CHAPTER 2

Tools for Writers

Spelling, Grammar, and Math

- The announcement of a national meeting of Girl Scouts advises them to meet at the National Maul.
- A Philadelphia headline boasts, "Phillys Put Nats on Notice."
- A company's annual report notes that revenues rose from 80 million to 90 million, or a 10 percent increase.
- A bank newsletter reports a merger, saying, "We have great respect for First Home Savings, and we look forward to working with them."

A close check of all the above statements shows that Girl Scouts actually are headed for the National Mall; that the plural of Philly is Phillies; that revenues actually rose 12 percent; and that First Home Savings, as an institution, must be referred to as "it" rather than as "them."

Writers take great care as they gather information and write. But if they are not careful in checking their grammar, punctuation, spelling, numbers, or facts, they can damage their credibility—as well as their company's credibility. On the Internet, inaccuracies may be forwarded and spread indefinitely. Readers are unlikely to see posted corrections.

Errors need not be dramatic to cause audiences to pause or be dismayed. Large and small errors such as those listed above usually are caused by haste or carelessness, and readers react to them.

Research has shown that when messages are perceived to be error-free, they also are thought to be credible and well written. The perception of quality carries over to the writer and to the medium, be it newspaper, television, or online. In other words, messages free of errors are perceived to be of high quality and produced by professionals.

Students often argue that they do not need spelling, grammar, or punctuation skills. They believe an editor will fix any errors or that errors will be caught by spell-checkers or grammar-checkers built into computer software. Wrong. As a writer types a few keystrokes, the system might complete the word but not select the word the writer intended. As a media writer, you must be prepared to be both writer and editor and to find such errors. Spell-checkers also don't always catch the difference between *maul* and *mall*, *principal* and *principle*, or *affect* and *effect*. Any number of synonyms and homonyms can present problems, so it's up to you to know the difference.

Communicators who pay attention to their audiences know they must also pay attention to detail. That means attending to spelling, grammar, punctuation, and style. Most media have style manuals that contain many clear writing guidelines. They follow Associated Press style, or they have developed style guidelines of their own. Adopting a specific style ensures consistency in all articles, regardless of who writes them or where they appear. Even in short text messages, writers follow a certain style of known abbreviations; otherwise, recipients would have difficulty translating the meaning. (Style is covered in Chapter 3.)

Writers today are expected to know basic math and elementary statistics. They need to know how to compute percentages, figure out square footage, determine whether poll data are representative, and analyze budget figures.

In this chapter, you will learn

- typical spelling errors,
- common adult grammar problems, and
- bottom-line math skills.

Spelling in the Computer Age

Writers, beware: Certain spelling skills are essential in the digital era. This warning might sound exaggerated because, as we all know, computers can check spellings of thousands of words in minutes. But take heed.

What Spell-Checkers Will (and Won't) Do

Checking systems embedded in computers are a great invention, virtually eliminating senseless typographical errors, such as "scuh" and "typograpical," as well as common spelling problems such as "seperate" and "mispell." Sometimes, however, spell-checkers merely highlight many potential problems without correcting them. You, the writer, are expected to check the highlighted words or phrases and to approve them or provide correction.

Here's an example: If a computer merely finds a word in its dictionary, it "checks" that word, assuring the writer that the spelling is correct. Say,

for example, the computer encounters this sentence: "Robin was going too the fare." The sentence checks the words "too" and "fare." They exist in the dictionary, so they pass muster. And if "Robin" happens to be spelled correctly as "Robyn," that error will go unchecked because "robin" would be found in the computer's dictionary. Or perhaps the typo is an actual word, such as "count" instead of "court." The error would slip by as correct, and the writer would have created an immediate audience-stopper and confusion.

So spell-checkers aid writers in most spelling dilemmas, but not all of them. Some of the most challenging spelling tasks (listed in the next section) are still the writer's responsibility.

A Do-It-Yourself List. By now, it should be clear that spell-checkers will not do everything. The writer has the hands-on, do-it-yourself responsibility of checking the following problems that spell-checkers do not correct.

Homonyms. Writers must distinguish among homonyms, or words that sound alike but have different meanings and are spelled differently. Any writer's credibility would drop if his or her readers saw these sentences:

- Mrs. Margolis consulted two professional piers before suspending the student. (Readers will see Mrs. Margolis conferring in a lakeside setting.)
- Barnes said he didn't want to altar his plans. (Will Barnes offer his plan during religious services?)
- All navel movements will be approved by the commanding officer. (Whose belly buttons are moving?)
- Investigators found millions of land mines sewn into the earth. (Did someone use a needle and thread?)

Such homonyms as "alter" and "altar," "pier" and "peer," and "sewn" and "sown" sometimes escape highlighting by spell-checkers that recognize each as a word in the dictionary. Writers who are overconfident in the ability of spell-checkers will undoubtedly leave some errors in their writing. A list of words writers should watch for includes the following:

aid, aide	it's, its
no, know	their, they're, there
to, two, too	whose, who's

Some subtle and damaging errors are made when writers confuse other commonly occurring homonyms, such as those listed below. Good writers distinguish between or among homonyms.

a lot (colloquial expression substituted for "many" or "much")
allot (to distribute)

allude (refer to)
elude (escape)

altar (in a church)
alter (change)

altogether (adverb meaning entirely)
all together (adjective meaning in a group)

bare (naked, uncovered)
baring (showing)

bear (animal, to support)
bearing (supporting)

bore (to drill, to be dull)
boar (pig)

canvas (cloth)
canvass (to poll)

capitol (building)
capital (city)

complement (fills up or completes)
compliment (flattering statement)

council (assembly)
counsel (to advise, legal adviser)
consul (diplomatic officer)

dual (two)
duel (combat between two people)

flair (style; panache)
flare (torch)

effect (noun, meaning result, verb meaning bring about)
affect (verb, meaning influence or cause, noun, meaning facial expression)

gorilla (ape)
guerrilla (person who engages in warfare)

immigrate (come to a new country)
emigrate (leave one's country)

legislator (individual official)
legislature (body)

miner (in a mine)
minor (underage)

naval (of the navy)
navel (belly button)

peer (social equal)
pier (water walkway)

pore (small opening; to examine closely)
pour (to cause to flow)

principal (head, first)
principle (lesson, belief)

role (in a play)
roll (list)

stair (step in a staircase)
stare (regard intensely)

stationary (permanent)
stationery (paper)

vain (conceited)
vein (blood vessel)
vane (wind detector)

Similar Words with Different Uses. Spell-checkers will highlight commonly confused pairs of words, such as "border" and "boarder," "conscience" and "conscious," "flout" and "flaunt," "loose" and "lose," "lead" and "led," "populace" and "populous," or "read" and "red." Keeping a good dictionary, stylebook, or grammar guide handy is the best way to make distinctions between similar words. Again, the writer or editor must catch the error, even though his or her computer includes a spell-checker.

Compound Words. Some compound words, such as "bookkeeper, "speedboat," and "stylebook," will pass spell-checkers as two words, even though they are correctly spelled as single words. The reason? The spell-checker recognizes the separate words—"book" "keeper," "speed," "boat," and "style"—as valid dictionary entries, leaving the writer appearing not to know the correct spelling.

Proper Names. As noted earlier, proper names—unlike most units of language—may be spelled any way an individual desires. The infinite variety of name spellings makes it essential to check and double-check all names, regardless of what spell-checking approves. Many names, such as Robin and Lily, are also common nouns listed in computer dictionaries. Often the correct spelling for the proper name is different from that offered by a spell-checker. For example, Robin may be "Robyn," and Lily may spell her name "Lillie." Double-check names in any document.

Both spell-checking and manual, word-by-word editing are essential parts of the writing process. No software can replace the complex decision-making an editor provides. In the digital age, good writers and editors ensure accurate writing.

BOX 2.1 Useful Tools for Writers

Professional writers and editors have their favorite resources. Despite their age, some reference books have timeless value. Others are more modern websites. All will help strengthen your media writing.

Books

Christian, Darrell, Jacobsen, Sally, and Minthorn, David, editors. *The Associated Press and Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law.* New York: The Associated Press, 2012.

Cook, Claire Kehrwald. *Line by Line: How to Improve Your Own Writing.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985.

Kessler, Lauren, and McDonald, Duncan. *When Words Collide.* Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 2004.

Strunk, William, Jr., and White, E. B. *The Elements of Style,* Third Edition. New York: Macmillan, 1979.

Wickham, Kathleen Woodruff. *Math Tools for Journalists.* Oak Park, Ill.: Marion Street Press, 2002.

Web Sites

Dictionary.com, http://dictionary.reference.com.

Oxford English Dictionary, http://www.oed.com, the definitive record of the English language.

EditTeach.org, www.editteach.org, with resources for language, editing, teaching.

Radford, Tim. "Manifesto for the simple scribe—my 25 commandments for journalists, http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/blog/2011/jan/19/manifesto-simple-scribe-commandments-journalists [posted by former Guardian writer and editor].

Rogers, Tony. "Six tips to improve your newswriting," http://journalism.about.com/od/writing/tp/Newswriting.htm.

News University, www.newsu.org, with access to a range of reporting and writing courses that require user registration.

"The Purdue Online Writing Lab" (OWL), http://owl.english.purdue.edu.

Grammar to the Rescue

Our world is fast-paced and fast-changing—hardly the kind of place you would expect to need something as tedious as a lesson on grammar. But today's communicator cannot afford to slow down audiences, and faulty grammar does just that. Just as writers are cautioned about relying too much on spell-checking systems in computers, they should be aware that grammar-checking programs also have flaws.

Consider the reader who encounters "its" where "it's" should be. For a split second, the reader will pause and wonder about the error, the writer, and the site. Sometimes the musing reader will stop reading entirely because of the slowdown or because of the reduced credibility or appeal of the flawed message.

People do not have to be grammar experts to stop and wonder about correctness. For example, any unusual use of "whom" or "who" might cause a reader to reflect rather than to read on. "Now, what was it I learned about whom?" the reader muses, and the tempo of reading is lost.

Television viewers might cringe when the news announcer says, "The committee will reconvene their meeting tomorrow morning." They know a committee is referred to with an "its," not a "their." As the viewers know pause to correct the sentence, they lose the remainder of the announcer's message.

But My Grammar Is Good...

Most of us who pursue writing as a career consider ourselves to be language experts, and in general, our grammar and language use are far above average. Even educated people have problems, however. Evidence of grammar problems is found in mistakes made daily by adults in business letters, memos, and reports, as well as in newspapers and on the airways. An ad proclaims, "There's no down payment and no service charge!" To be grammatically correct, it should say, "There are no down payment and no service charge." A newsletter states, "Children will be grouped by age, irregardless of grade in school." There is no such word as "irregardless"—it simply is an aberration of "regardless."

Educated people regularly make grammar mistakes that other educated people will recognize. Writers need to identify their most frequent grammar errors and learn how to correct them. A first step in checking your grammar is to know what errors you are most likely to make.

Grammar Problems

Author Katherine C. McAdams developed "The Grammar Slammer," a workshop on grammar problems that identifies five areas in which real-life errors are most likely to occur:

1. Punctuation, especially commas, semicolons, colons, apostrophes, dashes, and hyphens.
2. Subject and verb agreement.
3. Correct pronoun choices that provide agreement and avoid gender bias, such as "Each student has his or her book" rather than the more common and erroneous "Each student has their book."
4. Correct sentence structures, especially when sentences use modifiers or require parallel structure.
5. Word use—that is, using words (such as "regardless") correctly; this area often involves spelling problems and confusing words that sound alike (such as "affect" and "effect," or "vain" and "vein").

This section follows the format of the Grammar Slammer workshop, giving a short lesson on each of the problem areas and following that lesson with some exercises. The approach is designed for writers who are bright, motivated, and capable of learning quickly.

The lessons provide a quick fix rather than an in-depth understanding. They are designed to refresh and renew rather than to re-educate. Going through the grammar lessons will help you identify your grammar deficiencies. You can then be on guard for your particular problems when writing and editing. You might find you have many weaknesses in language skills. If so, you will want to study the books recommended at the end of this chapter or take a grammar course.

Test Yourself

To determine your grammar problem areas, take the following diagnostic quiz. Record your answers on a sheet of paper.

Grammar Slammer Diagnostic Quiz

The following sentences contain errors in grammar and punctuation. No sentence contains more than one error. Read each sentence. Circle the error, and note how the sentence should be written correctly. Sentence 1 is corrected for you as an example.

1. If past performance is any indication, Maryland should be considered a top challenger for the championship; having downed defending regional champion Duke twice in the regular season. (*Correction*: Use a comma in place of the semicolon because the second half of the sentence is not an independent clause.)
2. The list of candidates being considered for the position of university chancellor have been trimmed to approximately 50 names, including four university officials.
3. The computer did not seem to be working today, it kept shutting down when instructed to save any document.
4. The following afternoon, Wednesday, October 25 a Royal Indian Air Force DC-3 landed on the unpaved runway at Srinagar Airport.
5. Traditionally expected to be in control of their surroundings, the insecurity makes students uncomfortable in their new situation.
6. The president's body will lay in state until services are held at the chapel.
7. Each student is expected to purchase their books prior to the first day of class.
8. Among those who attended services for the coach were Ralph Brooks, head football coach at Eastern, Mary Barnes, chancellor; Michael Thomas, former chancellor; and Paul Wells, former athletic director.

9. She predicted that neither the speaker or the minority whip would receive the Republican nomination.
10. In its advertising, the Acme Recycling Company claims that they are in business only to do good works for the community.
11. Millie Rosefield, chair of the Cityville Historic Preservation Committee ran fifth in the Nov. 6 race for four council seats.
12. One of every five of the state's residents live in the sort of poverty that drove Erskine Caldwell to write.
13. Three-fourths of the business district in Long Beach, N.C. was destroyed by Hurricane Hugo, which struck the coast in 1989.
14. Many children in the 1950s used to believe that he could acquire practically superhuman strength by eating the right cereal.
15. The mayor said the parade would feature the homecoming queen, the marching band will play, and as many floats as possible.
16. Several people, all of them eager to give their opinions and all of them pressing forward to meet the governor, who was conducting interviews with voters in the area.
17. I like ice cream and cookies, I don't like cakes with icing.
18. Rosalie complained, and she had no heat.
19. Being a weight lifter, his muscles were well developed.
20. The alligator is hunted for their skin.

Several of the following words are misspelled. Circle the misspelled words and write the correct spelling for each in the space provided.

1. principal (of a school) _____
2. waiver (permission slip) _____
3. bore (a wild pig) _____
4. naval (belly button) _____
5. stationery (you write on it) _____
6. role (a list) _____
7. lead (a heavy metal) _____
8. canvass (cloth) _____
9. complement (flattering statement) _____
10. cite (reference or footnote) _____

Answers for the diagnostic quiz are included in Appendix A at the end of the book.

Grammar Problems Up Close

Examine the items you missed on the diagnostic quiz. You should have an idea of which grammar problems you need to review. The discussion of each problem is presented here, followed by exercises. Test your proficiency and move on. Record your answers on a sheet of paper. To check your work, look at the answers in Appendix A.

Problem 1: Punctuation

Perhaps no problem looms larger than punctuation. Few people actually know the rules and regulations of punctuation use. Most of us, much of the time, use the "feel good" school of punctuation, saying, "I just feel like I need a comma here" or "A semicolon just felt right."

Professional communicators must give up their "feel good" philosophy of punctuating. The first rule of punctuating professionally is this: **Do not punctuate unless you know a rule.** When you even think of adding a mark of punctuation, stop and decide whether it is justified by the rules in this chapter. If not, you probably do not need to punctuate at all.

If you find you are punctuating excessively—that is, using more than three punctuation marks within any given sentence—it is probably time to rewrite that sentence. Sentences requiring many punctuation marks, even if they are all correct, usually are too long and complex to be easily understood. So another rule of punctuating professionally is this: Less is better. Less punctuation leads to clearer, more readable copy. When in doubt, leave the comma out.

Commas. Literally hundreds of comma rules exist. But the nine listed here, distilled by high school English teacher Mary Penny in the 1940s, have been found over the years to take care of most everyday comma problems.

Rule 1. Use commas in compound sentences when clauses are separated by a conjunction such as "and," "but," "for," "nor," or "yet."

- She managed the restaurant, but he did the cooking.

Note: In such sentences, leaving out the conjunction leads to an error known as a comma splice, whereby a comma is left to do the work of joining two sentences: "She managed the restaurant, he did the cooking." Like weak splices in a rope, commas are not strong enough for this task. A period or semicolon is needed to make a correct sentence:

- She managed the restaurant; he did the cooking.
- She managed the restaurant. He did the cooking.

Rule 2. Use commas to separate elements in a series. Such elements usually are adjectives, verbs, or nouns.

Note: Journalism departs from traditional rules of punctuation by leaving the comma out before a conjunction in a series of elements, following this rule in *The Associated Press Stylebook*. The text in this book follows the comma in a series rule, but the journalism examples do not—as you may have already noticed in reading this text.

English composition version:

- The tall, dark, handsome man hailed, lauded, and applauded Ben, George, Maude, and Rebecca.

Journalism version:

- The tall, dark, handsome man hailed, lauded and applauded Ben, George, Maude and Rebecca.

Rule 3. Use commas when attributing from quoted material. Commas set off words of attribution from the words of a one-sentence quotation unless a question mark or exclamation mark is preferred. Use them also in greetings:

- He said, "Hello."
- "Good-bye," she replied.
- "The fair has been canceled," she said.

Rule 4. Commas follow introductory matter, such as after an introductory adverbial clause:

- When the team was forced to kick, the coach sent in his best players.

Commas also follow two or more introductory prepositional phrases:

- In the spring she returned to College Park. (no comma)
- In the spring of 2012, she returned to College Park. (comma needed because "in" and "of" are two prepositional phrases)

Also use a comma with a phrase that contains a verbal (i.e., a verb form used as a modifier):

- Singing as she worked, Mary answered her phone.
- Kicked by a horse, Don was more than stunned.
- To cure hiccups, drink from the far side of a glass.

Rule 5. Commas follow the salutation of a friendly letter and capitalized elements, such as the complimentary close (e.g., Sincerely, Very truly yours). A colon follows the salutation of a business letter:

- Dear James,
- Dear Dean Smith:
- Sincerely, Dean Smith

Rule 6. Commas follow all items in a date or full address:

- July 16, 1992, is his date of birth.
- She has lived in Lake City, Fla., all her life.

Rule 7. Commas set off nonessential words or phrases:

- Well, we will just have to walk home.

Commas also set off appositives, which are words or phrases that rename a noun. Appositives amplify a subject:

- Betty Brown, his mother-in-law, has been married four times.

Also use commas to set off nonessential modifying clauses and phrases:

- The president-elect, suffering from laryngitis, canceled his speech.

Rule 8. Commas surround words of direct address:

- Maria, please pass the butter.
- I can see, Fred, that you are lazy.

Rule 9. Commas indicate omitted verbs that are expressed in another part of the sentence:

- Talent often is inherited; genius, never.

This rule is an old one and is rarely used today except in headlines. It would be rare to find a comma indicating an omitted verb in contemporary writing, but far from surprising to see such headlines as:

- Pilots Ask for Guns; Airlines, for Marshals
- Coach Smith Has Much to Gain This Season; His Team, Even More

Semicolons and Colons. Miss Penny added three more rules to her list to take care of another widespread punctuation problem: the correct use of semicolons and colons. Miss Penny's rules 10 and 11 explain the two uses of the semicolon—the only two uses. Rule 12 explains the use of colons.

Rule 10. Semicolons connect two complete sentences if sentences share a related thought or theme. Use of a semicolon usually creates a sense of drama:

- The brown-eyed, dark-haired, vivacious model, at age 18, seemed destined for quick success; on Sept. 11, 2001, her apparent destiny was altered.

Rule 11. Semicolons are used in a list separating items that require significant internal punctuation:

- He lived six years in Richmond, Va.; four years in Raleigh, N.C.; one year in Greenville, S.C.; and six months in Baton Rouge, La.

Rule 12. Colons precede formal lists, illustrations, multisentence quotes, and enumerations:

- The following students received scholarships: Jim Johnson, Juanita Lopez, Martha Taylor, Tiffany Eldridge, and Courtney Sampson.
- He answered her with a parable: "A man once had six sons. Five of them...."
- The senator listed the steps in her economic recovery program: first, to raise interest rates; second, to reduce spending....

Do not use a colon after "include" or forms of "to be," such as "was" or "were." Example: Her best friends were Sally, Marisa, and Claire.

Slammer for Commas, Semicolons, and Colons

Now, using Miss Penny's list of 12 rules as your reference, complete the following exercise. Remember, the most important rule is that you do not punctuate unless you know a rule. Defend each mark of punctuation you use by citing one of the Penny rules on a sheet of paper and listing the rule or rules you used you used next to the sentence.

Rule(s)

_____1. Although we watched the Super Bowl we don't know who won.

_____2. John Blimpo an egocentric man dropped his hat in the fruit salad.

_____3. Guitars have six strings basses four.

_____4. The tall dark handsome man listed his hobbies as reading fishing painting and writing.

_____5. To Whom It May Concern

The spelling and grammar test will be given on March 3 4 and 5 2013 in Room 502 of Knight Hall.

Grammatically yours

Dean Sarah Jones

_____6. Dad go ahead and send the money now.

_____7. The women's basketball team was down by four points at halftime however it came back to crush the opponent.

_____8. Congress passed the bill but the debate took several months.

_____9. Well just be in by daybreak.

_____10. Her blind date was a real disappointment he talked loudly and constantly about his pet snake.

_____11. She was elected on Nov. 4 2008 in Baltimore Md. the city of her birth.

_____12. She named her courses for the fall semester journalism English political science history and French.

Check your work by looking at the answers in Appendix A. Then go on to tackle some other troublesome marks of punctuation.

Hyphens and Dashes. Remember that hyphens and dashes, although often confused, are different. The hyphen differs from a dash in both use and appearance. The hyphen is shorter (- as opposed to —), and it comes, without additional spaces, between two words combined to express some new concept, such as polka-dot and part-time. Hyphens are useful joiners that bring some creativity to language.

Rather than joining, dashes are useful in separating phrases—usually in cases where that separation can be heard. Dashes are sometimes used to replace commas to ensure that a pause is audible and even dramatic (e.g., "Although charming, he was—on the other hand—a thief.").

Here is a list of guidelines for using hyphens and dashes correctly:

1. Never use a hyphen after a word ending in "ly."
   - The newly elected president stepped to the podium.

2. Use a hyphen to connect two or more related modifying words that do not function independently.
   - Kim always ordered the blue-plate special.
   - Todd dreaded any face-to-face confrontations.
3. The dash is a punctuation mark one "hears." It is a noticeable pause. Choose a dash instead of a comma so the audience can "hear" the pause.
4. Dashes work where commas would also work. The only difference is the dash adds drama—and an audible break in the text. Because dashes may substitute for commas, they are used to set off nonessential material.
   - The murderer was—if you can believe it—a priest.
5. Too many dashes in any text may be distracting and even irritating to readers. Limit dashes to only the most dramatic of pauses. In most cases, such as this example, commas will suffice.
   - She is—as most of you know—a punctuation expert.

Other marks of punctuation, especially apostrophes, can be troublesome. Correct use may vary from time to time and publication to publication. Always check your stylebook, and keep a current grammar reference book handy.

Problem 2: Subject and Verb Agreement

Few writers make obvious errors in subject and verb agreement, such as "I is interested in cars" or "The class know it's time to go to lunch." But most people struggle with the following subject–verb agreement problems:

1. Collective subjects can be confusing. Some nouns that appear to be plural are treated as singular units:
   - The *Girl Scouts* is a fine organization.
   - *Checkers* is an ancient game.
   - *Economics* is a difficult subject

   Some collective subjects, however, have Latinate endings and remain plural, although spoken language tends to make them singular. In formal writing, these plurals require plural verbs:
   - The *media* have raised the issue of the senator's competency.
   - The *alumni* are funding a new building.
2. The pronouns "each," "either," "neither," "anyone," "everyone," and "anybody" are always singular, regardless of what follows them in a phrase. Take, for example, this sentence:
   - Either of the girls is an excellent choice for president.

The phrase "of the girls" does not change the singular number of the true subject of this sentence: the pronoun "either." Following are some other examples of correct usage:
   - Neither has my vote.
   - Either is fine with me.
   - Each has an excellent option.
   - Anyone is capable of helping the homeless.
   - Everyone is fond of Jerry.
3. A fraction or percentage of a whole is considered a singular subject.
   - Three-quarters of the pie is gone.
   - Sixty-seven percent of the voters is needed.
4. Compound subjects, in which two or more nouns function as the subject of a sentence, can lead to agreement problems. To solve such problems, substitute a single pronoun, such as "they" or "it," for the sentence's subject or subjects. For example, transform this problem sentence: "The students and the teacher is/are waiting for the bus." By substituting, the subject becomes "they": They are waiting for the bus. The following are some other examples:
   - The opening number and the grand finale thrill the audience. (They thrill)
   - There are no down payment and no service charge. (They are not charged)
   - The Eagles, a classic rock band, is my dad's favorite group. (It is his favorite)
5. When subjects are structured with either/or and neither/nor, use the verb number that corresponds to the subject closest to the verb, as in the following cases:
   - Either the leader or the scouts pitch the tent.
   - Either the scouts or the leader pitches the tent.
   - Neither the parents nor the students win when rules are broken.

Slammer for Subject–Verb Agreement

Check your knowledge of subject–verb agreement by taking the following quiz. Select the verb that agrees.

1. He did say he would look at the sheet of names, which includes/include the owners of two apartment buildings.
2. Their number and influence appears/appear greatest in West Germany.

3. Experience in the backfield and the line gives/give the coach a good feeling on the eve of any opening game.
4. A first offense for having fewer than 25 cartons of untaxed cigarettes results/result in a $500 fine.
5. Before you make a final judgment on this student's story, consider the time and effort that has/have gone into it.
6. Who does the teaching? Full professors. But so does/do associates, assistants, and instructors.
7. She said they would visit Peaks of Otter, which is/are near Lynchburg, Va.
8. The news media is/are calling for a peace treaty that is fair to everyone.
9. The United Mine Workers exhibit/exhibits solidarity during elections.
10. There is/are 10 million bricks in this building.
11. The president said that students today are too job-oriented and neglect the broader areas of study that constitutes/constitute a true education.
12. Five fire companies fought the blaze, which the firefighters said was/were the longest this year.
13. Each of the 100 people believes/believe in God.
14. It is/are the boats, not the swimmers, that stir up the dirt in the lake.
15. The editor told the staff there was a shortage of money for the newsroom, a shortage she said she would explain to the board of directors, which decides/decide all matters on the budget.
16. One of my classmates typifies/typify student apathy.
17. Drinking beer and sleeping is/are the most important things in my life.
18. Dillon said he has insurance for everything except the buildings, which is/are owned by Thomas F. Williams.
19. Approximately 51 percent of the U.S. population is/are female.
20. There is/are only one way to beat taxes.
21. Neither the professor nor her two assistants teaches/teach this course in a style students like.
22. Each student is/are responsible for getting the work done on time.
23. All students considers/consider that an imposition.
24. The General Assembly and the governor disagrees/disagree on the solution.

Check your answers against those in Appendix A.

Problem 3: Correct Use of Pronouns

Pronouns are little words—"he," "she," "you," "they," "I," "it"—that stand for proper nouns. Look at this sentence:

- International Trucking is hiring 20 new drivers because it is expanding in the Southeast.

In this sentence, the word "it" is used to substitute for International Trucking. Pronouns help avoid needless repetition in language by doing the work of the larger nouns, called antecedents. In the previous example, "International Trucking" is the antecedent for the pronoun "it."

Pronouns must agree with their antecedents, as in the following examples:

- Marianne said she (Marianne) would never color her (Marianne's) hair.
- Baltimore became a model city after it (Baltimore) successfully restored the waterfront.
- Journalism is a popular major, and now it (journalism) prepares students for many careers.

Following are guidelines to ensure correct pronoun choices:

1. Watch for collective subjects—groups treated as single units—and use the correct pronoun.
   - The committee gave its report.
   - The United Mine Workers gave out a list of its legislative goals.
2. When using singular pronouns, use singular verbs.
   - Each of the rose bushes was at its peak.
   - Everyone in the audience rose to his or her feet and chanted.
3. Use correct pronouns to handle issues of sexism in language. The generic person is no longer "he."
   - Each of the students had his or her book.
   - The students had their books.
4. Be attentive to stray phrases or clauses that come between pronouns and antecedents and cause agreement problems.
   - He presented the list of candidates being considered for the office and told the committee members to choose from it. (For antecedent agreement; "it" refers to the list)
   - He posted the list of candidates for the position and read it aloud. (For antecedent agreement; "it" refers to the list)

5. Use reflexive pronouns, such as himself or herself, only when a subject is doing something to herself or himself or themselves.
   - Jan introduced herself to the new chancellor.
   - Henry never could forgive himself.
   - The relatives had the chalet to themselves.

Slammer for Pronouns

To ensure that you understand agreement of pronoun and antecedent, select the appropriate pronoun for each of the following sentences.

1. Each student had (his or her/their) assignment completed before class.
2. General Foods plans to change (its/their) approach to marketing baked goods.
3. Larry introduced (him/himself) and me to the governor.
4. The jury took (their/its) deliberations seriously.
5. The board of directors set a date for (their/its) annual retreat.
6. The Orioles (is/are) my favorite team.
7. Neither the Terps nor the Crimson Tide (was/were) having a winning season.
8. Neither of the teams (was/were) victorious.
9. The alumni voted to charge $1 an issue for (their/its) magazine.
10. Any of the three finalists (is/are) an excellent choice.
11. The six-member committee voted to reverse (its/their) decision.
12. The librarian's collection fascinated him, and he asked to borrow from (her/it).
13. The media (is/are) ignoring the mayor's speeches.
14. Each of the students could handle the job by (himself or herself/themselves).
15. Everyone in the audience rose to (his or her/their) feet for the ovation.

Check your work against the answers in Appendix A, and prepare to tackle the biggest pronoun problem of all: the *who/whom* dilemma.

Who and Whom. The word "whom" has all but disappeared from spoken English, so it is little wonder that few of us know how to use it correctly. Even though usage is changing, writers of published materials still need to know the rules that govern the distinction between "who" and "whom":

1. "Who" is a substitute for subjects referring to "he," "we," or "she," or the nominative pronoun.
   - Who saw the meteor?

   The statement, "He saw the meteor," as a question becomes, "Who saw the meteor?" "Who" is substituted for the subject "he." Relative clauses work the same way when "who" is substituted for a subject. In the sentence, "He questioned the man who saw the meteor," "who" substitutes for the subject of the clause, "He saw the meteor." The entire clause serves as an object of the verb "questioned." But the function of the clause does not change the role of a pronoun; in this sentence, the role of "who" is as the subject of the verb "saw."

2. "Whom" is a substitute for objective pronouns, such as "him," "her," or "them."
   - Whom did he question for hours?

   The statement, "He questioned her for hours," as a question becomes, "Whom did he question for hours?" "Whom" is substituted for "her" as the object of the verb "questioned." Substitution works the same way in relative clauses. In the sentence, "Marcella was the one whom he questioned for hours," "whom" substitutes for the object "her" in the clause, "He questioned her for hours." Again, it is the role of the pronoun within its subject-verb structure that determines whether it is the subject or the object and therefore "who" or "whom."

That and Which. Another fine distinction between pronouns is the difference between "that" and "which." Again, the spoken language no longer follows strict rules regarding these subordinate conjunctions, but careful writers need to observe the following guidelines:

1. "That" is a restrictive pronoun, indicating that the information it precedes is essential for correct understanding of the sentence.
   - Dogs prefer bones that improve their dental health.
     The use of "that" tells us that dogs prefer only this specific kind of bone.
2. "Which" precedes nonessential material; therefore, it typically appears with commas (the ones used to set off nonessential information).
   - Dogs prefer bones, which improve their dental health.
     The use of "which" tells us that all bones benefit dogs' teeth and gums.

3. "That" and "which" are not interchangeable. As you can see in the example sentences, the meaning of the sentence is affected when the comma is added in the second sentence and "that" becomes "which." In the first sentence, dogs like only bones that are good for them; in the second, dogs like bones better than other things, and bones just happen to be good for dental health. The second sentence is far more logical.

Slammer for Who/Whom and That/Which

Select the appropriate pronoun in the following sentences:

1. Alvin, (who/whom) everyone adored, absconded with the family fortune.
2. Betty, (who/whom) was the apple of his eye, followed him to Mexico.
3. The FBI agents (who/whom) Alvin had avoided for several months finally arrested him.
4. Veronica, Alvin's sister, (who/whom) needed the money desperately, refused to post bond.
5. Alvin, (who's/whose) health was delicate, wasted away in prison.

Select the appropriate pronoun, then note the proper punctuation as needed in the following sentences:

1. Betty bought a gun (that/which) was on sale and set out to free Alvin.
2. She headed north from Mexico in a stolen car (that/which) had more than 130,000 miles showing on its odometer.
3. The car (that/which) had New Jersey license plates was quickly spotted by police in Texas.
4. The Texans (that/which/who/whom) spoke in a slow drawl told her she was wanted in New Jersey for conspiring with Alvin.
5. She pulled out the gun (that/which) she had in her glove compartment and started shooting.
6. The police officer (that/which/who/whom) was standing closest to her car died after he was struck by a bullet.
7. Other officers took Betty's gun (that/which) now was empty of bullets.
8. They also arrested Betty and placed her in a local jail (that/which) overlooked the Rio Grande.

Check your answers against those in Appendix A and move on to the next grammar problem.

Problem 4: Sentence Structure

Aside from fragments and run-on sentences, two other categories cause most adults problems with sentence structure: faulty parallelism and modifier placement.

Journalists often struggle with giving sentences parallel structure—that is, making sure that series or lists of phrases are parallel in form. Rather than, "He enjoys reading and to go skiing," use the parallel form, saying, "He enjoys reading and skiing." Writers must always remember to check lists within sentences as well as bulleted lists to see that phrases are stated in parallel form, as shown in these examples:

- Marvelene listed steps in planning a successful party: sending invitations early, greeting guests personally, and supplying abundant food and drink. (Note the parallel gerunds: "sending," "greeting," "supplying.")
- A successful host always is sure
  —to send invitations early,
  —to greet guests personally, and
  —to supply abundant food and drink. (These infinitives are parallel.)

Other sentence errors might occur when modifiers are placed incorrectly and give readers an inaccurate, sometimes humorous, picture as, for example, in these sentences:

Wrong: Swinging from an overhead wire, we saw a kite.
Better: We saw a kite swinging from an overhead wire.

Wrong: When wheeled into the operating room, the nurse placed a mask over my face.
Better: The nurse placed a mask over my face after I was wheeled into the operating room.

Wrong: The jury found him guilty of killing his wife after deliberating for three days.
Better: After deliberating for three days, the jury found him guilty of killing his wife.

To solve modifier placement problems, place modifying clauses and phrases closest to what they modify.

Slammer for Modifiers

Rewrite these sentences to correct misplaced modifiers. Some sentences are correct as written.

1. The waiter served ice cream in glass bowls which started melting immediately.
2. The Simpsons gave a toy robot with flashing eyes to one of their sons.
3. We saw a herd of sheep on the way to our hotel.
4. Most people have strawberry shortcake topped with mounds of whipped cream.
5. The house is one of the oldest in Rockville, where Mrs. Rooks taught ballet.
6. Flying at an altitude of several thousand feet, the paratroopers could see for miles.
7. I could not convince the child to stop running into the street without yelling.
8. After the first act of the play, Brooke's performance improves, the critic said.
9. While watching the ball game, Sue's horse ran away.
10. The museum director showed me a spider with the orange diamond on its belly.
11. The bank approves loans to reliable individuals of any size.
12. Running on the beach, the sun rose before my eyes.
13. Riding in a glass-bottom boat, we saw thousands of colorful fish.
14. Aunt Helen asked us before we left to call on her.
15. Do it yourself: Make up a sentence suffering from modifier malady. Then correct it.

Check your work against the answers in Appendix A, then prepare for the final grammar problem: word usage.

Problem 5: Word Usage

English is a language enriched by words borrowed from other languages, resulting in a rich vocabulary—but also, in many cases, in unorthodox spelling and idiosyncratic usage. It makes little sense to have both "affect" and "effect" in the same language, functioning so similarly but not identically. And why do we distinguish between "pore" and "pour," or "flair" and "flare"? Who cares?

Careful writers have to care because subtle usage errors can cause big misunderstandings. Correct usage leads to credibility; readers have confidence in error-free reading.

Slammer for Troublesome Words

Use a dictionary and AP Stylebook to help identify correct usage for each of the following troublesome words.

Hopefully
Affect versus effect
Less versus fewer
Lie versus lay
Sit versus set
Comprise versus compose

Use the references again to change the words used incorrectly in the following sentences:

1. The most affective writing follows good writing principals.
2. The perspective budget for the coming year will include raises for the city's firefighters.
3. An incoming ice storm will effect whether we can drive to work tomorrow.
4. The state historical society will reenact signing the state constitution in the Capital.
5. The country's navel force has been reduced.
6. His desire for money is his principle guiding force in business.
7. The coach said the team ignored his advise to make it a passing game.
8. Jiminy Cricket said Pinocchio should let his conscious be his guide.
9. The engineer eliminated the High Road sight because it sloped to much.
10. Returning the stolen car to it's owner is the best decision.

Math for Writers

All professional communicators must be able to handle routine computations such as adding, subtracting, multiplying, dividing, figuring ratios and percentages, and rounding off numbers. Such simple calculations routinely are used in daily journalism, and any error makes a story inaccurate.

Professor Emeritus Phil Meyer at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill always advised mass communication students that if they chose the field because they thought they could escape math, they were wrong. Basic math is necessary.

Here's a typical example of statistical writing that misses the mark: An advertisement tells audiences that computer prices have dropped 200 percent. This news would appeal to someone shopping for a new computer. But what's