Grammar Slammer 1: Punctuation

Punctuation

- Don’t punctuate unless you know exactly why you’re doing it.
- Don’t rely on “feelings.”
- When in doubt, leave it out.

Commas—Rule 1

- Use a comma in a compound sentence when independent clauses are separated by a coordinating conjunction such as *for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet* or *so*.
- FANBOYS
  - Tom Jacobs supported the war in Iraq, but his father was against it.
  - He wrote the manuscript, and she published it.

Commas—Rule 2

- When a dependent clause is located after an independent clause, DO NOT place a comma between the two.
  - I went on the roller coaster because my brother dared me.
  - I became very sick when the roller coaster zoomed upside down.
  - She left the building three hours before the fire alarm went off.

Commas—Rule 2 cont.

- Dependent clauses can often be identified by the use of dependent clause markers.
- These include *because, since, when, while, until, if, as, though, although, unless, after, before, once, whether.*

Commas—Rule 3

- Use commas to separate items in a series.
- Leave the comma out before a conjunction in a simple series unless the meaning would be unclear.
  - Give the money to Ann, Sue and Pat.
  - The flag is red, white and blue.
  - He went to town to buy a can of corn, a can of peas and carrots, and a can of beans.

Commas—Rule 4

- Use commas to set attribution off from a full quotation.
- Commas go inside the quotation marks.
- Don't use a comma if a question mark or exclamation mark is appropriate.
  - "I need a 70 on this test," he said.
  - She said, "I scored a 90 on the first try."
  - "Why do I have to study grammar?" he asked.

Commas—Rule 5

- Use a comma after introductory material.

- After an introductory adverbial phrase or clause:

  – After six years of dating, they finally got married.
  – Because clouds covered the sky, it was difficult to see the comet last night.

Commas—Rule 5, cont.

- After two or more introductory prepositional phrases:
  - In the fall of 2007, the stock market dropped 12 percent.
  - In February it snowed 12 inches.
- When there are numbers involved, a comma may be needed for clarity:
  - In 1998, 79.2 percent of the adult population had a high school diploma.

Commas—Rule 5, cont.

- After a participial or infinitive phrase at the beginning of the sentence:
  - Running for the phone, she tripped and fell.
  - To win the South, John Kerry selected John Edwards as the vice presidential nominee.

Commas—Rule 6

- Use commas to set off participial phrases located at the end of the sentence that modify some part of the independent clause.
  - The committee adjourned the meeting, having conducted all the necessary business.
  - The bus crashed on Interstate 40, leaving two passengers with serious injuries.

Commas—Rule 7

- Use a comma between coordinate adjectives.
- Adjectives are coordinate if you can reverse the adjectives and put *and* between them.
  - The long, narrow passage was hard to navigate.
  - He was born on a cold, dreary Maine night.

Commas—Rule 8

- Commas follow all items in a full date or city/state combination.
  - June 25, 1940, was the date of my mother's birth.
  - I was born on Sept. 10, 1973.
  - She has lived in Ajax, Tenn., for six years.
  - The young girl was born in Georgia in 1998.
  - We married in June 1995 in Mississippi.

Commas—Rule 9

- Commas set off nonessential modifying clauses and phrases.
- Do not use commas for essential modifying clauses and phrases.
  - Olan T. Farnall, who learned to drive when he was 10, spent 40 years as a bus driver.
  - The man who stole my car was arrested.

Commas—Rule 9, cont.

- Commas set off non-essential appositives, which are words that rename a noun.
  - Joy R. Gibson, my mother, was a police officer.
  - My oldest sister, Julie, is in the hospital.
  - My brother John went to the store.

Commas—Rule 10

- Commas surround words of direct address.
  - Samantha, quit talking so loudly.
  - It’s not your place, Bill, to make that decision.

Commas—Rule 11

- Use a comma before the adverbs *too*, *as well* or *also* at the end of a sentence.
  - Roberto Dumas came to the event, too.

Commas—Rule 12

- Use commas to set off conjunctive adverbs (such as *however*, *likewise*, *at the same time*, *therefore*) from the rest of the sentence.
  - James, however, was early.
  - The moral, therefore, is that you should not cheat.

Comma don’ts

- Do not use a comma between clauses that form part of a compound direct object.
  - He said none of the workers required medical attention and the leak did not pose a danger.
  - Jamie Worther argued that she deserved a raise and he did not.

More comma don’ts

- Don’t use a comma between adjectives when the second adjective is closely linked with the noun.
  - She built a new stone wall.

- Don’t use a comma between adjectives when one of them refers to color or age.
  - The story of the old yellow dog is a sad one.
  - The mean old woman scared the baby.

More comma don’ts

- Don’t use a comma before a partial or indirect quotation.
  - Feldman said “old-age blues” set in when he turned 30.
  - He said that he was innocent.

Semicolons—Rule 1

- Semicolons connect two complete sentences of related thought. Use of a semicolon often creates a sense of drama.
- A semicolon is used instead of a conjunction and comma or a period.
  - She won the $45 million lottery on July 5; five days later she was paralyzed by a fall.
  - I'm neat; he's a slob.

Semicolons—Rule 2

- Semicolons are used in a list to separate items that require significant internal punctuation.
  - Survivors include his wife, Jean; a daughter, Jesse Wilkins, of Marietta, Ga.; and a son, Bill, of Midland, Texas.
  - I have lived in Dayton, Ohio; Nashville, Tenn.; Tuscaloosa, Ala.; and Lubbock, Texas.

Colons

- Colons precede formal lists.
- Do not put a colon after *including*.
  - The following students passed the exam: Mary Wilson, Ada Stone, Joseph Michaels and Bob Stoops.
  - I'm taking four classes this semester: French, journalism, history and English.
  - I love vegetables, including squash, peas and corn.

Hyphens—Rule 1

- Use a hyphen to join compound modifiers that precede a noun.
  - My left-handed son loves his blue-eyed dog.
  - I ate the chocolate-covered peanuts.
  - A man eating chicken is not the same as a man-eating chicken.
- Most compound modifiers are also hyphenated when they follow a form of the linking verb *to be*.
  - The student was well-read.

Hyphens—Rule 2

- Hyphens are used with compound numbers.
  - Forty-six women attended the event.

Hyphen “don’ts”

- Don’t hyphenate words with the adverb *very*.
  - She had a very good time.
- Don’t hyphenate *ly* words.
  - We all love a nicely dressed man.

Hyphens with ages

- Ages expressed as adjectives before a noun or as substitutes for a noun use hyphens.
  - She has a 5-year-old son.
  - The race is for 3-year-olds.
  - The boy is 6 years old.

Dashes

- Dashes are used to separate thoughts.
- Dashes are sometimes used to replace commas to ensure that a pause is audible and even dramatic.

  – The presidential candidate was — if you can believe it — silent for more than 30 minutes.

Apostrophes—Rule 1

- Apostrophes are used to make possessives.
- If a singular noun does not end in s, add ‘s.
  - John’s coat is red.
- If a singular common noun ends in s, add ‘s unless the next word begins with s. Then add only the apostrophe.
  - The boss’s machine works well.
  - The witness’ story was false.

Apostrophes—Rule 1 cont.

- If a singular proper noun ends in s, add only the apostrophe.
  - Mary Dickens' poetry is difficult to read.
- If there is joint possession, use the correct possessive form for only the possessive closest to the noun.
  - Joe and Sue's house in San Diego was ruined by fire.

Apostrophes—Rule 2

- Use an apostrophe to create a contraction.
  - He wouldn’t come to class on time.
  - It’s cold in here.
  - Who’s going to dress up for Halloween?

Apostrophes—Rule 3

- Use an apostrophe to indicate that something is missing.
  - I love the music from the ’60s.
  - Rock ‘n’ roll is here to stay.
  - He was born in the 1970s.

Grammar Slammer 2: Grammar

Finding the subject

- Make sure you find the TRUE subject of a sentence before you determine if it takes a singular or plural verb.
  - Drinking Diet Mountain Dew is fun.
  - The man, along with his dog, was found unharmed.

Collective subjects

- The question is whether the subject is singular or plural.
- Many nouns that appear to be plural are treated as singular units.
  - The committee will present its report today.
  - Measles wears down parents as well as children.
  - The jury looks concerned.
  - Some members of the jury look concerned.

Singular pronouns

- When used as a subject, the pronouns *each*, *either*, *neither*, *anyone*, *everyone, much, no one, nothing* and *someone* are always singular, regardless of what follows them in a phrase.
  - Each of the boys has his own personality.
  - Everyone in the class has a computer.
  - Neither of the candidates has my vote.
  - Anyone is capable of learning grammar.

Either/or and neither/nor

- When subjects are structured with either/or or neither/nor, use the verb that corresponds to the subject closest to it.
  - Either the teacher or the children are lying.
  - Either the children or the teacher is lying.
  - Neither Jane nor her daughters are ill.

Amounts

- Subjects that stand for definable units of money, measurement, time or food always take singular verbs.
  - Five thousand dollars is the minimum bid.
  - Twenty-six miles, 385 yards is the traditional distance for the marathon.

Percent

- Percent takes a singular verb when standing alone or when a singular word follows an of construction.
- It takes a plural verb when a plural word follows an of construction.
  - The teacher said 60 percent is a failing grade.
  - Records show that 50 percent of the membership was there.
  - Records show that 50 percent of the members were there.

Compound subjects

- When two or more nouns function as the subject of a sentence, use a plural verb.
  - Joe and Bob are buying a house.
  - The opening number and the grand finale always thrill the audience.
  - Before you assign a final grade, please consider the time and effort that have gone into the assignment.

As well as, together with

- A singular subject followed by phrases such as *together with, in addition to,* and *as well as* always takes a singular verb.
  - The tax resolution, together with its amendments, has been sent to the president for her signature.

Prepositional phrases

- Don't let a prepositional phrase after a subject confuse you as to which verb to use.
  - She will consider the committee's recommended list of names, which includes two women and one man.
  - I want to focus on two areas of study that interest me.
  - Each of the students is doing fine.

Pronouns and antecedents

- A pronoun must agree with its antecedent, the noun to which it refers.
  - Atlanta became less congested after it expanded its subway system.
- Collective subjects that are treated as single units will take a singular pronoun.
  - The Boy Scouts will reconsider its bylaws.
  - The committee gave its report.

Who and whom

- We don't often use *whom* in spoken English, so it may seem awkward in writing.

- Who is a substitute for subjects referring to *he*, *she*, *we* and *they*.
  - Who is going to be the next president?
  - She is going to be the next president.

Who and whom, cont.

- Whom is a substitute for the objective pronouns *him*, *her*, *us* and *them*.
  - Whom did he sing to over the phone?
  - He sang to her over the phone.

How to decide?

- Reword the sentence and substitute *he* or *him* to determine which one to use.

  - Who/whom did he call?
  - He called _____. (him)

  - Jean was the one who/whom he sang to for hours.
  - He sang to _____ (her) for hours.

That and which

- *That* is a restrictive pronoun, indicating that the information it precedes is essential for correct understanding of the sentence.
  - The version that had the error was discarded.
  - The dog that has the spots will be adopted by the young couple.

That and which, cont.

- *Which* precedes non-essential information and appears with commas.
  - My father's 1994 Buick, which has 120,000 miles on it, has been very reliable.
  - The chancellor's University Day speech, which lasted an hour, was extremely informative.

That vs. who

- That refers to things, and who refers to people.
  - The Californian who stole my car was arrested.
  - The car that was stolen has been recovered.

Faulty parallelism

- Series or lists of phrases in a sentence should be in parallel structure.
  - Yes: I love running and skating.
  - Yes: I love to run and to skate.
  - No: I love running and to skate.
  - Yes: The mayor submitted three budget requests: to widen Georgia Street, to close portions of Reading City Hall, and to double the number of night patrol officers.

Misplaced or dangling modifiers

- Modifying clauses and phrases should be closest to what they modify.
  - The car is in the garage, which he smashed just a block from his home.
  - Should be: The car, which he smashed just a block from his home, is in the garage.
  - Running from the law, we saw a criminal.
  - Should be: We saw a criminal running from the law.

Lay or lie?

- To lay is to place something somewhere, and it requires a direct object.
  - Lay, laid, have laid, laying
  - He laid the hat on the table.
  - I will lay my book on the desk.
- To lie is to recline.
  - Lie, lay, have lain, lying
  - She wanted to lie down after dinner.
  - He lay on the sofa for two weeks.

Grammar Slammer 3: Word Usage

Among or between?

- Between refers to two things.
- Among refers to more than two things.
  - The twins split the ice cream between them.
  - The triplets split the ice cream among them.

It's or its?

- Usually we use an apostrophe to make something possessive, but not with *its*.
- *Its* is the possessive of *it*.
- *It's* is a contraction for *it is*. If you see *it's*, substitute *it is* and see if it makes sense.
  - The cow swished its tail.
  - It's damp in here.
  - It's time for General Motors to give its employees a raise.

Whose or who's?

- Whose is the possessive of who.
  - I will vote for the candidate whose beliefs best match my own.
- Who's is a contraction for *who is*. It is NOT possessive.
- If you see *who's*, substitute *who is* and see if it makes sense.
  - I want to know who's in charge here.

Hopefully

- Hopefully is an adverb that means full of hope.
  - Correct: The puppy looked hopefully at the waitress.
  - Incorrect: Hopefully she will be on time.

Accept or except?

- Accept means receive.
- Except means exclude.
  - I accept the promotion.
  - Everyone except Jason was present.

Lay or lie?

- To lay is to place something somewhere. It requires a direct object.
  - Lay, laid, have laid, laying
  - He laid the hat on the couch.
  - I will lay my coat on the chair.
- To lie is to recline.
  - Lie, lay, have lain, lying
  - She wanted to lie down after dinner.
  - He lay on the sofa for two weeks.

Set or sit?

- To set is to place something somewhere.
  - Set your paper on the desk.
- To sit is to take a seat.
  - Sit down, please.

Affect vs. effect

- Effect is a noun that means a result of.
  - The effect of the crash was devastating.
- Effect can be a verb that means to bring about.
  - The chancellor wants to effect change.
- Affect is a verb that means to have an effect on or to influence.
  - The grammar test will affect your grade in this course.

Bad vs. badly

- Bad is an adjective. It describes someone's state of being.
  - Mayor Jim Smith feels bad about lying to his constituents.
- Badly is an adverb. It tells how someone does something.
  - He plays the guitar badly.

Fewer vs. less

- When you refer to a number of individual items, use *fewer*.
- When you refer to a bulk amount, sum, period of time or concept, use *less*.
  - At Data Corporation, fewer than 10 employees make less than $50,000 a year.

Insure vs. ensure

- Limit the meaning of *insure* to activities of insurance companies.
- *Ensure* means in a general sense “to guarantee” or “to provide something.”
  - Prudential refused to insure him because of his pre-existing condition.
  - She promised to do all she could to ensure our safety.

Very bad things:

- Alot — that's wrong!
  - It should be a lot (two words).
  - I have a lot of work to do tonight.
  - Susie likes Jason a lot.
- Alright — that's also wrong!
  - It should be all right (two words).
  - Things will be all right soon.