, and does it radiate anywhere?
   - On a scale of 1 to 10, how severe is the pain?
   - How long has the pain lasted? Is it steady, or does it come and go?

   Or use all statements ...
   - What provokes the pain and whether anything makes it better or worse.
   - What the pain feels like.
   - Where the pain is located and whether it radiates elsewhere.
   - The severity of the pain, on a scale of 1 to 10.
   - How long the patient has had the pain and whether it comes and goes.

The Case of the Misplaced Modifiers (Part 1: Limiting Modifiers)
(Page 144)

1. b
2. a
3. b.
4. a
5. b
6. a
7. a
8. b

The Case of the Misplaced Modifiers (Part 2: Misplaced Modifiers)
(Page 145)

The following are suggested revisions. Other options may be appropriate.

1. The patient with third-degree burns is being evaluated by a paramedic.
2. Some of the people who did not seek shelter were killed by the passing tornado.
3. The children bravely testified in court against the man who had molested them.
   (or *testified bravely*)
4. Engine 11 responded for a report of a man who had suffered a seizure on the trail.
5. I put the evidence found at the crime scene into the storage locker.
6. On orders from the chief, we can't disclose the name of the woman who was shot.
7. The tenth annual reunion was disrupted by a bomb threat.
8. Over time, the recruits became more proficient at raising ladders.
9. Many of the patients who were badly injured were in the front of the bus.
10. The teens set off the illegal (or illegally purchased) fireworks in Kyle's backyard. (Because moving the modifier would not create a clearer sentence, rewriting the sentence slightly was a better solution.)

Solutions to the Cases (continued)

The Case of the Squinting Modifier
(Page 147)

Correct placement of the modifier depends on the intended meaning.

1. irritated my throat briefly
   or ... The small amount of smoke I inhaled irritated my throat.
2. accused them wrongly
3. deeply penetrated
   or ... concerns me deeply
4. covertly tailed
5. rapidly deteriorating
   or ... need rapid transport
   (change *rapidly* to *rapid* for the second option)
6. often drives Code 3
   or ... may often become impatient
7. arrest him tonight
   or ... Tonight we decided
8. Immediately evacuating
9. routinely drove *or* complained routinely
10. first said
    or ... What you said made sense to me finally ... (change *first* to *finally* for this option)

The Case of the Split Infinitive
(Page 149)

1. b
2. a is best, b is acceptable
3. b is best, a is acceptable
4. b
5. c is best—emphasis is *stopped briefly*
   a and b are acceptable—but the emphasis is *reassess briefly*
6. b
7. a
8. b
9. a
10. a —this wording shows that *quickly and quietly* applies to both exiting the building and reporting to the assembly areas

The Case of the Dangling Modifier
(Page 152)

Provided below are one or two possible revisions for each of the sentences. You may have come up with other alternatives that are also acceptable.

1. If the knife is still impaled in the patient, you should stabilize it in place.
2. For evidence to be ruled admissible in court, you must ensure the chain of custody is unbroken.
   or ... You must ensure the chain of custody is unbroken for evidence to be ruled admissible in court.
3. Because Diane had been kidnapped during the night, her parents were distraught.
   or ... Diane's parents were distraught because she had been kidnapped during the night.
4. Because he is a known sex offender, the police department will be watching him closely.
   or ... As a known sex offender, he will be watched closely by the police department.
5. While inspecting the building, I noticed several safety violations.
   or ... I noticed several safety violations while inspecting the building.
6. Because we are women, some men think we are not strong enough to do the job.
   or ... Some men think we are not strong enough to do the job because we are women.
7. To stop the bleeding, apply direct pressure.
   or ... Apply direct pressure to stop the bleeding.
8. Three minutes after we rescued the last victim, the structure collapsed.
   or ... The structure collapsed three minutes after we rescued the last victim.
9. Not finding evidence to support arson, I determined the cause of the fire to be accidental.
   or ... Because I found no evidence to suggest arson, I determined the fire to be of accidental origin.
10. Because the helmets were old and not up to current standards, I took them out of service.
    or ... I took the helmets out of service because they were old and not up to current standards.
11. While I was working with the Hurst tool, the high-pressure hose burst and splashed hydraulic fluid in my face.
12. While I was assessing the patient, he suddenly became combative and struck me in the face.

Solutions to the Cases (continued)

The Case of the Faulty Construction
(Page 154)

The following are suggested revisions. Other options may be appropriate.

1. In response to our community's concern about the increase in gang violence, we are ...
   (delete *is the reason that*)
2. Smoke detectors are ...
   (not *the use of* smoke detectors)
3. Incorporate ...
   (not *incorporating*)
4. Hypothermia is the cooling of the body core temperature.
   (delete *is when*)
5. I determined ...
   (not *my investigation determined*)
6. To check capillary refill, press ...
   (not *by pressing*)
7. A stoma is a surgical opening ...
   (delete *is where there is*)
8. Evaluate your progress ...
   (not *by evaluating*)
9. Having personnel observe ...
   (*Assigning* personnel to observe for safety hazards is not the same as knowing the assignment is being carried out. Thus *having* is a better choice for this sentence.)
10. Do you have some form of emergency decon in place? Emergency decon must be set up prior to performing a rescue.
    (Breaking this into two sentences is less awkward than the original version. The suggested solution was also made more concise by eliminating text that's obvious and doesn't add meaning to the sentence.)

The Case of the Capital Titles
(Page 157)

The following are my recommendations based on usage. However, there is enough flexibility in the rules to allow for different options in some of these sentences.

1. chief, Lieutenant
2. Doctor
3. president, Governor *or* governor
4. late, Captain
5. Medical Unit Leader, Operations
6. Secretary of Homeland Security, Pope's
   (These titles would likely be capitalized out of respect in a press release. However, it would not be wrong to lowercase them instead.)
7. Senior Crime Scene Analyst
8. former, Presidents *or* presidents
9. incident safety officer, incident commander's
   (Lowercasing these titles in a magazine article puts the emphasis on the rest of the text rather than on the positions. However, it would not be wrong to capitalize them instead.)
10. amateur sleuth

Glossary of Grammatical Terms

The following is a partial list of grammatical terms used in *Crimes Against the English Language*.

Absolute Phrase. An absolute phrase is a phrase that modifies the whole sentence, rather than just a portion of it.

> *Considering the quality of the prints*, I'd be surprised if we find a match in AFIS.

Adjective. An adjective is a word used to modify a noun or pronoun. An adjective identifies *what kind*, *which one*, or *how many*. ***Proper adjectives*** are formed from proper nouns. ***Compound adjectives*** are made up of two or more words meant to function as a single unit. ***Coordinate adjectives*** are two or more adjectives that equally modify the same word.

> *Proper:* At least one *American* citizen is among the injured.
> *Compound:* It's unknown whether his injuries are *life-threatening*.
> *Coordinate:* It was a *senseless, brutal* act of terrorism.

Adverb. An adverb is a word used to modify a verb, an adjective, or another adverb. Adverbs describe *how*, *when*, *where*, *why*, or *to what degree* (e.g., *repeatedly* denied or *brutally* attacked).

Antecedent. The antecedent is the noun or phrase to which a pronoun refers.

> *Glenn* wrecked his parents' car. (*Glenn* is the antecedent of *his*.)

Appositive. An appositive is a word or phrase that defines, explains, or renames another noun before it.

> Approximately 40 percent of all patients who suffer an acute myocardial infarction, or *heart attack*, die before they reach the hospital.

Article. There are three articles: *a*, *an*, and *the*. *A* and *an* are *indefinite* articles; they refer to an unspecified item. *The* is a *definite* article; it refers to one or more specific items.

Case. Personal pronouns come in three cases. The ***nominative case*** (or ***subjective case***) refers to the person or thing doing the action. The ***objective case*** refers to the person or thing being acted upon. The ***possessive case*** is used to show ownership or possession.

> *Nominative:* *They* were killed sometime last night.
> *Objective:* Someone killed *them* last night.
> *Possessive:* *Their* identities have not yet been confirmed.

Clause. A clause is a group of related words containing both a subject and a predicate. A ***independent*** (***main***) ***clause*** can stand alone as a sentence. A ***dependent*** (***subordinate***) ***clause*** cannot stand alone as a complete sentence. Rather, it is used to modify an independent clause.

> *Independent:* Workers reported an accidental release of chlorine from a one-ton container.
> *Dependent:* *Before we do anything else*, let's isolate the area and call for the hazmat team.

Comma Splice. A comma splice is a grammatical error in which two independent clauses are joined solely by a comma.

> *Splice:* The driver was pronounced dead at the scene, his passenger died later at the hospital.
> *Revised:* The driver was pronounced dead at the scene. His passenger died later at the hospital.

Contraction. A contraction is an expression formed by condensing two words into one. One or more letters are removed from the original two words, and an apostrophe is added to take their place. Examples include *don't*, *can't*, *I'm*, *they're*, and *it's*.

Glossary of Grammatical Terms (continued)

Coordinating Conjunctions. Coordinating conjunctions (*and, but, for, nor, or, so,* and *yet*) are words used to connect other parts of speech.

Dangling Modifier. A dangling modifier is a modifier that doesn't clearly refer to anything in the sentence. Readers are often misled to believe that the modifier refers to one thing, usually the subject of the sentence, when it refers to something else.

Dangling: *Having injected heroin and other drugs for many years*, we considered it likely that he was infected with HIV.
Revised: *Because he had injected heroin and other drugs for many years*, we considered it likely that he was infected with HIV.

Essential Element. An essential (or restrictive) element is one that cannot be omitted without changing the meaning of the sentence or leaving the sentence structurally incomplete.

One of the workers *who was in the immediate area when the release occurred* is complaining of irritation to the eyes, nose, and respiratory system.

Gender. Gender is the classification of nouns or pronouns as *masculine* (e.g., *Paul, father,* or *he*), *feminine* (e.g., *Paula, mother,* or *she*), or *neuter* (e.g., *vehicle, hydrant,* or *it*).

Infinitive. An infinitive is a form of verb made up of the word *to* plus the present tense of a verb (e.g., *to believe, to withdraw*). A ***split infinitive*** is one that has been separated by an adverb (e.g., *to honestly believe, to reluctantly withdraw*).

Interjection. Interjections are words or expressions designed to show a strong feeling or sudden emotion, such as anger, frustration, excitement, surprise, happiness, pain, or shock. They may also be used to catch a reader's attention. Examples include *oh, ouch, hey, darn, well, yes,* and *no.*

Misplaced Modifier. A misplaced modifiers is a modifier that is positioned where it appears to modify something other than what was intended.

Misplaced: We're giving out free condoms to protect against HIV *provided by the health department.*
Revised: We're giving out free condoms *provided by the health department* to protect against HIV.

Modifier. A modifier is a word, phrase, or clause that qualifies or limits the meaning of another word or group of words. Modifiers include adjectives and adverbs, as well as words, phrases, and clauses that serve as adjectives or adverbs. ***Limiting modifiers*** limit or restrict the word or words that immediately follow them. Examples of limiting modifiers include *almost, even, exactly, hardly, just, merely, nearly, only, scarcely,* and *simply.* (See also *dangling modifier, misplaced modifier,* and *squinting modifier.*)

Mood. Mood refers to the attitude behind a statement. The ***indicative mood*** is used to make a statement or ask a question. The ***imperative mood*** is used to give a command or make a request. The ***subjunctive mood*** is used to express a wish, a condition contrary to fact, a recommendation, or a demand.

Indicative: The gunman is holding several people hostage.
Imperative: Get a hostage negotiator out here.
Subjunctive: The gunman is demanding that he be given safe passage across the border.

Nonessential element. A nonessential (or nonrestrictive) element provides supplemental information that can be omitted without changing the meaning of the sentence or leaving the sentence structurally incomplete. A nonessential element is set off by commas.

Chlorine, *which is placarded as a poison gas*, can severely damage the respiratory system.

Glossary of Grammatical Terms (continued)

Noun. A noun is a word that names a person, place, thing, quality, or idea. ***Common nouns*** name a *general* person, place, thing, quality, or idea (e.g., *chief* and *station*), whereas ***proper nouns*** name a *specific* person, place, or thing (e.g., *Chief Parker* and *Sunnyoaks Station*). ***Collective nouns*** name a group or unit (e.g., *crew* and *team*).

Object. An object is the person or thing that receives the action of the verb—the person or thing being acted upon. The ***direct object*** is the person or thing that *directly* receives the action of the verb. The ***indirect object*** is the person or thing that *indirectly* receives the action of the verb. In a *compound object*, two or more people or things receive the action of the verb.

Direct:	Mitch gave Matt the *marijuana*. (*The marijuana was given or acted upon.*)
Indirect:	Mitch gave *Matt* the marijuana. (*Matt received what was given or acted upon.*)
Compound:	Mitch gave Matt *marijuana and cocaine*. (*Two items were given or acted upon.*)

Parallel Construction. Parallel construction refers to the use of grammatically similar form between two or more coordinated elements.

Nonparallel:	Check for *pulse and whether the patient is breathing* for at least five seconds.
Parallel:	Check for *pulse and breathing* for at least five seconds.

Parenthetical Elements. Parenthetical elements are words or groups of words that interrupt the main flow of thought in a sentence but are not essential to the meaning of the sentence. They are called *parenthetical* because they can (and sometimes do) appear in parentheses. Sometimes they are set off by commas or dashes instead. (Parenthetical elements are also *nonessential elements.*)

Attacks with a deadly weapon *(aggravated assault)* occur almost 40 times more often than rape.

Person. There are three grammatical persons. The *first person* is the person(s) speaking (*I* or *we*). The *second person* is the person(s) being spoken to (*you*). The *third person* is the person(s) being spoken about (*he, she, it,* or *they*).

Phrase. A phrase is a group of two or more related words that lacks a subject and a predicate or both and that acts as a single part of speech.

Terrorists may plant secondary devices *designed to kill or injure emergency responders.*

Predicate. The predicate is that part of the sentence that says something about the subject. It may say what the subject does, what is done to the subject, or what state of being the subject is in. A ***compound predicate*** consists of two or more predicates that share the same subject.

Predicate:	Firefighters *extricated the patient.*
Compound Predicate:	Firefighters *extricated the patient and secured her to a backboard.*

Prefix. A prefix is a letter or word added to the beginning of a root word to change its meaning. Examples include *re-, pre-, non-, in-,* and *self-*.)

Preposition. A preposition is a connecting word that shows how a noun or pronoun relates to another part of the sentence. Prepositions may be used to indicate place (e.g., *above, below,* and *inside*), direction (e.g., *up, down,* and *across*), time (e.g., *before, during,* and *after*) or other relationships (e.g., *by, with,* and *instead of.*)

Pronoun. A pronoun is a word that can be used in place of a noun. ***Personal pronouns*** refer to specific people or objects (e.g., *I, you, he, she,* and *they*). ***Indefinite pronouns*** refer to people or things that are *not* specific (e.g., *anyone, everyone,* and *someone*). ***Relative pronouns*** (e.g., *who, which, that,* and *what*) are used to relate groups of words to nouns or pronouns. (See also *case.*)

Glossary of Grammatical Terms (continued)

Question. A ***direct question*** is a sentence that *asks* a question and ends with a question mark. An ***indirect question*** is a sentence that *reports* a question and that ends with a period. An ***elliptical*** (***condensed***) ***question*** is a word or phrase that is understood to represent a more complete question.

Direct: What are the health hazards associated with the product?
Indirect: I asked for information on the health hazards associated with the product.
Elliptical: How bad? (How bad are the patient's symptoms?)

Quotation. Quotations report what someone else has said or written. ***Direct quotations*** contain the exact words of the person being quoted. ***Indirect quotations*** often do not. Direct quotations are enclosed in quotation marks. Indirect quotations are not.

Direct: She said, *"Thousands of people were left homeless by the hurricane."*
Indirect: She said that *thousands of people were left homeless by the hurricane.*

Run-On Sentence. A run-on sentence is a grammatical error in which two or more independent clauses are run together in the same sentence without any punctuation mark or connecting word between them.

Run-On: We had to cut short the station tour we were dispatched on an EMS call.
Revised: We had to cut short the station tour because we were dispatched on an EMS call.

Sentence. A sentence is a group of words that can stand on its own as a complete thought and that consists of at least a subject and a predicate. A ***simple sentence*** contains one independent clause. A ***compound sentence*** consists of two or more independent clauses. An ***elliptical sentence*** is a word or phrase that is understood to represent a complete sentence (or question), even though the subject and verb are missing.

Simple: She was stung by a bee.
Compound: She is allergic to bee stings, but she does not have her bee sting kit with her.
Elliptical: What now? (What do we do now?)

Sentence Fragment. A sentence fragment is an incomplete sentence, most often considered a grammatical error, though sentence fragments are sometimes used for effect, particularly in works of fiction.

Fragment: I'll testify against him. *If you give me police protection.*
Revised: I'll testify against him *if you give me police protection.*

Squinting Modifier. A squinting modifier is a modifier that falls between two words or phrases and can conceivably modify the words or phrases on either side.

Squinting: The possibility of the roof collapsing *suddenly* worries me.
Revised: The possibility of the roof *suddenly* collapsing worries me.

Subject. The subject names the person, place, thing, or idea that the sentence is about. A ***compound subject*** is two or more subjects that share the same predicate.

Subject: *Sara* processed the crime scene.
Compound Subject: *Sara and Nick* processed the crime scene.

Suffix. A suffix is a letter, syllable, or word added to the end of a root word to change its meaning and/or to allow it to function as a different part of speech. Examples include *-ment, -ness, -able,* and *-less.*

Transitional Expression. Transitional expressions are words or phrases that link sentences and show the relation between them. Examples include *therefore, thus, as a result, after all,* and *in conclusion.*

Glossary of Grammatical Terms (continued)

Verb. A verb is a word that expresses either an action or a state of being. A ***transitive verb*** is one that requires an object (someone or something being acted upon) to complete its meaning, whereas an ***intransitive verb*** does not. Many verbs can be transitive or intransitive, depending on how they are used in the sentence. A ***linking verb*** is one that expresses a state of being. The most common linking verbs are *be* and its various forms (*am*, *are*, *been*, *being*, *is*, *was*, and *were*). Others include *become*, *appear*, *look*, *feel*, and *seem*.

Transitive Verb:	Be very careful not to *drop* the patient.
Intransitive Verb:	We will see more cases of hypothermia if the temperature continues to *drop*.
Linking Verb:	I *am* well today, but I sure *felt* bad yesterday.

Voice. Voice indicates whether the subject acts or is acted upon. The ***active voice*** emphasizes the one(s) doing the action. The ***passive voice*** emphasizes the one(s) being acted upon. The one(s) doing the action may or may not be mentioned in sentences written in the passive voice.

Active:	We found the victim in a ravine.
Passive:	The victim was found in a ravine.

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About the Author

Jill Meryl Levy owns her own business—Firebelle Productions. She is an author and publisher, with several full-length books to her credit. She wrote the first edition of *The First Responder's Pocket Guide to Hazardous Materials Emergency Response* in 1996 and a greatly expanded second edition in 2000. That book is now in its third edition, with a new title: *The First Responder's Field Guide to Hazmat & Terrorism Emergency Response*. In 1998, she released *Take Command of Your Writing*, a comprehensive guide to more effective writing geared specifically for emergency services personnel. The *Hazmat Chemistry Study Guide* was first published in 2002 and revised in 2005. Her latest book, *Crimes Against the English Language*, another book on more effective writing, was published in September 2005. Jill also produces brochures, booklets, and newsletters for fire departments and industry.

Jill has worked in the field of safety education since 1981 when she was hired by the City of Santa Clara Fire Department (CA). Later, during her employment at Hewlett-Packard Company in Cupertino (CA), Jill began producing brochures, booklets, and newsletters as a means to communicate safety information to a large employee population. The publications became so popular that she was soon producing brochures and booklets on a corporate-wide basis.

Jill first got involved with hazardous materials while working with the Governor's Office of Emergency Services California Specialized Training Institute (CSTI) on the 1994 and 1995 revisions of its *Hazardous Materials Technician/Specialist* curriculum. In 1995 she became a CSTI-certified hazardous materials specialist and a first responder outreach instructor. Jill has also assisted the California State Fire Marshal's Office with curriculum revision projects.

Jill has been a volunteer firefighter for the Santa Clara County Fire Department (CA) since 1980. In her spare time, Jill helps build homes with Habitat for Humanity.

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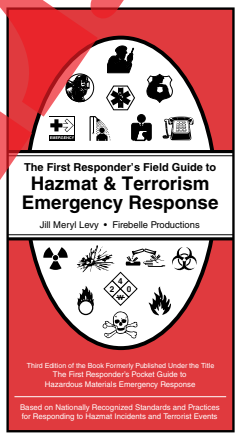

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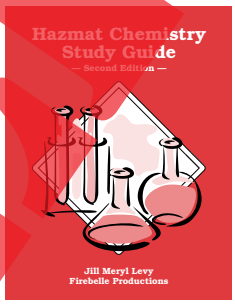

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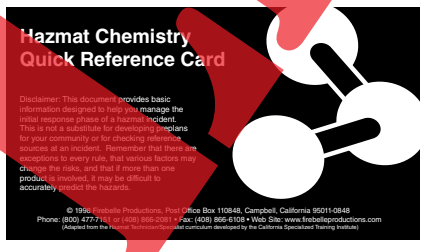

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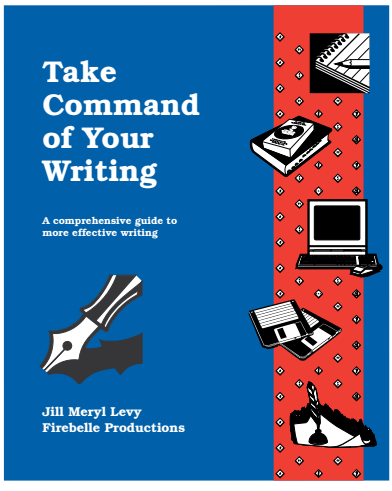

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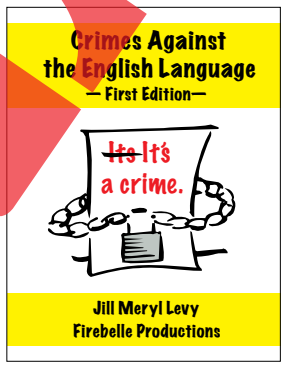

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