

(This section is intended to replace the usual "To The Student" prefatory note.)

TO THE OWNER OF THIS BOOK

Whatever you do, don't ever sell, lose, or give away this book. Don't even loan it out. I have loaned books to other people fifty or more times, and at least twenty five of those books have not been returned to me.

If you use this book during the coming months, and get used to the idea of having it around, you'll want to look up one thing or another in it for the rest of your life--sometimes to get something straight for yourself, sometimes to settle an argument, sometimes to help out a friend, sometimes to help out a young person, sometimes to help a student in your family or your neighborhood.

If you are a college student, I have something else to say to you. Years ago, by the time they finished college, students had their own personal library made up of all of the books they had bought for their courses. They consulted those books for the next ten or fifteen years on all kinds of occasions they'd never even dreamed would occur when they were in college. Although when I finished college I went to graduate school in English, then after three years started teaching English, I found that for ten or more years I had several occasions each year to look up things in my old physics, chemistry, and mathematics books. Why would a student of English, and then an English teacher, want to look up things in science textbooks? Search me, but I did. And when I wanted to find something, I was mighty glad to have the right old friendly book right where I could reach for it.

Today a lot of students sell all their books at the end of each semester. Why? To get a few dollars, which will soon be gone. At the end of four years of college, those students own no books. That seems to me to be a pathetic state for a college graduate who is about to enter either graduate school or the Real World. Don't let it happen to you. Resolve right this minute that no matter how badly you need a few extra dollars at the end of each semester, you are not going to sell your books, and you are not going to finish college without having built up your own personal library. If you need money at the end of a semester, sell your tennis racket.

If you are still on the fence about this matter, consider one further thing. Someday you will probably have children. Kids ask questions. If you have your own library in your house, your children will eventually discover among your books certain books that will help them, both at school and in their own personal growth. Although you know what subjects interest you, and don't interest you, there is no way in the world you can tell what subjects will interest your children. You might hate your course in, say, anthropology so much that you can't wait till the end of the term so that you can get rid of the book. You might even want to burn it with glee the way some older folks are said to burn the mortgage the instant they've paid it off. But remember this: someday you might have a child who takes to anthropology the way Einstein took to mathematics.

I wrote

ABOUT THIS BOOK

I wrote this book to help people who want help with their writing. The book is not intended to teach you how to write; your teacher will help you with that. It's to help you straighten out and remember a lot of things,

many of them trivial, that people who write need to know about. I have written each section while thinking about a person who has trouble with the subject of the section, so if you look at a section concerning some matter you already know about you'll think the section is ten times too long and extremely boring. Well, I agree that it is too long, and very boring, for someone who already knows all about the subject. But for someone who doesn't, I want to be sure I give enough examples so that he or she has an excellent chance of seeing the point. Of course, anyone who sees the point after two or three examples doesn't have to keep reading. But I know that there are times when someone is explaining something to me--occasionally something very simple--when it takes me three or four times as long as it should to get the point. In this book I sometimes take three or four times as much time explaining a point and giving examples as should be necessary for you to see the point, but, as I say, we don't always see things as quickly as we should.

Of every ten hours most college English teachers spend writing corrections and comments on students' papers, I would imagine that eight or nine go into the marking of what might be called stupid little mistakes: alot; already/all ready; quite/quiet; ect.; to/too; its/it's; each have; took/brought; misplaced words; me/myself; they're/there; their/there; comma pairs with one comma missing; preform; where/were; whether/wheather; a man/this man; good/well; could have/could of; redundant words, and so on:

But, that wasn't the way it was.

I went but, he wasn't there.

He had with him the following things; a tennis ball,
I knew I shouldn't. However I went ahead and did it.

There was no one around to whom I could turn to.

Houses in the midwest are lower than New England.

It was as big, if not bigger than the other one.

Babe Ruth was better than any baseball player in the US.

(Written by hand) The CASE for the plAintif WAS not Very ConVincing.

He said that if he did make the trip, that he would call her.

She judges boys by their looks and how smart they are.

Because the paper was due the next morning.

It wasn't that big of a deal.

Less people showed up than he expected.

I could not help but think he was the guilty one.

I'd like to give a party for them because they have been especially nice to my friends and I.

I have spent very little of my correcting time marking Major Errors in the papers of most of my students, because I haven't seen them. I have seen plenty of poor practices such as those I've just listed, however. Sometimes a good student made only three or four of those errors (each more than one) in a semester, while another good student made a dozen or more. Curiously, an excellent student might make several of them too, as many as twenty, each one amazing me as it leaped out at me when I least suspected.

When I have looked into traditional English Handbooks to see whether I should try asking my students to buy one, I have always decided not to. Here is what has discouraged me. Let us say one of my students has written:

At the banquet, several of us were singled out for praise, and a few of us were given trophies: Best Player (the captain of the team, who was, indeed, the best player); Most Improved (my best friend, a wonderful, pathetic fellow who finally made it to the second team); and Most Valuable Player (myself--the most stunned person in the room!).

I want to write him a long note about "myself" in that sentence. I don't have time to do it, so I write "see me for a minute after class about this one." After class we leave the building, sit down on a bench in the sun, and I explain to him in four minutes why "myself" should be "me;" writing examples on a piece of paper. He seems not to understand, though he tries to comfort me by nodding his head "yes" from time to time. All of a sudden, at the end of the fourth minute,

in a classical "Ah ha!" moment, he gets the point, saying brightly and loudly, "Oh! You mean!", telling me what I mean. I say "You've got it! That's what I mean!" "Oh," he says, "OK, I get it. It's really simple, isn't it." "Yes," I say, "although it may be harder to remember to think about it at the right times than it seems. Can you think about it at the right times?" [Feigned scorn]: "Of course!" That I take to mean "What do you think I am, an idiot?" I take it as it is meant--good naturedly. I am only slightly skeptical that he will never make that mistake again, but in the rest of his papers for me he doesn't.

After our conversation, as I walk back to my office, I wonder why I have just spent six or seven minutes with one student explaining one rather small matter, when my main aim is to teach writing. When I teach writing, I want to be free to teach writing, not grammar or mechanics. In the classroom I want to look at ideas and their relations, the implications of certain words and phrases, the assumptions that key words point to, the kind of voice a piece of writing creates, and so on. I don't want to talk about stupid little errors. When I read a student's paper, I want to write questions about ideas, assumptions, relations, implications. I don't want to write, repeatedly, notes about "myself" and other matters like those I listed earlier. As classroom teacher and paper reader, I want to deal with writing, not errors.

When I get to my office--remember, I said all those thoughts go through my head as I walk back to my office--I think "Maybe I should require my students to buy a handbook, so I wouldn't have to spend much of my time writing notes about mistakes." I pick up a handbook, look up "myself," and find:

Myself (like yourself, himself, herself, itself, themselves) is an intensive and reflexive pronoun. It should never be used in a sentence without its corresponding noun or pronoun: "I myself will do it." "I hurt myself." "They sent for John and me (NOT myself)."

I ask myself whether the student I have just conferred would be able to read that, learn from it, and never make the same mistake again. If so, I should require my students to buy a good handbook. But that is not what I decide. I read the handbook passage again, think of the four minutes of talk it took me to get the student to see the point, and conclude that if he read that section, he would not learn enough to change his behavior. After all, does he know what "intensive and reflexive" means? Does he know what a pronoun is? When someone says to him "me (NOT myself)," does he understand the principle? When he is given three examples, does he assume that all three are relevant to the mistake he has made? If not, can he pick out the example that is relevant? Does he know what "its corresponding noun" means? What is a corresponding noun? I should add quickly that I do not criticize grammarians who use technical talk when writing for other grammarians; I have spent all of my professional life using technical talk of one kind or another (The speaker in the poem) But my student is not a grammarian; he is a bright, lively, attractive fellow who has a lot of ideas, is rather articulate, and generally writes well. Still, it took me four minutes of patient explaining to get him to see why one small error was an error, and what to do about it.

So much for my good and superior students. What about my mediocre

[unintelligible]

TABLE OF CONTENTS (tentative)

<u>a and an</u>	commas between clauses
abbreviations	commas for changing directions
affect/effect	comma pairs
aggravate	comma splices and run-on sentences
agreement in number between subject and verb	commas to prevent misreading
all right/alright	commas: too few
a lot/alot	commas: too many
already/all ready	commas up front
altogether/all together	commonly misspelled words
among/between	comparing things
anyone/any one; everyone; someplace; sometime; everyday	compliment/complement
appropriateness	consensus/ consensus of opinion
as good as/so good as	conciseness: myth #1
a way/a ways	consistency of tense, subject; sequence of tenses
awful/awfully	continual/continuous
baby talk (simple sentences)	couldn't care less
big deal	criterion
Black English and white teachers	dangling things
brackets	dashes
British spelling	data
. . . but, . . . / . . . , but . . .	decimate
by driving	different from/different than
can/may	disinterested/uninterested
can't help/can't help but	ditto marks
can't/cant; I'm/Im; etc.	ellipses
capitalization	equally/equally as
capitals in handwriting	etc./ect.
center on	existence
clichés	farther/further
colons	final periods
commas: city, state	first/firstly
commas and series	first responses: myth #2
commas with main ideas	fragments and sentences
	good/well; bad/badly

handwriting	preventive/preventative
hanged/hung	pronunciation and spelling
hardly	proofreading
he/him; she/her	proofreading as you type
However, . . . / However . . .	proofreading marks
I/me/myself	punctuating dialogue
imply/infer	questions (correct forms)
in/into	quite/quiet/quit
incomplete sayings (idioms)	quiz English
inspiration: myth #3	quotations
it's/its	quotations inside quotations
kind of/kind of a; sort of/sort of a	quoting words
Knowing better	racism in language
lay/lie	real/very; really/very
lead/led	redundancy
less/fewer	regardless
let's/lets	sacrilegious
like/as if	salutations
lose/loose	seeing as how
me/my; him/his	semicolons
media	set/sit
misplaced words	sexism in language
most/almost	shortened spellings
muddled sentences	signatures
neither/nor	slang, common expressions, clichés, and quotation marks
not only X but Y	slashes
one of those	sloppiness
orient/orientate	so/very
parallelism	spelling: ally
parentheses inside parentheses	spelling: ie/ei
periods for question marks	spelling: tt, rr, nn (doubling final consonants)
phenomenon	take/bring
placement of certain punctuation marks	. . . that . . . that . . .
possessives	that/which
prepositions and idioms	their/thier
present tense in writing abt books	

there is/there are

Think about what you're saying

this man/a man

thus/thusly

titles of books, articles, movies, etc.

too/to

too/very

try to/try and; be sure to/be sure and

verbal/oral

very/very much

vocabulary: myth #4

volley/rally (tennis)

wait for/wait on

was/were

Well, here's how it is

whereas

where it's at

who/whom

who/whom/that

who's/whose

will/shall

would have/would of; could have/could of

Written, Edited American English

On April 11, 1773, James Boswell asked his famous friend, Samuel Johnson, to tell him about Johnson's early years. After mentioning two experiences with one of his first teachers--Dame Oliver--Dr. Johnson said that

he next went to an English master, Tom Brown, who wrote an English spelling book and dedicated it to the Universe.

Boswell for the Defense, eds. William K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Frederick A. Pottle (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), p. 175

A and AN

Correct

an orange
a building
~~a potpie~~
a book
an elephant
an illusion
an umbrella
an order

Error

a orange
No one ever says "an building," so I
won't list, in this column, mistakes
no one ever makes.
a elephant
a illusion
a umbrella
a order

The important thing here is the sound of the first part of the word that follows a or an. If it sounds like a vowel--a, e, i, o, or u--you use an in front of it, no matter how it's spelled:

an hour
an R C Cola
an Exxon sign
He got an F on the test.
Cheerleaders: "Give me a G!"
"Give me an H!"
"Give me an L!"
"Give me an M!"
a university
a history book

a hour
a R C Cola
a Exxon sign
He got a F on the test.
"Give me a H!"
"Give me a L!"
"Give me a M!"
The British say "an university."
The British say "an history book."

That's all there is to this matter: if the first part of a word sounds like a vowel, an goes before it. In "a unit," the first sound in "unit" is pronounced "you," which is a vowel sound; in "an umbrella," the first sound in "umbrella" is pronounced "uh," which is not a vowel sound, though it's close to one. The two pronunciations of u are the only tricky thing about the use of a and an, and it's not very tricky:

Correct (you sound)

a unit
a universal joint
a utility pole
a useful tool
a uranium molecule
She plays a ukulele.

Correct (uh sound)

an ugly wound
an umbrella
an uphill battle
an ulcer
an uncle
She gave him an ultimatum.

ABBREVIATIONS

Certain abbreviations are so common that we hardly think of them as abbreviations; these are the only ones that you should use in writing for a college course. The following lists are not complete, of course, but they should give you the general idea:

OK

Mr. Siler
Mrs. Konek
Ms. Hunt
Dr. Bilestri
the Rev. Mr. Clark
Barbara Biegel, M.A.
James Campbell, Ph.D.
St. Marks
Prof. Rhynette Hurd
Prof. R. Hurd
the Hon. A. L. Link
Sen. M. J. Butler
etc.
John M. Tanner, M.D.
\$50.00
NAACP
NBC
USA

Avoid in formal writing

N. Y. City
Cal.
Chi.
the gas co.
Thos.
First Ave.
Elm St.
Thurs.
Sept.
He went to the Dr. to have the cast removed.
The prof. lectured for fifty minutes.
I'm a student at the univ.
I'm running out of \$.
He was taking math., pol. sci., and phys.
Here's an ex. of what I mean.
Ten yrs ago, . . .
The passage appears on p. 256. (256 is OK)
It's in ch. 7. (7 is OK)

AFFECT and EFFECT

There are three ways of using these two words:

- 1) What was the result of the action?
What was the effect of the action?
This medicine often causes other problems.
This medicine sometimes has side-effects.
All his practicing had a good effect on his game.
The result of the debate was to cool everyone down.
The effect of the debate was to cool everyone down.
The effect of the earthquake was millions of dollars worth of damage.
His nap had a good effect on him.

That one should be fairly easy to remember, especially if you can remember the phrase "side-effects," whose meaning here is "results."

- 2) All of our arguing didn't bring about any changes.
All of our arguing didn't effect any changes.
His hours and hours of practicing didn't cause an improvement in his performance.
His hours and hours of practicing didn't effect an improvement in his performance.
The police brought about an end to the ruckus.
The police effected an end to the ruckus.
His speech caused a wave of good feeling.
His speech effected a wave of good feeling.
- 3) Her poor attitude on the court influenced the coach's view of her.
Her poor attitude affected the coach's view of her.
His sudden wealth didn't influence his way of life.
His sudden wealth didn't affect his way of life.
All that booze influenced him for the worse.
The booze affected him for the worse.
All my ranting and raving didn't influence the weather.
My ranting and raving didn't affect the weather.

I wish I had a good way of remembering the difference between 2) and 3).

AGGRAVATE

This used to be used by most educated people in only one way, and they looked on it as having only one meaning:

By speaking up, he stirred up the crowd's anger.
By speaking up, he aggravated the crowd's anger.
By running away, she made a bad situation worse.
By running away, she aggravated a bad situation.
The noise made her headache worse.
The noise aggravated her headache.
The explosion intensified his fear.
The explosion aggravated his fear.

Some people still use the word that way, and only that way, in both speech and writing (I am one of those people). The basic meaning is "to intensify."

But many other people now use "aggravate" to mean "annoy" or "irritate," a practice that does not annoy or irritate me, though I am surprised when I see it in formal writing. I usually think, "Now, that writer should know better than to do that." Here are some examples of what I mean:

He aggravated them by talking all the time.
She aggravated him by refusing to go to the movie.
Customers who arrive one minute before closing time aggravate the clerks.

My advice is this. If you want to become an excellent writer, learn and remember the distinction between "aggravate" (intensify) and "annoy" (irritate). If you aren't setting your sights that high, don't worry about this one, unless you are writing for a high school teacher who wants you to worry about it. If you are in college, or plan to go to college, you'd do well to get the distinction straight. If you want to write letters to the editor, I think you should learn the distinction.

More practice:

Correct and Formal

Inflation aggravated their misery.
Inflation intensified their misery.
The long silence aggravated their anxiety.
The long silence intensified their anxiety.
The bad news aggravated his melancholy.
The bad news made his melancholy worse.
The bad news

Informal; Many Say Incorrect

Inflation aggravated them.
Inflation irritated them.
The long silence aggravated them.

The bad news aggravated him.

AGREEMENT IN NUMBER BETWEEN SUBJECT AND VERB

"Agreement in number between subject and verb" refers to a simple matter: are you writing about one person's doing something, or about two people's doing something? Are you writing about one book, or two (or more) books? Are you writing about one thing, or more than one thing? Are you writing about one activity, or more than one activity? People who can't tell whether they're talking about one thing, instead of two things, will not be able to understand what follows. I assume you are not one of them.

The problems we have with subject/verb agreement in number have **three causes**. The first is that after we've started writing a sentence, and gotten into the middle of it, we forget how we started out, and we don't bother to go back and check. For example, you can, without any trouble, write a sentence like this:

Each one is going to the game.

But if you write a lot more, adding ideas to the basic idea you started with, you might forget after awhile how you started out:

Each one of them, because they all like music a whole lot, and they all are free Saturday night, are going to the concert.

That's exactly the same as writing "Each one are going," which is a bad error; an error few people would make in either speaking or writing a short sentence.

Anyone who gets confused about what he's talking or writing about--that is, whether he's talking or writing about one thing or more than one thing--can solve his problem easily. All he has to do, when he finishes a sentence, is ask himself, "Now, wait a minute; am I talking about one thing or more than one thing?" and then go back and check.

The second cause of errors in subject-verb agreement is also simple, and not very hard to correct. Some people don't know whether certain words do refer to one thing, or to two or more things. Or, rather, they think they know, but most English teachers say they don't. For example, a lot of people think "everybody" is pretty much the same as "all of them," so they write

Everybody are going,

just as they would write "All of them are going." Here's why most English teachers say that is not correct. "Everybody" means "every body," which is grammatically the same as "each body," which is the same as "each one." Look at these examples:

Each is going.

Each one is going.

Every single one of them is going.

Every one of them is going.

Everyone is going.

Each and every one of them is going.

Every body is going.

Everybody is going.

The third cause of subject-verb agreement errors is confusion about which verbs go with one subject, and which with two. Confusion here can be corrected by anyone who is willing to take a few minutes to memorize whichever standard forms he has backwards. Memorizing the standard forms is like memorizing addition combinations in the first and second grades, or learning the multiplication

tables. ($2 \times 2 = 4$; $3 \times 3 = 9$). A mistake with one of these standard forms (such as $3 \times 3 = 10$) is considered by some people to be equally surprising as a mistake with the other (such as "I is"). If you have been using a non-standard form, it would be worthwhile to learn the standard form and to use it when you write.

Here are some of the standard forms. Underline the ones you say differently, then, when you've finished reading all of the examples, go back and memorize the ones you've been saying and writing differently.

SINGULAR (ONE PERSON OR THING) PLURAL (TWO OR MORE PEOPLE, THINGS, ACTIVITIES, etc.)

I am going
you are going
he is going
she is going
it is going

one is going
no one is going
none is going
each is going
one of them is going
no one of them is going
none of them is going
each of them is going

either is going
either one is going
everyone is going
every one of them is going
everybody is going

neither is going
neither of them is going
neither one of them is going

not one is going
not everyone is going
not everybody is going

we (two or more of us) are going
you (two or more) are going
they are going
they are going
they are going

some are going

both are going
some are going
most are going
all are going
both of them are going
some of them are going
most of them are going
all of them are going
both are going
both of them are going
all of them are going
all of them are going
all of them are going

both are going
both of them are going
both of them are going
few are going
few of them are going
~~a few are going~~
a few of them are going
many are going
many of them are going
a lot are going
a lot of them are going

Agreement--3

It's just as important to use the correct forms when you report what has happened in the past. Here are the standard forms for the verb to be:

SINGULAR (ONE PERSON OR THING) PLURAL (TWO OR MORE PEOPLE OR THINGS, etc.)

I was going
you were going
he was going
she was going
it was going

one was going
no one was going
none was going
each was going
one of them was going
no one of them was going
none of them was going
each of them was going

~~either was going~~
either one was going
everyone was going
everybody was going

neither was going
neither of them was going
neither one of them was going

not one was going
not everyone was going
not everybody was going

we were going
you (two or more) were going
they were going
they were going
they were going
some were going

both were going
some were going
most were going
all were going
both of them were going
some of them were going
most of them were going
all of them were going
both were going
both of them were going
all of them were going
all of them were going

both were going
both of them were going

few were going
few of them were going
a few were going
a few of them were going
many were going
many of them were going
a lot were going
a lot of them were going
several were going
several of them were going

ALL RIGHT

Most English teachers consider "alright" a nonstandard spelling, even though more and more students are writing it. I think it will become a standard spelling eventually, but for now it is probably best to follow the traditional practice:

I said "All right, I'm ready."
Is it all right with you if I borrow this?
She said she was beginning to feel all right.
He got the answers all right.
I've already told you that it's all right to go.
That movie is all right!

A LOT

In the last few years, more and more people have begun writing "a lot" as one word: "alot." It is possible that some time in the future, that will be the standard practice, but today the standard practice is to write it as two words: a lot.

How can you remember to write it as two words? Here's a suggestion. If someone buys a piece of land on which to build a house, we say "He bought a lot," not "He bought alot." He bought a lot, and it might even have cost him a lot of money to buy a lot. It didn't cost him alot of money to buy alot to build on. Here are some examples:

Correct

He has a lot of nerve!
It'll take a lot of hard work to do this job.
She has a lot of time on her hands.
She bought a lot ~~for a house.~~ ~~build on it.~~
We had a lot of fun.
He ate a lot of food.

Not so good

He has alot of nerve!
It'll take alot of hard work to do this job.
She has alot of time on her hands.
She bought alot and hopes to build on it.
We had alot of fun.
He ate alot of food.

ALREADY and ALL READY

I already know that.
She had already dressed.
I've already seen that movie.
I'd already gone to bed when the phone rang.
She's already eaten lunch.

I'm all ready to go.
She was all ready to start out.
I'm all ready to go to the movie.
I was all ready to go to bed when the phone rang.
She's all ready to eat lunch.

See? These two express two different ideas: I've already done something, and I'm all ready to do something. If someone found it impossible to remember the difference, the problem could be solved by never using "all ready." That would leave a person with just two words for the two ideas: I've already done something, and I'm ready to do something. More examples:

We've already checked in.
I've already limbered up.
It's already been painted.
I've already made the sandwiches.

We're ready to check in.
We're all ready to check in.
I'm ready to limber up.
I'm all ready to limber up.
It's ready to be painted.
It's all ready to be painted.
I'm ready to make the sandwiches.
I'm all ready to make the sandwiches.

A LOT

In the last few years, more and more people have begun writing "a lot" as one word. It is possible that in a few more years, that will be the standard practice, but today the standard practice is to write it as two words: a lot. How can you remember to do this? It will take an effort. Read the following, and try to figure out some way to remember:

He has a lot of nerve.

It will take a lot of hard work to do this job.

She has a lot of time on her hands.

Alaska gets a lot of snow every winter.

We had a lot of fun.

She made a lot of money.

He ate a lot of food.

A lot of people went to the dance.

ALREADY and ALL READY

I already know that.
She had already dressed.
I've already seen that movie.
I'd already gone to bed when the
 phone rang.
She's already eaten lunch.

I'm all ready to go.
She was all ready to get dressed.
I'm all ready to go to the movie.
I was all ready to go to bed when
 the phone rang.
She's all ready to eat lunch.

See? These two express two different ideas: I've already done something, and I'm all ready to do something. If someone found it impossible to remember the difference, the problem might be solved by never using "all ready." That would leave a person with just two words for the two ideas: I've already ~~done~~ something, and I'm ready to do something.

We've already checked in.

We're ready to check in.

I've already limbered up.

We're all ready to check in.

I'm ready to limber up.

It's already been painted.

I'm all ready to limber up.

It's ready to be painted.

I've already made the sandwiches.

It's all ready to be painted

I'm ready to make the sandwiches.

I'm all ready to make the sandwiches.

Prentice Hall: Handbook for Writers

Already, All ready The adverb already means "previously."
The adjective phrase all ready means "completely prepared."

When ~~he~~ reached the station, his train had already gone.
By eight o'clock we were all ready to start hiking.

ALTOGETHER and ALL TOGETHER

I'm not totally happy about it.
I'm not altogether happy about it.

I don't entirely understand what you're saying.

I don't altogether understand your point.

He didn't completely go along with my proposals.

He didn't altogether go along with my proposals.

She was totally surprised when we all shouted "Happy birthday!"

She was altogether surprised when we shouted "Happy birthday!"

We all got together for the party.

We were all together for the party.

They all dived into the water at the same time.

They dived into the water all together.

They were all together at the entrance.

At 3:00, the team was all together on the practice field.

The forks are all together in one compartment in that drawer.

AMONG and BETWEEN

Here's the way these two used to be used by most educated speakers and writers:

Just between the two of us . . . Let's divide it among the three of us.

I can hardly choose between the two of them. I can hardly choose among the three of them.

Their father divided the candy between the two of them. He divided the candy among the five children.

He said he was between a rock and a hard place. There was a lot of friendly feeling among the members of the class.

Between now and then, I hope to improve a great deal. Among all the hats on the shelf I found only one I wanted to buy.

Today, fewer people maintain that distinction, but I still like it, even though occasionally I run into an idiom or concept that tempts me to break the usual rule:

There were seven people on the committee, and between them they came up with a plan.

On the map, he put a dot between the three cities.

I don't object to those sentences, and wouldn't correct them. On the other hand, I have a slightly negative feeling about them, and would try to phrase them differently if I found myself writing them. I can see how to do that very easily with the first one; the second one has me stumped.

ANYONE and ANY ONE

There are several words like this pair, and the point to be made about each pair is the same: the words in each pair don't mean the same thing. If you can make yourself read right to the end of this section, you should be able to clear the matter up once and for all.

He'll give help to anyone who needs it.
He likes nearly everyone he meets.
Sometimes I feel blue.

Let's go someplace where we can talk.
How can anyone deny we are all
imperfect?

Is anyone thirsty?
Everyone got there on time.
She's popular with everyone.
Is everybody happy?

Sometimes I think I'll never grow up.

Sometimes I feel like a motherless
child.

Little explosions like that are an
everyday occurrence around here.
There are my everyday, working shoes.

He'll give help to any one of them.
I squatted down and picked up every one of them.
There are some times during the day I like
to pause and catch my breath.
This is some place you've got here!
How could any one of them deny we're all
imperfect?

Does any one of you want to have a drink?
Every one of them got there on time.
Every one of her classmates likes her.
Every body found at the site of the plane
crash was removed by the police.

There are some times that I think I'll never
grow up.

There have been some times in my life when
I've felt quite lost.

I see him nearly every day.

I wear these shoes every day.

APPROPRIATENESS

Some expressions discussed in this book are called "unacceptable in formal writing," or "unacceptable in writing for college courses," or "backwoodsy," etc. There's nothing wrong with most of those expressions when they are used in the right circumstances, in speech. For example, I see nothing wrong with saying "Seeing as how the poor ole dog was deaf and blind, I had him put away," if you're talking to people who have grown up saying "seeing as how" and "ole." But if you're writing instead of speaking, custom dictates that you behave somewhat differently: you have to say "Since the dog . . .," or "Because the dog . . .," and you have to write "old" instead of "ole," if you want educated people to approve of your writing.

We all know, of course, that behavior that's acceptable in one situation is not acceptable in another. We drive on the right side of the street, but if we want to drive in England we must drive on the left side. If you want to be a baseball player, you must learn to use your hands, not your head and feet, when a ball is coming your way; but if you want to be a soccer player, you must learn to use your head and feet, never your hands, when a ball is coming your way.

In 1772, a man named James Boswell, who felt sorry for six young men who had been expelled from a university, argued with a friend about it, and later recorded their conversation in his diary:

JOHNSON. "Sir, that expulsion was extremely just and proper. . . . They were examined and found to be mighty ignorant fellows."

BOSWELL. But, Sir, was it not hard to expel them, for I believe they were good beings?" JOHNSON. "Yes, Sir, I believe they might be good beings. But they were not fit to be in the University of Oxford. A cow is a very good animal in the field. But we turn her out of a garden."

William K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Frederick A. Pottle, eds., Boswell for the Defense (New York: McGraw Hill, 1959), p. 122

A WAY

OK

It's a little way away from here.
She's come a long way as a
musician.
He has a way still to go.
You've come a long way from
St. Louis.
But, baby, you've still got
a long way to go.
Move just a little way away
from the camera.
It's a long way from here.

Poor

It's a little ways away from here.
She's come a long ways as a
musician.
He has a ways still to go.
You've come a long ways from
St. Louis.
But, baby, you've still got a long ways
to go.
Move just a little ways away from the camera.
It's a long ways from here.

AWFULLY and AWFUL

"Awful" has a curious history. You know what it means when someone writes "The Alps are awe-inspiring," or "The great cathedral filled me with awe." For centuries the word meant "sense of reverence, inspiration, wonder." But it could also be used to describe a horrendous event occurring on a large scale: an earthquake that killed thousands could be called "awful," or "awful." Then people gradually began to use it about more common events, until today it can be used in speech about even trivial things: "That's an awful shapshot of him," or "That's an awful TV commercial." The word when used in that way is generally unacceptable in papers for college courses.

But if you want to use it in speech--as I do (I like the sound of it, in some situations, such as "What an awful movie!")--then it becomes important to know when to say "awful" and when to say "awfully." Here's how it works:

That's an awful book.

He looks awful.

It takes an awful lot of time to do it.

I'm sick. I feel awful.

It cost an awful lot of money.

It's been awfully nice to see you.

It's been very nice to see you.

It's awfully cold in here.

It's very cold in here.

She's been working awfully hard.

She's been working very hard.

It's awfully good of you to help.

It's very good of you to help.

When I hear a mistake made about these two, it's usually with the word "lot," and the mistake is this: "That's an awfully lot of time to have to spend on such a project," which is like saying "That's a very lot of time." "Awful lot" is the right way to say it.

It took a long time for me to realize
the movie was really awful.

She had an awful time at the picnic.

That big building looks awful.

It took an awfully long time for me
to realize it was an awful movie.

It took me a very long time . . .

That's an awfully big building.

That's a very big building.

He is awfully dumb. ("He is awful dumb"

I have said as a joke.)

He is very dumb.

A mistake made with "awful" or "awfully" is one of the mistakes that I consider to be embarrassing, and many others do too. "It's awful good of you to help" is bad enough; "There are an awfully lot of birds out there" is terrible. These two words are worth getting straight.

If you can't get them straight, a simple solution to the problem is to give up using both of them. After all, "I feel terrible" is just as good as "I feel awful," and "I've been working very hard" is just as good as "I've been working awfully hard." Many good writers never use either word, even though I think they know the difference between them.

BABY TALK

If you know for sure what a sentence is (that is, if you do not unintentionally write fragments), and if someone has told you your sentences are too simple, this section could help you.

Baby Talk

That man lives in Arizona. He loves to jog. He works for a large manufacturing company. He and his wife have two children. The oldest child is five. He lives for jogging, it would seem.

The boy over there in the blue overalls is a senior. He lives in my neighborhood. He works weekends in a grocery store.

Billy started the car. Then he turned on the car radio. He began driving toward the park. He was driving too fast. His passenger began to get jumpy.

The examples on the left look like the work of a very young person. Children write short sentences. They don't express relations between or among ideas. As they write, they seem to be able to focus on only one idea at a time, and the sentences they write show that. If you have a tendency not to think about more complex relations as you write, you probably should start trying to think about them.

Mr. M. left the commercial television world. That was two years ago. He felt public television offered greater journalistic opportunities. He has now agreed to return to commercial TV. Commercial TV has bigger audiences.

I could give you more examples, but those are enough for you to get the idea, aren't they?

If you need to complicate your sentences--to express more complex relations--I have a word of advice about how to go about doing it. If you are able to write a paper, or write a first draft, in a reasonable amount of time, I'd suggest you keep on doing whatever you've been doing: complete the first draft in a reasonable amount of time, without worrying about whether your sentences are too simple. But when you start to revise your first draft, watch carefully for ways to combine the simple sentences. If you do that for several weeks, you'll eventually begin to find ways to create more complex sentences as you write your first draft. Of course it would be nice if you could, all of a sudden, start writing more complex sentences in your first drafts, but my advice is that you should not worry about that at all. That ability will come, in time, if you take things one step at a time.

Adult Talk

That man, who lives with his wife and two young children in Arizona, where he works for a large manufacturing company, loves jogging with a passion.

The boy over there in the blue overalls--a neighbor of mine--is a senior who works weekends in a grocery store.

After Billy had started the car and turned on the radio, as he began driving very fast toward the park his passenger started to get jumpy...

Mr. M., who left the commercial television world two years ago because he felt public television offered greater journalistic opportunities despite its smaller audience, has agreed to return to commercial TV.

BIG DEAL

Incorrect

It wasn't that big of a deal.
 It's not that big of a house.
 It's not that sort of a car.
 It's not that type of a party.
 It's not that kind of a party.
 It's a hot of a day.
 It's not that hot of a day.

It's not that type party.
 He's the type guy I like.
 What kind of a book is it?
 What type of a book is it?
 What sort of a ballplayer is he?
 It's not my kind of a movie.
 It's a good of a buy.
 It's not that good of a buy.

It's the type day for a picnic.
 It's not the type of a day for a picnic.
 It's not that sort of a day.
 What sort of a teacher is she?

Correct

It wasn't that big a deal.
 It's not that big a house.
 It's not that sort of car.
 It's not that type of party.
 It's not that kind of party.
 It's a hot day.
 It's not that hot a day.
 It's not a hot day.

It's not that type of party.
 He's the type of guy I like.
 What kind of book is it?
 What type of book is it?
 What sort of ballplayer is he?
 It's not my kind of movie.
 It's a good buy.
 It's not that good a buy.
 It's not a good buy.

It's the type of day for a picnic.
 It's not the type of day for a picnic.
 It's not that sort of day.
 What sort of teacher is she?

The ideas here are fairly simple. No one ever says "It's a good of a deal," so no one should ever say "It's not that good of a deal," but some people do say (and write) that. No one ever says "He's a good of a guy," but some say "He's not that good of a guy," which is incorrect. No one ever says "He's a good of a pitcher," but some say (and write) "He's not that good of a pitcher," which is wrong. People say "It's a big deal," which is all right; no one ever says "It's a big of a deal," which sounds terrible. Yet some people do say and write "It's not that big of a deal," which sounds just as bad to someone who knows the standard practices.

Incorrect

It's a solidly-built of a chair.
 It's not that solidly-built of a chair.
 It's the sort of a place I like.
 It's not that big of a deal!
 Big of a deal!
 So you're a minute late. No big of a deal!

Correct

It's a solidly built chair.
 It's not that solidly-built a chair.
 It's not a solidly built chair. (Better)
 It's the sort of place I like.
 It's not that big a deal!
 Big deal!
 So you're a minute late. No big deal!

Learning the correct practices here should be no big deal! If you can remember that "No big deal!" is right, and that "No big of a deal!" is not, you can straighten out this matter for yourself forever, if you can also remember that "he's my kind of player" is right, whereas "He's my kind player" (or "my type player") is wrong.

BRACKETS

Brackets are used for parentheses within parentheses, and for inserting some words of your own into a quotation:

. . . Well, I guess that's it for now. (Oh, by the way, she /Mrs. Jackson/ asked me to send you her best.) Time for bed . . .

There's an old saying: "Don't put all your eggs /meaning hopes, plans, dollars, etc./ in one basket."

Making brackets with a typewriter is perhaps the greatest pleasure a typist can have. How to make brackets:

- 1) Use the slash: /
- 2) Backspace one space, and hit the underlining mark: _
- 3) That gives you something that looks like this: /
- 4) Roll down the carriage one full line and hit the underlining mark again: -
- 5) Result: /
- 6) Experiment to find out how to make the bracket for the other end:]

BRITISH SPELLINGS

Of the dozens of words we spell differently from the way the British spell them, I think only a few are common enough to be worth mentioning here. If you are ever in doubt, of course, a dictionary will tell you what you want to know.

American	British
humor	humour
color	colour
labor	labour
odor	odour
acknowledgment	acknowledgement
judgment	judgement
traveled	travelled
theater	theatre
center	centre
connection	connexion

I was born in Rockville Centre, Long Island, New York, so I grew up thinking "centre" looked right. "Theatre" also looked right to me, since there were theaters near me that called themselves "theatres." Years later, when I first came across two lists like those above, I read through them with interest and some surprise, and thought, "Well, I'm going to keep using "centre" and "theatre." Then I thought, "No, wait a minute. I'm an American. I don't try to talk like the British, act like the British, dress like the British--why should I go around spelling like the British? I'm not British." That still seems to me a sensible view of the matter.

BUT,

Correct

I went, but he didn't show up.
You claim to be sure, but I have my doubts.
The sun is shining, but I think it's going to rain.
You are sad, but I am cheerful.
You are sad but I am cheerful.
You say that men are all alike, but I say that I am different.
Here's the trouble: you always want to do one thing, but I want to do another.

Incorrect

I went but, he didn't show up.
You claim to be sure but, I have my doubts.
The sun is shining but, I think it's going to rain.
You are sad but, I am cheerful.
You are sad but, I am cheerful.
You say that men are all alike but, I say that I am different.
Here's the trouble: you always want to do one thing but, I want to do another.

This is a rather simple matter, isn't it? The comma goes before "but," not after it. Where you put the comma--before or after "but"--is determined by the way you speak. Sometimes we fall into poor speech habits, and that causes us to make the wrong decisions when writing. The best speech habit with sentences like those above would lead the speaker to emphasize the sense of what was being said:

You are sad, BUT I am cheerful.

There is another way it could be said:

You are sad--pause indicated by the comma--but I am cheerful.

In any case, the most sensible place for the pause to come is before "but," not after it:

You are sad but I am cheerful.

Putting the pause before "but" makes less sense:

You are sad but I am cheerful.

No, that's no good. It should be "You are sad but I am cheerful," which is written "You are sad, but I am cheerful."

If you have been having a problem with this one, you probably should go back and read the examples at the beginning of this section a second time. If you're ever going to get this matter straight in your mind, now is the best time to do it, and it'll take no more than a couple of minutes.

BY DRIVING

By driving 55 miles an hour saves gas.

If that looks all right to you, you need to read this section carefully. Compare the following pairs of sentences, and try to figure out what the incorrect ones are missing:

Incorrect

By driving no more than 55 saves gas.
By taking aspirin gets rid of a headache, they say.
By saving a little bit each week can build up quite a sum.
By keeping right at it can finish the job in three hours.
By jogging a few miles every day keeps you in good shape.

Correct

By driving no more than 55, you save gas.
By taking aspirin a person can get rid of a headache, they say.
By saving a little bit each week you can build up quite a sum.
By keeping right at it I can finish the job in three hours.
By jogging a few miles every day, you keep yourself in good shape.

Do you get the idea? If you start a sentence with "By doing something," you have to follow it with a noun--you, I, one, a person, or even a thing: "By gusting up to 40 mph, the wind chilled us." Here's why it works that way:

I save gas by driving no more than 55 mph. (OK)
Saves gas by driving no more than 55 mph. (No good)
By driving no more than 55 mph, I save gas. (OK)
By driving no more than 55mph saves gas. (No good)
She keeps in shape by jogging. (OK)
Keeps in shape by jogging. (No good)
By jogging, she keeps in shape. (OK)
By jogging keeps in shape. (No good)

If this still seems strange or unnatural, I'd suggest you say the following sentences aloud, over and over, until you've got the pattern drilled into your brain:

By working, I hope to get ahead.
By studying, I hope to learn.
By saying these examples aloud, I hope to get this matter straight.
By dressing warmly, they'll be comfortable.
By selling cookies, they'll make money for the school.

CAN and MAY

I can throw a rock across this field.

May I have another drink?

Yes, you may.

I can drink this whole glassful without stopping.

May I go with you in your car?

Why, can't you drive a car?

Oh, sure, I can drive a car, but I don't happen to own one. May I go with you?

Yes, you may.

May I have permission to leave early?

I can run a hundred yards in ten seconds flat.

The distinction between "can" (ability to do something) and "may" (permission) was once observed by a great many educated people. Today it is still observed by many people over 40 or 50, and by most writers of things that might be called "formal." In speaking, the distinction is preserved by many older people, and by many others who like to think of themselves as speaking "correctly," but it is not observed by most other Americans. I used to observe it in speech, but find that I now don't always do so. Whereas some years ago I would have said, "May I look at a menu?", today I say "Could I look at a menu?" I still resist saying "Can I look at a menu," and I know that "could" isn't the right word, but "may" sounds funny, especially if I'm in a restaurant that's not the least bit fancy--it makes me sound more formal than I want to sound. But there are occasions on which I want to use the right word, and I think it's a good idea for you to know the difference.

CAN'T, I'M, WOULDN'T

If you have been having trouble knowing when to use an apostrophe, or where to put it, in words like "can't," "I'm," and "wouldn't," you should be able to get rid of the problem forever by going through this section carefully. Think hard about what you're reading here.

I am going = I'm going.

I would not say so = I wouldn't say so.

They ~~can not be bothered~~ = They can't be bothered.

I will do it = I'll do it.

I do not doubt it = I don't doubt it.

She is going = she's going.

He could not stop = he couldn't stop.

She would like to dance = She'd like to dance.

We were not ready = We weren't ready.

I shall do it = I'll do it.

They could not care less = They couldn't care less.

He did not doubt it = He didn't doubt it.

Here's a way to picture all of this:

do not	could not	I am	were not	I will	I would
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
don't	couldn't	I'm	weren't	I'll	I'd

Before you go on to the next part of this section, look carefully at the following pairs:

should not	can not	does not	I am	he is	I will	could not	were not
shouldn't	can't	doesn't	I'm	he's	I'll	couldn't	weren't

The following form is very similar:

I will not do it = I won't do it.

She will not go = she won't go.

You will not do it = You won't do it. They will not play = They won't play it.

Thus far, all of the apostrophes indicate that one or more letters has been dropped, and they indicate just where they've been dropped. The same things are true of the following examples:

It is = it's

We are = we're

there will be = there'll be

She was in the class of 1980 =

She was in the class of '80

"I'm going," he said = "I'm goin'," he said.

"I'm almost completely tuckered out," she said = "I'm 'most completely tuckered out," she said.

Who is there? = Who's there?

you are = you're

It's five of the clock (an old form) =

It's five o'clock

Yes, madam = Yes, ma'am

"I'm sweating like a hog," he said = "I'm sweatin' like a hog," he said.

"I'm ready to rest along about now," he said =

"I'm ready to rest 'long about now," he said.

CAN'T HELP BUT

A common mistake which makes no sense if you stop to think about it is this: "That baby is so cute you can't help but smile at him." That's like saying "turn left" when you mean "turn right."

Correct

Poor

You'll smile when you see that baby.

You can't help smiling when you see that baby. (That means you'll smile.)

You can't but smile when you see it. (That means you'll smile.)

He can't help acting like a comedian.

He can't but act like a comedian.

She can't help being a night owl.

Since he grew six inches in one year, he can't help being a bit awkward.

He can't help but act like a comedian.

He can't help but act like a comedian.

She can't help but be a night owl.

Since he grew six inches in one year, he can't help but being awkward.

Do you see the difference? Here's a simple explanation. "She can't help being cheerful" means "she is cheerful." "Can't help" is what is called a "double negative"; the two negatives cancel each other out, to make the whole statement positive. If you add a third negative,

She can not help but be cheerful,

that changes the meaning to "she isn't cheerful," which is the opposite of what you're trying to say or write.

He can do it = he is able to do it.

He can not do it = he is not able to do it.

He can't help doing it = he always does it.

He can't but do it = he always does it.

He can't help but do it = (logically) he doesn't do it.

Is it worth learning not to make this mistake? I think it's as much worth learning as it is to learn to say left instead of right when you mean left.

CAPITAL LETTERS

There is a difference between upper case letters (A, B, C, D, and so on) and lower case letters (a, b, c, d, and so on). After the first few grades of school, some people branch out on their own in the forming of letters, and, since penmanship is not taught in the later grades, they are not penalized directly for whatever weird practices they develop. (Whether they are penalized indirectly by teachers who give them lower grades than they would receive if their penmanship were better, I don't know, but I assume so.) Here is an example of the poor practices I am talking about; it is a sentence a student wrote (by hand) for me not very long ago:

The CAse for the pLAintif WAS not Very ConVincing.

Am I wrong in thinking that looks weird? Certainly anyone who typed a sentence in that fashion would be accused of not knowing certain things it is necessary to know in order to be promoted from the first grade to the second grade. Is writing like that on the same level as writing $2 + 2 = 5$, or $6 + 6 = 15$? Let me show you one more example, from a college freshman who was describing her early days as a typist. This, of course, was written by hand:

Now is thE timE foR all good mEn to ComE to thE aid of thE PARTy.

Do you find that distracting and annoying? I do, and I find it very difficult to take any pleasure in reading two or three pages made up of such stuff, even when I am pleased by what is being written.

Can a person change his handwriting after age eighteen? Of course! It takes some work, over quite a long period of time. Would it be better to make the effort now, or go through life producing sentences like the two I've quoted? I say it is worth the effort.

CAPITALIZATION

Most good dictionaries contain a section on punctuation, covering every usage under the sun, and other sections on such things as abbreviations, capitalization, the preparation of manuscripts, footnotes, and proofreader's marks. They even tell you the correct way of entering items in a bibliography.

If you don't have a dictionary, you should, and I would recommend that you get one that does have a section such as I've just described. Then you'll have all of the rules for capitalization. (In one of my dictionaries, the section is called "Basic Manual of Style.")

I want to deal with just a few problems having to do with capitalization.

The word "I" should always be capitalized. Occasionally I have taught a college freshman who wrote things like this:

Although my family originally came from California, i was born in Raleigh, North Carolina.

People are supposed to learn better than to do that in the middle of the first grade. I can only assume that the writer decided some years earlier to imitate a man named E. E. Cummings who called himself e. e. cummings, and who wrote i for I. I don't know what to say about that except that it seems to me a dumb choice of things to imitate.

Here are the most common errors in capitalization I have seen:

Correct

He goes to Hope High School.
My birthday is next Tuesday.
She was born in January.
He's taking French, English, biology, mathematics, and chemistry.
We went to a Chinese restaurant.
The young man with the mustache is a freshman.
She's in the freshman class.
He teaches Freshman English.
He's taking Introduction to Anthropology.
She said, "Let me ask my father about that."
She said, "I want to ask Father about that."
I don't know whether she's a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or what.
He liked to memorize passages from the Bible.
I'm headed south. I'm going to visit the South.
I just saw my physics professor.
I just saw Professor Foster.
She's a doctor.
I saw Doctor Foster yesterday.
He's the senator from Missouri.
That's Senator Anderson.

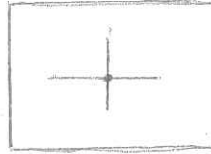
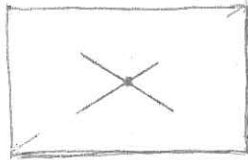
Incorrect

He goes to Hope high school.*
My birthday is next tuesday.
She was born in january.
He's taking french, english, biology, mathematics and chemistry.
We went to a chinese restaurant.
The young man with the mustache is a Freshman.
She's in the Freshman Class.
He teaches freshman english.
He's taking introduction to anthropology.
She said, "Let me ask my Father about that."
She said, "I want to ask father about that."
I don't know whether she's a democrat, Republican, independent, or what.
He liked to memorize passages from the bible.
I'm headed South. I'm going to visit the south.
I just saw my Physics Professor.
I just saw professor Foster.
She's a Doctor.
I saw doctor Foster yesterday.
He's the Senator from Missouri.
That's senator Anderson.

*In some sections of the country, "Hope high school" is standard practice, even in newspapers, but it is not a national practice.

CENTER ON

If someone asked you to find the center--the exact center--of a dollar bill or table top, you would make some measurements, or draw some lines, after which you could put a dot in the right place:



You would draw only one dot, since the dollar or table top has only one center. If someone else drew a large circle on the table, and said, "No, you've got it wrong; this area is the center," you would argue.

People who say or write "centers around" aren't thinking very hard about the words they're using:

Makes sense

The discussion centered on money.
The book centers on a single subject.
The talk centered on William and his peculiar problem.
The debate in Congress centered on ethical behavior.
In the center of a dollar bill is an imaginary dot, and just one dot.

Muddy thinking

The discussion centered around money.
The book centers around a single subject.
The talk centered around William and his peculiar problem.
The debate in Congress centered around ethical behavior.
The center of a dollar bill is a relatively large area, roughly between the size of a quarter and a half-dollar.

CLICHES

I have always been rather fond of clichés, but for different reasons at different stages of my life. As a teenager, I thought of myself as a clever writer, and I liked colorful or arresting ways of saying things. I can still remember the first time I read that something "fell with a dull thud." I thought, "Wow! That writer can really write! What a terrific way of saying that!" The first time I came across "He was born with a silver spoon in his mouth," I thought, "Boy, what a great way of saying that!" I had a similar response the first time I read that someone in the midst of stress "remained cool, calm, and collected." Neat!

Late in high school I learned that all of those wonderful expressions had been concocted a great many years--even centuries--earlier, and had been said and written since then by thousands or even millions of people. Instead of being fresh, new ways of phrasing an idea, they were old hat, I was told. In fact, they had been used so often by so many people that they had become worn out, and anyone who wanted to write well should avoid using them. I decided I had better not use them.

Of course it takes a few years for a young writer to learn just which phrases have been overworked, but I kept my eyes open, and ~~was~~ occasionally helped by seeing lists of cliches, or reading something that made fun of cliches. I gradually learned to spot a cliché when I saw one, and I tried to keep them out of my writing for many years.

Of course I still recognized them as wonderful phrases. For example, it took a good deal of talent to invent "all's well that ends well," "to be or not to be," "all that glitters is not gold," "parting is such a sweet sorrow," "hissing hot," "I can swim like a fish," "all the world's a stage," "and thereby hangs a tale," "lean and hungry," "to thine own self be true," "brevity is the soul of wit," "though this be madness, yet there be method in it," "what a piece of work is a man," "the play's the thing," "sweets to the sweet."

In recent years, I have let cliches creep back into my writing on certain occasions; as I ~~said in the beginning~~, I've always been rather fond of them. Yet my advice is to keep them out of your writing until you are sure you can distinguish a cliché from a collection of words that is not a cliché; then you can choose to use one or not use it, depending on the occasion.

I should add that if you are attracted to cliches, that usually means that a young writer has a good ear, that he or she ~~responds to~~ colorful and forceful phrasings. I see it as a sign of promise in a young writer. After all, there are probably people who don't feel a bit of amusement and pleasure the first time they read "snug as a bug in a rug," or "it's like trying to find a needle in a haystack." (I was five or six when I first heard that one. My mother, who had grown up on a farm, said it, and we had the following conversation:

JB: What do you mean?

Mother: I mean it would be very hard--or impossible--to find it.

JB: Did you ever lose a needle in a haystack?

Mother: No, I didn't.

JB: How do you know it would be hard to find?

Mother: Well, just think about it. How would you find a needle in a whole stack of hay?

JB: Could you find a needle in a haystack?

Mother: Well, maybe, but it would be an awful lot of work.

JB: Did you ever lose anything in a haystack?

Mother: Oh, I don't know. I may have lost something little.

JB: Did you find it?

Mother: Oh, I don't remember.

In the ensuing days, I mulled over the problem: how would a person go about finding a needle in a haystack?)

Here are some expressions that literate people say have been overworked sufficiently to be called "cliches," or "hackneyed expressions," or "trite expressions." These have been around for years. They are different from the overworked expressions that are concocted each year and then used by nearly everyone in the In Crowd before being replaced by others. This list is not meant to be complete, of course, since there are hundreds and hundreds of beautiful cliches:

add insult to injury	on a silver platter
an axe to grind	pandemonium reigned
apple of his eye	sadder but wiser
beat ^{about} around the bush	poor but honest
Easier better said than done	ray of hope
	right as rain
	smart as a whip
beyond the shadow of a doubt	sneaking suspicion
brought back to reality	sober as a judge
crushing blow	soft as silk
diabolically clever	solid as a rock
face the music	strong as an ox
handwriting on the wall	timely tip
hard as a rock	tried and true
hit the nail on the head	tired but happy
hour of need	virtue is its own reward
interesting to note	walk a mile in his shoes
ladder of success	word to the wise
point with pride	
quick as a flash	

COLONS (:))

In his house there are three kinds of chairs: uncomfortable, very uncomfortable, and extremely uncomfortable.

I have three main purposes in this speech: to entertain, to uplift, and to educate.

To start the machine, proceed as follows: 1) plug it in, 2) turn the switch on the back of the machine to the ON position, 3) check to make sure the blade is at the right height, . . .

He had three terrible fears: darkness, solitude, and ill health.

The people who actually showed up were: Mary, Joe, Rhynette, Hank, Bill, Susan, Ben, Ed, and Sam.

The people who actually showed up were Mary, Joe, and Rhynette.

Each camper should equip himself with the following: mess kit, trench coat, rain hat, . . .

I recommend the following books: The Scarlet Letter, Moby Dick, and Walden.

Lincoln rose from his chair, walked to the front of the platform, and began: "Four score and seven years ago"

The fact that he was unsure of himself can be seen from this entry in his diary:

On the way to the dance, I suddenly realized that my heartbeat had increased. A little later I realized that my palms were sweating

Dear Sir:

Dear Professor Nelson:

Dear Doctor Cranston:

Dear Jim,

Dear Mom,

Dear Senator Foghorn:

To Whom It May Concern:

Dear President Lincoln:

Some professional writers find a few other uses for the colon, as do some scholars, and it is entirely possible that you will find other uses for it in time.

COMMA PAIRS

Last night at 8:00 I went to the dance.
Last night, after showering and getting dressed, I went to the dance.
Last night (after showering and getting dressed) I went to the dance.
This car has started to fall apart.
This car, which I've had for nine years, has started to fall apart.
This car (which I've had for nine years) has started to fall apart.
One of our big problems remains unresolved.
One of our big problems, crime in the streets, remains unresolved.
One of our big problems (crime in the streets) remains unresolved.

Do you get the idea? In the above sentences that contain commas, each pair of commas is, in effect, a single punctuation mark. The two commas are very much like the two parentheses--you can't have one without the other.

The judge refused to make any comment.
The judge, who was right in the middle of the trial, refused to make any comment.
The judge (who was right in the middle of the trial) refused to make any comment.
Why don't you ask for a refund?
Why don't you, if you wish, ask for a refund?
I had a feeling that I was going to lose the game.
I had a feeling, nevertheless, that I was going to lose the game.
She was born in Chicago in 1900.
She was born in Chicago, Illinois, in 1900.
She was born in Chicago, on the south side, in 1900.

Notice that in all of the sentences so far, the words inside the commas can be dropped from the sentence without destroying the sense of the words that are left; that is always true when the pair of commas is used as if it were a pair of parentheses--that is, when it is a comma-pair.

The odors given off by this paint are mighty strong.
The odors given off by this paint, however, are mighty strong.
"We're going to need some help Saturday morning."
"We're going to need some help," he said, "Saturday morning."
"Hurry up or we're going to miss the beginning."
"Hurry up, please, or we're going to miss the beginning."
"Hurry up, please," she said, "or we're going to miss the beginning."
"Slow down, Harry, or you'll run this car off the road."
"Slow down, Harry," she said, "or you'll run this car off the road."

In the last sentence, there are two comma-pairs, one around "Harry," and one around "she said." They overlap in the middle, but that's OK: the three commas still make two comma-pairs.

A few more examples:

The hottest day of last year, here, August 10, was my birthday.
"The coldest day of the winter last year," he said, "was my birthday, Saturday, January 10, and it was so cold that no one, including me, wanted to have a skating party." (I count four comma-pairs there: around "he said," "Saturday," "January 10," and "including me.")
Her grandmother, even though she's in poor health, is very lively.
The man in the blue suit, who is chairman of the board, is mighty impressive.
She's the most gifted, physically and mentally, of all of the girls on the team.
The main idea expressed in this section, that sometimes you have to use two commas to surround an idea that interrupts the main part of the sentence, I think I understand. If I'm not sure, however, I should take two or three minutes to read this page again.

COMMA PAIRS, Part II

Sometimes you have to use your head about this one. For example, can you see any difference in the meaning of these two examples:

The two boys who are sitting on the fence are the culprits.

The two boys, who are sitting on the fence, are the culprits.

If you can't see a difference in the meaning, ask someone else whether he or she can. Talk it over until you can see the difference. Then try to figure out the difference in meaning between the following pairs of sentences, all of which are punctuated correctly:

The car which I've had for nine years is starting to fall apart.

The car, which I've had for nine years, is starting to fall apart.

The judge who was in the middle of the trial refused to comment.

The judge, who was in the middle of the trial, refused to comment.

The woman who was born in Texas got the joke.

The woman, who was born in Texas, got the joke.

The boy, who won the race, is sitting on the grass.

The boy who won the race is sitting on the grass.

If you've got the idea here, fine. If not, here's a hint. In the first sentence about cars, how many cars does that person own? Although you can't tell the exact number, you can tell that the person owns more than one. Right? On the other hand, you can't tell whether the speaker or writer of the second sentence owns just the car that's falling apart, or more. There's a slight implication that the person owns just one car--otherwise he or she would be more likely to say "This car." But we can't be sure, whereas with the first speaker we can be sure: he or she owns at least two cars.

THE HOLT GUIDE TO ENGLISH, on two uses of commas:

Commas are used:

6. To separate words, phrases, and clauses added to the end of a sentence:

<u>Direct address:</u>	I compliment you, ladies and gentlemen.
<u>Tag question:</u>	I would like to go, wouldn't you?
<u>Direct quotation:</u>	"I can't, I can't," he reported.
<u>Nonrestrictive element:</u>	We should agree on the basic costs, such as travel, meals, and lodging.
<u>Absolute phrase:</u>	Were was nothing else to do, the celebration having ended.
<u>Transitional words:</u>	We ought to listen, nevertheless.
<u>Suspended elements:</u>	My reading speed is as slow as yours, if not slower.

7. To enclose parenthetical, explanatory, or interruptive words, phrases, and clauses:

Nonrestrictive appositives:

The captain of the ship, Joe Delano, was only thirty-five years old. Some of Shakespeare's plays, such as Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, and The Merry Wives of Windsor, have been made into operas.

The prestige schools, namely, Harvard, Princeton, and Yale, are beginning to have strong competitors.

Cf. the restrictive appositive with no punctuation:

The director Antonioni was mainly responsible for the failure of the movie. William the Conqueror became William I of England.

p. 199-200

The section on the comma in THE HOLT GUIDE is a very fine piece of work. It explains, and illustrates, eleven uses of the comma, and in six full notes discusses six relevant matters, again with illustrations.

I insert it here, however, to point out that it is written for a teacher who is interested in having his or her students use, or at least understand, the technical language of a grammar; and it is written for students who already know, or are now being taught, that language.

My handbook is being prepared for teachers who are not interested (for whatever reasons) in teaching grammar, or who do not teach students well-grounded in the language of a grammar.

That is, I am trying to offer as many examples as are presented in the section on commas in the HOLT GUIDE, but to keep out such words as these: tag question, nonrestrictive element, absolute phrase, suspended elements, nonrestrictive appositives, and restrictive appositives. My reasons are several, and are detailed elsewhere.

COMMA SPLICES and RUN-ON SENTENCES

If you can distinguish a sentence from a fragment, every time without fail, you are ready for this section. If you cannot, you should read the section called "Fragments" before you tackle what follows.

Here are some examples of poor practices, with suggestions for ways to make them acceptable. For each poor example, there are several ways to make it better; I don't try to list all of the possibilities I can think of.

Unacceptable

I'm going to take biology I'm also going to take chemistry.
I'm going to take biology, I'm also going to take chemistry.
He was very slow in washing the dishes she wiped them.
He was very slow in washing the dishes, she wiped them.
I gave her a present she liked it a lot.
I gave her a present, she liked it a lot.
He knocked very hard a woman opened the door.
He knocked very hard, a woman opened the door.
I admire that lawyer I don't especially like him.
I admire that lawyer, I don't especially like him.

Some words that are useful in bringing two complete sentences together are: although, because, since, when, which, and while. For example:

Unacceptable

I was worn out I decided to go to bed.
I was worn out, I decided to go to bed.
I had a feeling it was getting late all of a sudden I heard the clock strike twelve.
I had a feeling it was getting late, all of a sudden the clock struck twelve.
She had an idea it was to surprise her sister.
She had an idea, it was to surprise her sister.

Also useful in bringing two complete sentences together is a group of little words: and, but, yet, for, nor, not, or, so. For example:

Acceptable

I'm going to take biology. I'm also going to take chemistry.
I'm going to take biology, and I'm also going to take chemistry.
He was very slow in washing the dishes. She wiped them.
He washed the dishes slowly, while she wiped them.
I gave her a present. She liked it a lot.
I gave her a present, which she liked a lot.
He knocked very hard. A woman opened the door.
He knocked very hard, and a woman opened the door.
I admire that lawyer, but I don't especially like him.
Although I admire him, I don't especially like him.

Acceptable

Because I was worn out I decided to go to bed.
Although it wasn't bedtime, I was so worn out I decided to go to bed.
Since I was worn out, I decided to go to bed.
I had a feeling it was getting late, when all of a sudden the clock struck twelve.
I had a feeling it was getting late, when all of a sudden the clock struck twelve.
She had an idea. It was to surprise her sister.
She had an idea, which was to surprise her sister.

Unacceptable

The forecast is for rain I'm going to take a raincoat.
The forecast is for rain, I'm going to take a raincoat.
I knew the answer I didn't put up my hand.
I knew the answer, I didn't put up my hand.
She said "You're guilty you know it."
She said "You're guilty, you know it."
In deciding to go to a large university he wasn't following a family tradition all of his relatives had gone to small colleges.
I was walking along happily suddenly I had a horrible thought.
It wasn't a good day for me it wasn't a bad day either.
It wasn't a good day for me, it wasn't a bad day either.
They turned down our offer I didn't care one way or the other.
They turned down our offer, I didn't care one way or the other.

There are three main ideas in this section so far:

- 1) If you write two complete sentences, you can't just run them together without any punctuation:

I gave her a present she liked it a lot.

That's called a "run-on" sentence, and is considered a terrible error.

- 2) If you write two complete sentences, you can't just put a comma between them and assume they now make one acceptable sentence:

I gave her a present, she liked it a lot.

That's called a "comma splice" and is considered almost as bad an error as a run-on sentence. It's considered sufficiently bad that many college English teachers fail a paper if it contains this error.

- 3) There are many ways to make two statements go together correctly. For example:

I gave her a present, and she liked it a lot.

I gave her a present, which she liked a lot.

Since I gave her the present, she liked it a lot.

Although I gave her the present, she still liked it a lot.

When I gave her the present, I could tell she liked it a lot.

Now I want to add another idea:

- 4) Some of the examples I've listed in the "Acceptable" column sound rather immature:

I gave her a present. She liked it a lot.

Do you agree that that looks like something created by a child in the

Acceptable

The forecast is for rain, so I'm going to take a raincoat.
The forecast is for rain. I'm going to take a raincoat.
I knew the answer, but I didn't put up my hand.
I knew the answer, yet I didn't put up my hand.
She said "You're guilty and you know it."
She said "You're guilty. You know it."
In deciding to go to a large university he wasn't following a family tradition for all of his relatives had gone to small colleges.
I was walking along happily when suddenly I had a horrible thought.
It wasn't a good day for me nor was it a bad day.
I wasn't a good day for me. It wasn't a bad day either.
They turned down our offer, not that I cared one way or the other.

first or second grade? I call that sort of writing "baby talk." This sounds more adult:

I gave her a present, which she liked a lot.

If you have been having trouble with comma splices or run-on sentences, your first aim should be to learn not to make either of those errors. Then you can start trying to create more complex, adult-sounding sentences. Or, if you are really interested in improving your writing, and want to do so as fast as you can, you can work on both matters at the same time.

If you've been having trouble with these two matters, another thing you probably should do is go back, right now, and re-read all of the sample sentences in this section. That won't take long, and it might do you a world of good.

COMMAS BETWEEN CLAUSES

Here is the usual practice; it depends on the length of the sentence:

I might go to the store but I might not.

I might go to the store that I usually use when I need something like that,
but then again I might not have time.

I liked the book but not the movie.

I liked the book because it was full of dialogue, but I didn't like the movie.

He started running early and ran ten miles.

He started running just before the sun was visible, and by the time there
was full daylight he had run ten miles.

I don't know whether to stay up late or get up early.

I don't know whether to stay up late to finish typing this paper, or go
to bed now and get up early.

Notice that in all of those examples, a word is between the two clauses: but, and, and or. The other conjunctions that are used in this way are for, nor, and yet.

COMMAS: CITY, STATE

Chicago is to be the meeting place.

Chicago, Illinois, is to be the meeting place.

He was born in Jacksonville in 1950.

He was born in Jacksonville, Florida, in 1950.

They went through Kansas City in the middle of the night.

They went through Kansas City, Missouri, in the middle of the night.

He's from Los Angeles.

He's from Los Angeles, California.

He's from Los Angeles, California, though he now lives in Dallas.

They drove from Minneapolis, Minnesota, to Shreveport, Louisiana.

If you have trouble with commas when you're using the names of cities and states, you should probably look at the section called "Comma Pairs," which explains the matter more fully.

COMMAS FOR CHANGING DIRECTION

If you write a sentence that changes direction, you probably need a comma in it:

I called for a discussion, not an argument.

It's not more intelligence that we need, but courage.

We need action, not talk.

What he asked for was mercy, but what he got was justice.

All they're asking for is a little more freedom, not chaos.

She occasionally has a drink with dinner, never before that.

Notice that the comma goes before "but," not after it:

She likes most kinds of music, but she doesn't like that kind.

If you are a very good writer, I can't imagine why you're reading this section, but if you are, let me reassure you that you don't always have to use a comma with "but," though in any of the sentences above I think you would choose to use it. Well, maybe not.

COMMAS TO PREVENT MISREADING

Sometimes a comma is needed to tell your reader to pause because if he doesn't pause he'll get tangled up for a moment:

In the spring semester end comes in late May.

In the spring, semester end comes in late May.

We sent out Harry for pizza because he happened to have the money.

We sent out Harry for he was the fastest runner.

We sent out Harry, for he was the fastest runner.

The debate over the participants left the room.

The debate over, the participants left the room.

After days of planning what we wanted to do was to get moving.

After days of planning, what we wanted to do was to get moving.

In all of the ~~troublesome~~ sentences, it's easy to see that a comma is needed; but to the writer of each one, it wasn't at all obvious, because the writer was imagining a pause at the right place. To avoid writing a misleading sentence, imagine yourself reading each sentence aloud;--pause only where a punctuation mark tells you to pause. That is much harder to do when you're reading something you wrote yourself than when you're reading something written by another, but it can be done.

COMMAS and SERIES

Here's how it works:

I saw her on Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday.

I saw her on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.

He had a glass of milk, a chicken salad sandwich, a cup of coffee, and a piece of pie.

He was wearing shorts and sneakers.

He was wearing shorts, a T-shirt, and sneakers.

He was wearing shorts, white socks, a T-shirt, and sneakers.

She's a big, bouncy, talkative, animated woman whom I love, love, love.

Now watch this:

He has a beautiful, old car.

He has a beautiful, battered old car.

He has a beautiful, beat up, shined up, jazzed up old car.

Notice that it's not "He has a beautiful, old car," but "beautiful old car."

That's like "It's a very big old house," or "He's a good old boy from the good old state of Texas."

A comma tells your reader to pause. If you have been having trouble using commas in the right places, you probably should pay more attention to how you want your sentences to sound. That can be done by imagining that you are reading each sentence aloud. Try it on this one--listen to yourself saying it silently in your head:

Inside the room was a mess.

That sentence needs a comma because, as it stands, it can be read in two ways, and the writer has failed to tell you which way he wants you to read it:

Inside, the room was a mess. There were clothes all over the place.

Inside the room there was a mess. It looked as if a dog had had an accident right in the middle of the huge rug.

When you write a sentence such as "Inside the room was mess," since you know what you mean the sentence seems to be clear. It's short and to the point. But if you get into the habit of saying your sentences out loud, or pretending to do so, when you write a sentence like that you'll see that it needs a pause, a comma.

And it's the same way with a series. You want your reader to pause between certain words. Notice where you pause, but also notice where you don't pause:

He bought apples, a grapefruit, lemons, oranges, and a bunch of bananas.

He bought apples, organges, lemons, and a great big bunch of yellow bananas.

The movie was described by various critics as "great," "big," "noisy," and "fast moving."

Our trip was slow, and hot and boring and uncomfortable.

Our trip was slow, hot, boring, and uncomfortable.

If you have been having trouble with commas, it might be worthwhile to go back to the beginning of this section, and re-read the whole thing, making yourself imagine that you are reading each sentence aloud, and noticing carefully where you do and do not pause. Read even my explanations in that way.

COMMAS: TOO FEW

If you have been having trouble in knowing when to use commas--that is, if you have been leaving them out when you should have been using them--one piece of advice is probably worth listening to. A comma tells your reader to pause. In all of the following sentences, a good reader pauses at each comma, and a good writer makes sure to use a comma to tell the reader where to pause. Try reading these sentences aloud, or imagine that you are reading them aloud, pausing at each comma:

She was born in Seattle, Washington.

She was born in Seattle, Washington, in 1960.

He jogs every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

The woman who plays the leading lady, a very juicy part, is thirty.

In private life, she's a chemistry teacher.

Oh, is she a good teacher?

Yes, I've heard that she is, anyway.

Well, you can't believe all you hear, you know.

Oh, sure, I know that, but I've heard it from several people.

That seems funny, a woman chemist.

Say, when were you born, the Middle Ages?

No, eighteen years ago. Why, do I look ancient?

No, but you sound it.

Each comma in those sentences is where it is for a particular reason, as is explained in the other sections on commas. For now, if you have been leaving out some commas where they are needed, it might be well to reread the above list of examples, thinking hard about why the commas are where they are.

COMMAS: TOO MANY

Some people think that you need to put a comma in a sentence whenever you pause in reading it aloud. That is not right. When you use a comma, that does mean your reader should pause; but that ~~does not~~ mean that you should use a comma every time you pause as you read a sentence aloud. After all, you might pause more than most people do.

If your teacher or someone else has told you that you use too many commas, you need to do at least three things:

- 1) Forget the idea that every pause in an oral reading indicates that you need to use a comma.
- 2) Read the other sections on commas, in this book, and try to get an idea about where they are needed, and why.
- 3) Start paying more careful attention to the use of commas in the things you are reading--textbooks, other required reading for your courses, magazines, newspapers, and so on.

Here are some sentences written by people who thought they needed to put in a comma to indicate every pause they made as they read aloud. I would say they were often pausing in the wrong places, but that's another subject. In the right hand column the sentences are punctuated correctly:

Poor

He invited all of us, but I, didn't want to go.

She called me but, I wasn't at home.

Some of the other duties of the job, were planning activities and keeping order.

With my parents away, I played the role of both, mother and father.

I thought we were compatible, but I was wrong. What I mean is, we had different values.

Standard

He invited all of us, but I didn't want to go.

He invited all of us, but I alone didn't want to go.

He invited all of us, and I was the only one who didn't want to go.

She called me, but I wasn't at home.

Some of the other duties of the job were planning activities and keeping order.

With my parents away, I played the role of both mother and father.

I thought we were compatible, but I was wrong. What I mean is we had different values.

COMMAS UP FRONT

All of these commas tell the reader to pause:

~~Did you find the book? Yes, I found it.~~

Hey, you're looking good!

Thanks, I'm feeling good.

Ah, I'm glad to hear it.

Boy, it's good to see you.

Yeah, it's good to see you too. ~~OK, now that we've got that all settled, what'll we talk about?~~

OK, now that we've got that all settled, what'll we talk about?

Oh, I don't care. What do you want to talk about?

Well, I don't know. Anything, I guess.

Say, do you have any news?

No, no news.

Say, isn't that Harry over there?

Mmmm, yeah, I think so.

Hey, Harry!

Wow, you two!

Hello, Harry.

Well, what a surprise.

Right, it is.

You know, I was just thinking of you two yesterday.

Oh, how come?

Well, I heard you'd both flunked out of school.

What, are you kidding?

No, I'm not kidding.

Come on, you must be!

Yeah, I am. Well, what's up?

Well, to tell you the truth, nothing.

Man, this party is boring.

Yeah, let's get out of here.

And off they went. Now, if you don't use a comma to tell your reader to pause in some sentences like those, you mislead him--that is, you seem to be taking him in one direction when you really want him to go in another. Notice what happens as you read these:

Man the lifeboats!

Man the lifeboats are so tiny they wouldn't hold half of us!

Man, the lifeboats are tiny!

Well you may ask such a question.

Well you may as well hear the truth.

Well, you may as well hear the truth.

What are you coming in here for?

What are you kidding us?

What, are you kidding?

Boy and girl get back together in the final scene.

Boy and was I ever surprised!

Boy, and was I ever surprised!

Say the words slowly.

Say the last word in that sentence is misspelled, isn't it?

Say, the last word in that sentence is misspelled.

You know I don't like spinach.

You know I was just thinking of you two yesterday.

You know, I was just thinking of you two yesterday.

Well I believe it.

Well I heard you'd both flunked out of school.

Well, I heard you'd both flunked out of school.

COMMAS WITH MAIN IDEAS

The following sentences have a main idea in one part--that is, the main idea of the whole sentence--with another, less important idea in the other part. If the main idea is in the first part of the sentence, you need to put a comma after it:

I'm going to vote tomorrow, although I don't care much for either candidate.

Everything she explained was old stuff, though I found it useful to be reminded about it all.

He got an A on the examination, which was no easy feat.

She left work at five, going home on the bus.

She worked all afternoon on the car, getting rather dirty in the process.

If the most important idea comes in the last part of the sentence, then you need a comma after the introductory part, unless that part is very short:

Although I don't care much for either candidate, I'm going to vote in the election tomorrow.

Planning to go home on the bus, she left work at five.

At a country crossroads the accident occurred.

At a dangerous intersection several miles north of the city, just after midnight the accident occurred.

Since it was considered by everyone to be a very difficult course, he was surprised to get an A on the first test.

Since he'd studied for hours he wasn't surprised to get an A on the quiz.

A comma tells your reader to pause. If you are reading this section, you probably do not consider yourself to be an excellent writer yet, and if that is so, I recommend that you try to learn to follow all of the common practices when it comes to such things as commas. If you become an expert writer, you will develop a surer sense of both the common practices and the results you want to achieve; at that point, you might want to depart from the usual practices on occasion for particular reasons, and ask your reader to pause, or not to pause, in an unconventional place. By then you'll have figured out how to do it, as I'll explain shortly.

First, though, an analogy: if you were teaching a child of ten how to do something--sew, catch a baseball, cook, bat, tie a necktie, wash the dishes--you would stress the fundamentals, the usual practices. You would know, of course, that if the child later became very expert at the activity, he or she might add variations, but you would want the child to master the fundamentals before inventing variations. And that is my advice to you: master the fundamentals first.

A comma, I say, asks your reader to pause; omission of a comma tells your reader to read right on, full steam ahead. Occasionally the lack of a comma can cause confusion for a split second. Here's an example I ~~read~~ copied from an English handbook thirty years ago:

Cultivate the flowers and weeds will not grow.

That sentence desperately needs a comma.

If you become an expert writer, and find you want your reader to pause in

Commas with main ideas--2

an unusual place, you'll figure out a way to do it.

COMMONLY MISSPELLED WORDS

This section is printed with large spaces between the words so that you can fill in words that you misspell. If you list the words that you misspell in the next few months--list each one as soon as you're aware of it--and if you keep this book near you when you write during the next few years, you can save yourself hours and hours of time. You can also save yourself from misspelling the same words over and over for a lifetime.

If you are a poor speller, you should know that the ability to spell has never had anything to do with the ability to write. Plenty of the best writers this country has produced have been lousy spellers. Some teachers in both high school and college give the impression that a poor speller is necessarily a poor writer, and that has had terrible consequences: many fine thinkers, with the potential to be fine writers, have given up on themselves as writers simply because they couldn't spell very well. That's about as stupid as a potentially fine young tennis player's giving up tennis, or thinking he could never become any good at it, because he had trouble picking up loose tennis balls on the court at the end of a point.

I say that some teachers give the impression that they think a poor speller is necessarily a poor writer, but I have never talked to a teacher who meant to do that. Teachers have a limit to their patience, as other people do, and many teachers will fail a paper containing a lot of misspelled words. Although I have never done that myself, I don't think it's an unreasonable action if the writer of the paper had a chance to look up the words and make the paper presentable before handing it in. I see that matter as comparable to this: suppose you turned in a research paper in which you said "In 1900 the population of the United States was 60 million; in 1930 it was 80 million; in 1960 it was 100 million; and in 1980 it was 180 million." Then suppose someone read that and said, I think those figures are all wrong, and I think you've misspelled population." If you answered, "Well, I didn't actually look up any of that stuff--the figures, or the spelling," I'd say you deserved to have your paper failed by your teacher. Of course, you could argue, "Well, hell, 180 million or 220 million, populasion or population, they're both close enough--it's no big deal." I would consider that a mighty poor argument. If it's not difficult to look things up, yet a person refuses to look them up, that person is not very serious about doing a good job, I think.

Some poor spellers get the idea that they are unable to find a word in the dictionary. I have, on a few occasions, had that trouble myself, but in general that idea is dead wrong. If you are a poor speller, you at least know the first two letters of 99% of the words you need to look up in a dictionary. If you don't believe me, check at random any ten words in the list that follows, or check twenty of them. Even if you find that you don't know the first two or three letters of a couple of words in the first ten you check, that doesn't mean you should not look up spellings. After all, a success rate of 80 or 90% isn't bad!

I remember trying to look up the word eerie at age 15. I had probably written something like "It gave him an erie feeling." As soon as I wrote the word, I knew it was spelled wrong. I grabbed my dictionary and started

Commonly misspelled words--2

tracking it down. I was a good speller, so I thought I wouldn't have much trouble. I tried

erie
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ierree
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erae
errae.

I spent fifteen minutes trying to find that word, and never did find it, but since I really wanted to use that word in my English paper, I went ahead and used it. I added a note, probably in the margin, saying "I know this isn't the right spelling, but I don't know what it should be." I thought that would get me off the hook. When my paper was returned to me, I found the teacher had circled the word, and written "sp." In response to my note, there was a message: "Look it up."

Again, if you'll add to this list every time you misspell a word in the next few months--or years--and keep the list in a handy place, you'll save yourself a lot of time in the long run. You'll create your own personal dictionary. Of course, in order to do that, you'll need a regular dictionary too.

absence

accommodate

acknowledge

acquaintance

(etc. I'd leave out all ie and ei words, and all ally words, I think. No, it would be better to include them, with an asterisk referring the reader to the right section; the same should be done with other misspellings treated in other sections.)

COMPARING THINGS

Poor

Houses in the midwest are lower than New England.
She is as smart, if not smarter than, he is.
It's as hot today, if not hotter than, it was yesterday.
The laughter of children is more fun to hear than adults.
Babe Ruth was better than any baseball player of his time.
This is one of the best, if not the best, movies of the year.
That house is larger than any house in town.
I like Lincoln more than any president in history.
It was harder to climb up over the hills than the valleys.
She has fewer worries, or maybe none at all, in comparison to him.
I like him better than his roommate.
This stuff is as good if not better than anything you can buy.
He drank more than the others.
Basketball players always have, and still do tend to be better all-around athletes than football players.
That painting is somewhat different.

That car runs better.
His hands are like a ditch-digger.
The food here is as good as any other restaurant.
That is one of if not the catchiest songs I've heard in ages.

There are two big points here. When you compare two things, be sure you're comparing things that can be compared. For example, here's a comparison that doesn't work: "The trees in Florida are shorter than Wisconsin." Trees can be compared to trees, and Florida can be compared to Wisconsin, but you can't compare trees to Wisconsin.

The second big point to be made is that when you make a comparison, you have to make it fully. "That is one of if not the stupidest joke I've ever heard" doesn't work. It's like "That is one of . . . the stupidest joke I've ever heard." To make the comparison fully, more words are needed: "That is one of the stupidest, if not the stupidest, jokes I've ever heard."

There are a couple of other big points too. For example, why doesn't it make sense to say "I like Lincoln better than any president in history"?

Better

Houses in the midwest are lower than those in New England.
She is as smart as, if not smarter than, he is.
Today it's as hot as, if not hotter than, it was yesterday.
The laughter of children is more fun to hear than that of adults.
Babe Ruth was better than any other baseball player of his time.
This is one of the best movies, if not the best movie, of the year.
That house is larger than any other house in town.
I like Lincoln more than any other president in history.
It was harder to climb up over the hills than to walk through the valleys.
She has fewer worries than he does, or maybe none at all.
I like him better than his roommate does.
I like him better than I like his roommate.
This stuff is as good as, if not better than, anything you can buy.
He drank more than the others did.
Basketball players always have tended, and still do tend, to be better all-around athletes than football players.
That painting is somewhat different from the others.
That car runs better than the others.
His hands are like a ditch-digger's.
The food here is as good as that at any other restaurant.
That is one of the catchiest songs, if not the catchiest song, I've heard in ages.

TO COMPLIMENT and TO COMPLEMENT

To compliment = to praise:

She complimented him on his nice appearance.

He commented in a complimentary way on her new jacket.

Some members of the audience complimented the performers backstage after the concert.

He complimented me so often that it got to be embarrassing.

Senators and Representatives like to compliment each other in public.

To complement = to complete, fill out:

The two sides of the argument, as I understood them, complemented each other.

The two colors complement each other in that painting. That is, they make a pleasing whole.

In that song, the brass section complements the rhythm section perfectly. They go together so as to make a complete composition.

The Senate and the House of Representatives are supposed to complement each other--at least that is what the writers of the Constitution hoped.

CONCISENESS: MYTH

I can remember hearing and reading, in high school, that "good writing is consise." "Consize" means "no extra words, no excess baggage." I thought that made good sense. After all, if certain words are unneeded, obviously a writer should get rid of them.

The advice to be consise goes back a great many years, long before I was born. For most of those years it was aimed at people who were rather good writers. It was aimed at people who liked to write, who thought they wrote well, and who were able to describe experiences fully. The advice was not aimed at people who had trouble writing half a page while their classmates were writing three on the same subject, or who think it best to write only half a page when others are writing three.

If you are already a good writer, and can express yourself rather fully, you might do well to look at the examples that follow the next paragraph. Perhaps you do need to make your writing more concise.

If you are not a very good writer yet, or if you have trouble expressing yourself as fully as your classmates, this is probably not the time to work on conciseness. You should also know that the advice to be consise does not mean to write just a little bit on whatever subject you're tackling. If you are in the habit of expressing your thoughts less than fully, the time to think about trying to be consise might be many months away.

Here are some examples of excess baggage--words that should be removed to make sentences more consise:

Wordy

What did I do as President? Well, when, when you are asked to do something, thing, I mean when you take on a job, you go ahead and do the job, and I did just that. I felt I had a mandate from the people to do it, so I did it. I think I did one important thing: I strengthened our relations with several foreign countries.

Concise

What did I do as President? I strengthened our foreign relations. (The passage on the left, by the way, is fictitious, even though it may sound to you like several of our Presidents.)

(I want more examples.)

CONSISTENCY OF TENSE AND SUBJECT

This section is about keeping track of 1) time, and 2) whether you are writing about you or me. Notice what happens with words that indicate time (verbs) in these two accounts.

OK

It was the summer before last, on a warm, drizzly night. There had been a burglary on our street the week before. I was alone in the house, when, at midnight, I thought I heard someone cough in the cellar. I had been reading, and it had been very quiet. The cough in the cellar made my hair stand on end. Was it a burglar? My first thought was, "If I walk to the phone and call the police, he could race up the stairs in two seconds and have a knife at my throat."

The account on the right is a mess, isn't it? Now look at a different kind of mess:

It was the summer before last, on a warm, drizzly night. There had been a burglary on our street the week before. I was alone in the house, when, at midnight, I thought I heard someone cough in the cellar. You had been reading, and it had been very quiet. The cough in the cellar made your hair stand on end. Was it a burglar? Your first thought was, "If I walk to the phone and call the police, he could race up the stairs in two seconds and have a knife at your throat."

If I handed you that account, and said, "Here, read this and tell me what you think about it. I'm pretty proud of it, and am going to write out the rest of the story," you would tell me to figure out whether I'm writing about me or about you, and, to my decision instead of jumping back and forth.

If a writer were unfortunate enough ^{to stick} ~~as~~ to combine both kinds of mistakes in a single paragraph, that paragraph would be a terrible mess. It would be so bad it might even be funny. Here's what it might look like:

A Terrible Mess

It was the summer before last, on a warm, drizzly night. There was a burglary on our street the week before. I was alone in the house, when, at midnight, I thought I had heard someone cough in the cellar. You are reading, and it is very quiet. The cough in the cellar had made your hair stand on end. Is it a burglar? Your first thought had been, "If I walk to the phone and call the police, he could have raced up the stairs in two seconds and have had a knife at your throat."

I won't say any more about jumping back and forth between "I" and "you"; you can see that's not a very bright thing to do. But if you've been having trouble with getting the tenses right ("sequence of tenses" this is called), you probably could use some more practice:

Standard

The cake started to burn before I got to the kitchen.
The team was told that the coach was waiting for them.
The electrician wouldn't start wiring the house because he hadn't been paid anything.

Poor

It was the summer before last, on a warm, drizzly night. There was a burglary on our street the week before. I was alone in the house, when, at midnight, I thought I had heard someone cough in the cellar. I am reading, and it is very quiet. The cough in the cellar had made my hair stand on end. Is it a burglar? My first thought had been, "If I walk to the phone and call the police, he could have raced up the stairs in two seconds and have had a knife at my throat."

Substandard

The cake started to burn before I had gotten to the kitchen.
The team was told that the coach is waiting for them.
The electrician wouldn't start wiring the house because he hasn't been paid anything.

Consistency of tense and subject--2

I would like to have gone to the game,
but I was too sick.
She would have liked to go to the movie,
but she had no way to get there.
She proposed a plan because they couldn't
think of one on their own.
If I had known you were coming this early,
I would have been ready.
I wish I had been able to go.
If I had known you were going to be so
upset, I would have arrived on time.
She meant to tell him he'd been nominated
for the vice presidency of the club.
If he had realized his mistake at the
time it happened, he would have
corrected it right then and there.
If she had known that Sunday was his
birthday, she would have given him a
present.

I would have liked to have gone to the
game, but I was too sick.
She would have liked to have gone to the
movie, but she had no way to get there.
She proposed a plan because they can't think
of one on their own.
If I knew you were coming this early, I
would have been ready.
I wish I had been able to have gone.
If I would have known you were going to
be so upset, I would have arrived on time.
She meant to have told him he'd been nomi-
nated for the vice presidency of the club.
If he would have realized his mistake at the
time it happened, he would have corrected
it right then and there.
If she knew that Sunday was his birthday,
she would have given him a present.

If you have recognized that some of the sentences in the "Standard" column are not the way you normally speak or write, you should probably re-read that list right now, and mark the ones that sound funny. Then you should read them over and over, saying them aloud if possible, and drill their patterns into your tired old brain. It's the patterns that count:

Right patterns

If X had known, X would have . . .
X would like to have . . .
X wishes X had been able to . . .

Wrong patterns

If X would have known, X would have . . .
If X knew, X would have . . .
X would have liked to have . . .
X wishes X had been able to have . . .

If you can learn to use those patterns in your speech, you'll use them in your writing.

CONTINUAL and CONTINUOUS

A faucet drips continually; a river runs continuously. Drip . . . drip
. . . drip . . . drip = continual. Smooth flowing is continuous.

COULD HAVE/OF and WOULD HAVE/OF

Correct

I would have helped him if he'd asked me.
He would've been happy to contribute.
She could have been more tactful in saying "no."
She could've done better on the exam but she ran out of time.
I could have danced all night, danced all night. . .
If I'd known you were coming I'd have baked a cake.
If I'd known you were coming I would have baked a cake.

Incorrect

I would of helped him if he'd asked me.
He would of been happy to contribute.
She could of been more tactful in saying "no."
She could of done better on the exam but she ran out of time.
I could of danced all night, danced all night. . .
If I'd known you were coming I'd of baked a cake.
If I'd known you were coming I would of baked a cake.

The trouble some people have with these two comes from the fact that "would've" sounds like "would of," and "could've" sounds like "could of." People who say "would have" and "could have" instead of "would've" and "could've" have no trouble with these two when they start writing something. I say "would've" and "could've" most of the time, except when I want to emphasize a point:

Why didn't he get to that ground ball? He would have gotten to it if he'd been healthy! This announcer is an idiot.

No, I didn't accuse the man at the fair of shortchanging me. After all, I could have been mistaken. I don't know for sure whether I gave him a five or a ten. It could have been an honest mistake. In fact, it could've been my mistake in thinking I'd given him a ten.

If you say "would of" and "could of," the place to start in correcting the errors in your writing is with your speech. From now on, every time you're about to say "would of," try to remember to say "would have," or "would've." There is a slight difference in sound between them. Try saying them aloud, right now, and you'll see that I'm right. And the same with the other two: from now on, every time you're about to say "could of," try to remember to say "could have" or "could've." As with the other pair, there's a slight difference in sound between "could've" and "could of." The difference, come to think of it, is not so much in the sound as in the timing: "could've" takes less time to say than "could of"; the same is true for "would've" and "would of." It takes a little more time to say "would of" and "could of."

These two mistakes are called "illiterate errors" by many educated people. That is, they are looked on as serious mistakes in the speech and writing of grown-ups. If you've been making either or both of these errors, in speech or in writing, my advice is to get rid of both of them. It's not very hard to do so. Hundreds of thousands of people have done so, or perhaps even millions of people. If millions have done it, you can too.

COULDN'T CARE LESS

A lot of people are saying and writing the opposite of what they mean, and if you are one of them, you might pause here to consider whether you want to continue doing that. Do you want to say what you mean, or the opposite of what you mean?

In the mid-60's, it became popular among certain people--especially on occasions when they wanted to be amusing--to say "I couldn't care less" about one thing or another. That meant "I don't care about it." The phrase became more and more popular with people who like to pick up the latest fads in current ways of speaking, such as guests and hosts on TV talk shows, the leaders of the In Groups, and so on. Then something funny happened. A great many people started getting it wrong. They would say "I could care less," when the situation called for them to say "I couldn't care less." They were saying the opposite of what they wanted to say, but didn't know it. They're still at it, many of them.

I care = I am interested.

I couldn't care about it = I'm not interested in it.

I couldn't care less than I do about it = I'm not at all interested in it.

I couldn't care less about it = I'm not at all interested in it.

I couldn't care less = I'm not at all interested.

I could care less than I do about it = I am interested in it, but not very much.

I could care less about it = I am interested in it, but not very much.

I could care less = I am interested, but not very much.

Got it? If you mean that you have no interest whatever in it, you say or write "I couldn't care less."



"You could care less? Don't you mean you couldn't care less?
That kind of crummy English is why I'm leaving."

CRITERION

A mistake with this one is embarrassing to those who hear or read it, so it is worth getting this right. Here's how it works:

She said we should use a single criterion.	How many criteria did you use to judge the applicants?
There is one chief criterion I use to judge a movie.	I use several criteria to judge a movie.

To fix this distinction in your memory, try saying aloud several times
one criterion.

To become comfortable with phrasings you haven't used before--that is, to break old habits--all that is necessary is to say the new forms several times out loud, till you get used to the sound of your voice as it says them. I'd suggest that you say each of the following sentences aloud several times. That should do the trick:

There is just one criterion.
There are several criteria.

DASHES

A note to typists. An expression set off by dashes--like this one--is set off the way that one is set off. Use two dashes in a row--like this--without spaces before or after. Do not do it - like this - with each dash sandwiched in between two spaces. Do not do it-like this-with one dash and no spaces. Do not do it -- like this -- with two dashes surrounded by spaces. Do not make up your own variations --- like this.--- whether you're using two dashes or only one, say at the end of a sentence--like this. Do it--like this--with two dashes and no spaces. That goes against the instincts of any good, self-taught typist, but it is the only way.

DATA

Most people never use this word; those who do use it tend to use it a lot, and they should certainly take pains to get it straight, since if they don't use it correctly they will continually embarrass and annoy their readers or listeners. The point is this: data is plural, not singular:

What did the data show?

What did the facts show?

Additional statistics are needed.

Additional data are needed.

These data show positive results.

In popular usage, "data" is often used as if it were singular--"More data is needed," "This data doesn't show a thing"--and most people don't know the difference. But, as I say, most people never use the word anyway.

The singular of "data" is "datum," and I come across that so seldom that I would never dream of using it in speech or writing, since there are good substitutes:

This datum means nothing all by itself.

This fact means nothing.

This statistic means nothing.

Although "data" will undoubtedly be fully acceptable when used as a singular noun within a few years, there will always be people around to whom it will sound and look as funny as "These four chairs is dusty" sounds to me.

Using "data" as a singular noun is not a recent phenomenon; I am told that some students at the very best colleges and universities did it in the twenties and thirties. What has changed is the percentage of students who do so.

DECIMATE

This word, which was coined to name a horrible event, is often misused. First, the horrible event: there have been times when conquering armies, trying to keep control of a rebellious civilian population, have lined up a group of civilians and shot every tenth person. That was called decimation, since the Latin word decimus meant tenth. A decimal system, for example, is a system based on ten. Decimate means to take away every tenth member of a group. A war correspondent for a newspaper might write of a particular battle, "The ranks were decimated," meaning "ten percent of the soldiers were killed or injured."

Ordinarily, decimate is used metaphorically. A football coach might say, "One result of playing the number one team in the nation last week is that our squad has been decimated," meaning that a large number of players had been injured. A Dean of Admissions might say, at the end of the first semester, "The freshman class has been decimated," meaning that a large number of freshmen had had to drop out of school.

Those two sentences would be all right if the injured players, and dropouts, amounted to no more than ten percent or so. But let's say half of the freshman class had dropped out; then the statement would be an example of a poor use of decimate. The dean who made the metaphor would be thinking, "This is a terrible situation; we've lost half of our freshman class; it's like a mass slaughter." He wants and needs a strong comparison. But if his statement means "We've lost one out of every ten," he's misusing decimate. He thinks he's using a very strong word, as he is, but it's only one fifth as strong as the word he needs.

DISINTERESTED

A lot of people have been misusing this one recently, mistaking it for "uninterested." It has nothing to do with lack of interest; in fact, it implies that someone is interested, but is also impartial, fair, just, unbiased:

A judge is supposed to be a disinterested listener in the courtroom. (That is, he doesn't have a stake in the outcome, so he gives each side a fair hearing.)

We looked to the umpire for a disinterested ruling.

Scientists are not supposed to push the evidence toward their favorite theory; they are supposed to report all of the evidence in a disinterested way.

They booed and booed the referee, since they thought he had failed to act in a disinterested way. They thought he favored the home team.

A perfect member of the jury would be intensely interested in listening to all the evidence, and completely disinterested as he tried to form a final judgment. That is, he would be alert and impartial.

Some students are uninterested in their school's teams.

I was uninterested in the tennis match.

He is uninterested in science courses. He has a lot of interest in anthropology and sociology, though.

Many people are uninterested in world affairs. They don't even bother to read about wars in other countries.

Many jobs have their interesting moments and their uninteresting moments.

ELLIPSIS

That means three or four periods, with spaces between them: You use them to indicate that you are omitting some words from a passage you are quoting. Here's how it works. Notice whether there are three or four periods in each example, and see whether you can figure out why it's three, or why it's four:

The original passage

Dear Ann,

What is it with girls, anyway? I know you can't help with this, but I have no one else to turn to. Here's the deal. I fell head over heels in love with this fantastic chick more than a year ago. I busted my gut to please her. I made her the Numero Uno project of my life. I took her to dances, concerts, the beach (man!), restaurants, everywhere. I gave her flowers, candy, presents at Xmas and on her birthday. On Valentine's Day I gave her a five-pound box of chocolates. (Have you ever hefted a five-pound box? It weighs a ton!) Well, to make a long story short, she didn't fall in love with me. She was nice, but she always kept her distance. Finally I gave up. I didn't tell anyone, but I said to myself, "Man, this is a dead end street. Turn around. Cut your losses." Next thing I knew, this iceberg turned into an electric blanket! Fantastic! We've been engaged for two months, and I am on top of the world, but I am totally baffled. What is it with girls? I am 22 and she is 21.

Sincerely,

Finally warm in Bangor,
Maine

When you omit some words from a single sentence, you use three dots, as in examples 1, 2, 4, 5, and 7.

When you omit a whole sentence, or more than a sentence, you use a period at the end of the previous sentence, then three dots to mark the omission, as in 3. In 6 and 8 it's the same thing--a punctuation mark to end a sentence, then three dots.

You don't need ellipsis marks at the beginning or end of a quotation. If the passage on the right ended with the paragraph, rather than with "Sincerely," and so on, you wouldn't use any ellipsis marks at 8.

The other use of ellipsis marks is one I'd recommend you avoid. It's to indicate that someone's voice trailed off. If the original passage had begun the way the letter on the right begins, that would indicate the writer wanted you to think he was deliberately leaving a sentence unfinished, as we often do in conversation:

What is it with girls, anyway? I know you can't help with this, but . . .

The Dear Ann letter, by the way, is not taken from a newspaper column. I made it up several years ago after reading "Like as a Huntsman," a poem by Edmund Spenser (1552-1599). I thought it (my letter) was pretty funny.

As you might want to present it

Dear Ann,

What is it with girls, anyway? I know you can't help with this, but . . . 1
Here's the deal. I fell head over heels in love with this fantastic chick more than a year ago. I busted my gut to please her. I made her the Numero Uno project of my life. I took her . . . 2
everyplace. I gave her flowers, candy, presents at Xmas and on her birthday. On Valentine's Day I gave her a five-pound box of chocolates. . . . Well, 3
to make a long story short, she didn't fall in love with me. She . . . always kept her distance. 4
Finally, I gave up. I didn't tell anyone, but I said to myself, "Man, . . . cut your losses." Next thing 5
I knew, this iceberg turned into an electric blanket! . . . 6
engaged for two months, . . . but 7
I am totally baffled. What is it with girls? . . . 8

Sincerely,

Finally warm in Bangor,
Maine

EQUALLY

You don't need to use "as" with equally: "These two motorcycles are equally good." Here are a few examples:

Standard

These two tables are equally good.
Your news is as good as mine.
The twins are equally handsome.
Those two jokes are equally bad.

Poor

These two tables are equally as good.
Your news is equally as good as mine.
The twins are equally as handsome.
Those two jokes are equally as bad.

ETC.

There are two things you should know about "etc." First, it is an abbreviation for two words, not one. In Latin, et means and; cetera means others. When the phrase is not abbreviated but written out it is always written as two words, just as we use two words to write its equivalent:

et cetera
and others.

When "et cetera" is abbreviated, it becomes one word: "etc." That is, the first three letters of "et cetera" are taken in order for the abbreviation. Spelling the word "ect" thus makes no sense. The correct spelling should be very easy to remember.

The second thing you should know is that since "etc." means "and so on," or "and so forth," or "and others," it makes no sense to write "and etc." That is the same as writing "In her room were a bed, two chairs, a rug, a desk, and and so on." Never write (or say) "and etc." Here's the way to do it: "In her room were a bed, two chairs, a rug, a desk, etc."

PRENTICE HALL HANDBOOK FOR WRITERS on etc.

Etc. This abbreviation for and so forth is appropriate in business usage and may be used in formal writing if its meaning is entirely clear.

EXISTENCE

I don't know why this one is so hard for so many people, but it is a fact that since I started teaching in 1953, I have corrected it thousands of times. It is existence, not existance.

Here's a way to remember it. No one ever has trouble spelling "distance." If you can remember that "distance" and "existence" are different, you should be able to keep the two straight, and never again misspell "existence." Try to remember this line:

In the distance, he led a quiet existence.

FARTHER and FURTHER

"How far away is the end of this trail?" "It's farther than you think."
"We've walked pretty far already." "I know but we'll have to walk farther."
"How far do you think I can walk?" "Oh, a bit farther, I think."

Far and farther go together, and should be fairly easy to remember. "Farther" refers to distance:

They ~~went farther~~ into space than anyone else had been.

It's five miles farther.

The sun is farther away than the moon.

When you want to refer to something other than distance, use "further":

I want to think further about that.

I want to explore this subject further.

Further, here's another reason.

The distinction between "farther" and "further" was once maintained by most educated people--at least they tried to maintain it. Today many fewer people try to maintain it, or have even heard of it. I maintain it, but then I grew up with it, and it would take a conscious effort for me to get rid of it. So far as I can tell, it has never brought me any harm.

FINAL PERIODS

For some reason I can't understand, a number of people leave off the final period at the end of a paragraph, and even at the end of a paper. When they write a letter, they leave off the period at the end of the last sentence. Young people learn to put periods at the ends of sentences in the first grade. Anyone who leaves periods off the ends of sentences at age eighteen is making a mistake no child who passes the first grade makes. It's as bad as $2 + 2 = 3$. A child who couldn't learn to put periods at the ends of sentences would not be passed in the first grade. A college student who doesn't know enough, or care enough to bother, to put periods at the ends of sentences should, in my view,--no, I'm not even going to finish that sentence. I am getting too angry.

Any adult who doesn't bother to put periods at the ends of sentences is expressing great contempt for his or her reader. It's as if the person continually wrote things like " $3 + 3 = 5$," and when confronted with it said "Well, hell, 3 and 3 make 5 or 6 or 7, something like that, what's the difference? It's a small matter, and I didn't miss by much." Would you agree to teach mathematics to a first grader who behaved like that? Would you agree to teach mathematics to a college student who behaved like that?

FIRST and FIRSTLY

"First" is a perfectly good word. If you're saying or writing "first, second, third," and so on, don't be tempted to use "firstly, secondly, thirdly." If someone who spoke or wrote like that wanted to make a long list--I once heard a Commencement speaker outline fourteen points we had to understand in order to save the world, and he numbered each one--the number-words would begin to sound funny very soon. For example, try saying "eighthly," "Eleventhly" sounds mighty odd to me, as do "thirteenthly" and "fourteenthly."

FIRST RESPONSES: MYTH

Years ago--I think in the 1940's--it was discovered that the first response of a person taking a multiple-choice test was often the best one. When people went back over their answers, after finishing the test, it was found that they sometimes changed right answers to wrong ones, especially when they didn't know much about the subject. That is, a first guess was usually better than a second guess, if you knew a little about the subject.

Students all over the country were soon given that bit of information, and thereafter, when taking multiple-choice tests, acted upon it.

Within a few years, something amazing happened: the information about multiple-choice tests got twisted into advice about writing. Word spread that when you are writing, the first word that pops into your head is the best one! Now, that is about as silly, and as dead wrong, as any advice could be, but a lot of young people started hearing and believing it. If you believe it, this is a good time to re-think the matter. Good writers have known for centuries that whatever they produce as a first draft, no matter how happy they are with it, will need revising in a great many places. It is a fine thing to be happy about a first draft--I love being happy about a first draft--but it is extremely foolish to think that a first draft, because it expresses your first responses, should be left untouched. After all, writing a paper is not the same as taking a multiple-choice test.

KNOWING BETTER

Here is a curious thing: when it comes to matters of "incorrectness," if you know better, and if your audience knows you know better, you can say and write practically anything, on certain occasions, and it's all right. For example, if I'm with a group of English teachers and say "Not hardly!", that's not "poor English" but a joke. People who know all the old rules about what has traditionally been considered correct and incorrect can, on suitable occasions, get away with saying or writing such things as: "I'm not so excited over the plan."

She was so excited over the plan!
If he'd said that to me I would of set him straight.
I can't hardly pull myself out of this here chair.
Harry, you did good.
You hadn't oughta do that.

It may seem cruel to say it, but most people who "know better" have a different response when those things are said or written by people who don't know better, on certain occasions, such as in a classroom, or in a paper for a college course.

On the other hand, I have many friends and acquaintances (who don't know better) whose speech (and occasional writing) is full of expressions like those I've listed. They speak and write (letters, postcards) the language, or dialect, they grew up with. I would no more dream of criticizing the language in their talk, notes, cards, postcards, or letters to me than I would think of criticizing a Frenchman for speaking and writing the language he grew up with, French.

But if one of those friends came to me said "I want to write some things at work, and I want to write some letters to the editor, and I need some help with my writing. I mean I want to learn how to write," I would not say "Oh, just go ahead and write the way you talk." I would say, "OK, there is something that English teachers now call 'written, edited American English,' and I'll help you learn the conventions of that kind of writing." That's what this book is all about.

LAY and LIE

lie-lay-lain-lying (to recline)

lay-laid-laid-laying (to place)

TODAY: I think I'll lie down and take a nap.
She's lying down for a few minutes after the long trip.
He likes to lie on a beach and soak up the sunshine.*

YESTER- DAY: Yesterday he lay in bed all day, sick as a dog.
He spent the whole day lying in bed, poor fellow.
His car keys were lying right there where he'd left them.
After four, he lay down for a rest.

EARLIER: By the time he called, I had already lain down.
She had lain in bed for an hour before she remembered the appointment with the dentist.
He had been lying in bed, tossing and turning for an hour, before he realized what was wrong.

Why don't you lay those things down on the table?
They're laying down a bed of gravel before they pour the concrete.
Lay your head upon my shoulder.

Yesterday afternoon he laid his glasses down somewhere, then couldn't find them.
Yesterday they laid down their weapons.
While they were laying down their weapons, they shouted with joy.

By the time I got there, they had laid half of the bed of gravel.
They had laid down the railroad ties before preparing the dirt properly.
He had been laying brick for an hour before she joined him.
I had laid out all my coins on the shelf before dialing her number.

* Add:

A single rose lies on the table.
Two apples lie beside it.

LEAD and LED

For some reason, a great many people always get one of these wrong. Here's how they work. Notice how simple this is. If you read these examples aloud--or imagine yourself doing so--you'll see right away how easy it is to distinguish between the two words:

I'll lead the way.

He said, "Lead us not into temptation."

Then are you trying to lead me to believe that that murderer is innocent?

You wouldn't lead me on a wild goose chase, would you?

My many hours of research ^{now} lead me to a single conclusion.

Try not to lead a life of dissipation.

But that could lead to even worse things!

Yesterday, I led the way.

Then he led us right into temptation!

All the evidence I heard led me to believe that that man was guilty.

It looks to me as if yesterday you led me on a wild goose chase.

Last year, my many hours of research led me to a single conclusion.

I thoroughly enjoyed it last summer when I led a life of dissipation.

I know. Luckily a wonderful girl came along and led me out of my wilderness.

LESS and FEWER

This one should be a cinch, but a great many people go through life getting it dead **wrong**. Here's how these two words work:

RIGHT

fewer people
fewer oranges
fewer dollars
fewer chairs
fewer pounds

There are fewer chairs in the room than we need.

There are fewer noisy people in that section of the room.

Fewer women than men die of heart attacks.

He said there are fewer really good movies being made today.

If you're talking about things that can be counted, like people, eggs, chairs, pounds, stones, or dollars, use "fewer." If it's something you can't count, use "less":

Fewer cars are available at that dealer's. Less choice in cars is available at that dealer's.

Fewer houses are for sale here. There's less housing available here.

He made fewer mistakes than she did. She was less expert at it than he was.

He has fewer headaches than he used to. He has less trouble with headaches than he used to.

He reads fewer books than he used to. He does less reading than he used to.

Fewer people came than we expected. We had less of a crowd than we expected.

There are fewer apples on that tree. That tree has less fruit on it.

People watch fewer movies than they used to. There's less movie-going than there once was.

It's hard to make a mistake with "fewer." No one ever says "He has fewer coffee in his cup than I do," or "I have fewer money than he does," or "This box weighs fewer than that one." But it seems to be fairly easy to make mistakes with "less." Think of eating a meal. One person has

fewer rolls than another
fewer helpings than another
fewer pieces of cake than another

fewer servings of meat than another
less water than another
less wine than another
less coffee than another

FEWER FIGS

LESS LIQUID

If you can remember the last two, fewer figs and less liquid, that might do the trick?

If that doesn't do it, here's another suggestion. Generations of Americans have been told that "the business world" wants high school and college graduates

Less and fewer--2

who can write "correctly" and speak "correctly," and in a way that is true: anyone who is hiring people for his or her business does want people who can speak and write correctly. Yet the business world in general doesn't hesitate at all to mislead school children, high school students, college students, and others about which forms are correct and incorrect. For example, many large grocery stores have one or more Express Checkout counters. Above the cash register is a sign saying (the number differs from store to store):

EXPRESS
12 ITEMS OR LESS.

Now, that's dead wrong. What's more, the people who ordered the sign knew it was wrong, the people who made the sign knew it was wrong, the people who arranged to have it installed knew it was wrong, and the people who have the power to let it stay or replace it know it is wrong. Collectively, across the country, those four groups represent a sizeable chunk of "the business world," the same business world that complains to schools and colleges that their graduates can't speak or write correctly. How, a reasonable person might ask, can a person growing up today learn to get such things right when the business world keeps showing it to us wrong?

One answer to that question is simple: go back over this section, learn the difference between "fewer" and "less," then use them correctly. And every time you see "EXPRESS 8 ITEMS OR ~~LESS~~," say to yourself "What idiots!" That is called "re-inforcing your learning."

Strunk and White (THE ELEMENTS OF STYLE) on "fewer, less":

Less. Should not be used for fewer.

He had less men than in
the previous campaign.

He had fewer men than
in the previous campaign.

Less refers to quantity, fewer to number. "His troubles are less than mine" means "His troubles are not so great as mine." "His troubles are fewer than mine" means "His troubles are not so numerous as mine."

p. 45

(I find that delightful, but I have never had any trouble with less and fewer, even as an eighth grader. I think that treatment is adequate--or certainly should be--for any A student, but I would not trust it to be adequate for most students.)

Houghton Mifflin Practical English Handbook

Fewer, less Use fewer to denote number; less, to denote amount or degree.

With fewer advertisers, there will also be less income from advertising.

LETS and LET'S

This one is simple:

I hope he lets us go.

Let us go.

Let's go.

I hope the coach lets us
fast-break.

OK, girls, let us have a better second half!

Let us go get them!

OK, girls, let's have a better second half!

Let's go get 'em!

I hope she lets us pray.

Let us pray.

Let's pray.

He lets all kinds of mistakes
creep into his writing.

Let's try to keep stupid little mistakes
out of our writing.

She lets that kind of thing
bother her.

Let us not let it bother us.

Let's not let it bother us.

My sister lets me wear some
of her clothes.

Let's go shopping for some new clothes.

If you have that matter straightened out, you probably should now look at the section titled "Can't, I'm, Wouldn't, etc.," and read enough of it to see whether you need to read it all.

LIKE, AS, and AS IF

I am tempted to say that the traditional distinction between "like" and "as" has been lost forever, since half of the young people I have taught in the last few years know nothing about it, yet I do know this: the other half of my students have known about it, and all of my colleagues except for some who coach intercollegiate athletic teams have known about it, and all of the editors and publishers of the newspapers, magazines, and books I read have known about it. In other words, although the distinction between "like" and "as" has been disappearing from popular speech, it is very much alive in the talk and writing of most highly educated people.

Here's how it works. All of the following examples are correct.

LIKE

He acted like a dunce.
He looks like an athlete.
She ate like a horse.
I felt like a dope.
He felt like a hero.
That view looks like a painting!
He performed like a professional.
He performed like a true professional.
It looks like A THING, or PERSON.

Do you get the idea? A thing, or a person, is different from an action. It's the difference between a noun and a verb.

Tall people, like you, have an advantage in this game.

He looks like an old man, though he's only 42.

Like me, he loves to drink milk.

He looks like a movie star.

The difference is rather simple, isn't it? If you don't yet see it clearly, it might be well to go back and re-read the examples.

If you've been having trouble with "like," "as," and "as if," here is the sort of trouble you've probably been having:

These are considered "correct," or standard, by editors, publishers, and most educated people:

Winston's taste good, as a cigarette should.

I'm going to tell it as it is.

As I said, he's a good halfback.

She acted as if she were having a good time.

We sang as we had in the old days.

As I was saying, she's terrific. She's a girl and a half.

AS and AS IF

She acted as if she were right at home.
It looks just as it should.
We gathered around the piano as we used to.
He acted as if he were a dope.
We sang as we had when we were all campers.
That view looks as if it had been painted!
They danced as if they were still young.
As I was saying, you look tired.
It looks as if SOMETHING HAPPENED.

Tall people behave as if they have an advantage in this game.

He behaves as if he were an old man, though he's only 42.

Like me, he acts as if milk were the best drink of all.

He acts as if he thought himself a movie star.

These I personally consider very poor (incorrect) in writing, and poor in the speech of educated people:

Winston's taste good, like a cigarette should. (That started as something of a joke, in an advertising campaign. It was assumed that, since everyone knew it was wrong, it would catch the eye.)
I'm going to tell it like it is. (That one also started as something of a joke.)

Like I said, he's a good halfback.

She acted like she was having a good time.

We sang like we did in the old days.

Like I was saying, she's terrific. She's a girl and a half.

Like, as, and as if--2

As I said, our team got tired toward the end.

It looks as if it's going to rain.

It seems to me as if you've tried as hard as you could.

Like I said, our team got tired toward the end.

It looks like it's going to rain.

It seems to me like you've tried as hard as you could.

If you want to make a change in your speech and writing here, a simple way to put yourself on the right track would be to memorize a few phrases and sentences, the way billions of people who wanted to learn a foreign language have done. Although you take a dim view of memorization--most American adults think they are "above" it--memorization is what got you through the first few grades of school, and it is how you learned half of what you now know. You are not above memorizing someone's name, or an address, or an important fact, or some instructions you want to know. Right?

Here are some suggestions. All of these could be written on a slip of paper, and read aloud once a day for a week or two. That ought to do the trick, since everything else you want to say or write will follow the form of one of these examples:

As I said.

As I was saying.

As I say.

It looks as if.

I feel as if.

It seems as if.

He acts as if.

Tell it as it is.

They taste good, as they should.

I feel like a dope.

He looks like a student.

She acts like an idiot.

You're like me.

I worked like a dog.

LIKE and AS and AS IF

The Little, Brown Handbook (pp. 500-501):

In formal speech and writing, as may be either a preposition or a conjunction; like functions as a preposition only. Thus, if the construction being introduced is a full clause rather than a phrase, the preferred choice is as or as if (see 16c): This cigarette tastes good, AS (not LIKE) a cigarette should. This cigarette tastes AS IF (not LIKE) it were made of oregano. This cigarette tastes LIKE oregano.

When as serves as a preposition, the distinction between as and like depends on meaning. As suggests that the subject is equivalent or identical to the description: She was hired AS an engineer. Like suggests resemblance but not identity: People LIKE her do well in such jobs.

16c:

Although like is often used as a conjunction in speech and in advertising (Dirt-Away works like a soap should), writing and standard speech continue to require the conjunction as if or as though.

INFORMAL SPEECH The examination seemed like it would never end.

WRITING The examination seemed as if (as though) it would never end.

(p. 238)

Barron's Essentials of English (p. 218)

When used as a preposition, like should never introduce a clause (NOT like I was saying). When introducing a clause, as is used (as I was saying) even if some of the words of the clause are implied: "He did it as well as I did." (See 6A)

6A: (the relevant part of it):

Despite the sustained campaign of advertising agencies, like is still a preposition in Standard American English.

*Like I was saying, it's going to rain.

Like me, Hans enjoyed soccer.

*Samsons smell good like a walnut should. As a walnut should is still preferred in the standard dialect despite the campaign about good grammar or good taste.

(p. 37)

Prentice Hall Handbook for Writers (p. 378):

Like is a preposition; as and as if are conjunctions. In informal English like is often used as a conjunction to introduce clauses. Formal English prefers as or as-if in such constructions.

Formal He looks as if (or as though) he might be tired.

Informal He looks like he might be tired.

Do not use the preposition like as a substitute for the conjunctions as if or as though in formal writing.

Formal He looks as if (or as though) he were exhausted.

Informal He looks like he is exhausted. (p. 276)

LOSE and LOOSE

When I was a graduate student I lived in a small apartment. My landlady, who had a rather nervous cat named Joe, once reported to me, when Joe was sick:

Joe finally had a bowel movement! It was loose as a goose
and black as your hat!

If you can remember the phrase loose as a goose, you can remember the difference between these two:

He didn't lose any time getting ready.	I have some loose change in my pocket.
Now, children, don't lose your mittens.	This screw has come loose.
If you lose your wallet, you'll be	I fixed it. The lightbulb had just
in a jam.	become loose in the socket.
He hates to lose at ping pong.	I'm <u>relaxed</u> . I'm loose as a goose.

ME and MY, HIM and HIS

Which of these do you think is considered "correct":

She doesn't like me wearing this old shirt.

She doesn't like my wearing this old shirt.

Here's how the reasoning goes. What exactly is it that she doesn't like? Is it me that she doesn't like? That's what the first sentence implies. Or is it my wearing of an old shirt that she doesn't like? That's what the second sentence implies.

Here's another one:

She doesn't like him always being late.

She doesn't like his always being late.

Again, what is it that she doesn't like? Him? Presumably not. His being late? Yes, it would appear so. Some more examples:

Good

Not so good

He's envious of your winning every prize.
She was annoyed at their sitting down
to eat before she even got to the ~~table~~
table.

He's envious of you winning every prize.
She was annoyed at them sitting down
to eat before she even got to the table.

Jake's breaking up with Jessica is
probably a good thing.
His breaking up with her is a good thing.
Mickey and Maggie's adopting a baby has
worked out just fine.

Him breaking up with Jessica is probably
a good thing.

Their adopting a baby has worked out.
The whole family was happy about their
getting the tickets.

Them adopting a baby has worked out.
The whole family was happy about them
getting the tickets.

I was sorry to hear about Bob's losing
his shirt.

I was sorry to hear about him losing
his shirt.

I was sorry to hear about your losing
your shirt.

I was sorry to hear about you losing it.

Be sure not to let yourself get carried away with this one. For example, you wouldn't want to say "I saw your skating yesterday," or "I saw your talking to your special friend yesterday." Those two should be "I saw you."

Index: gerund phrases
participial phrases
verbal nouns

MEDIA

Here's how it works:

Singular

See that painter? His medium is oil.

My favorite medium of expression is photography.

A book titled The Medium is the Message is usually called "the Medium is the Message."

The mistake many people make with this word is in using the plural form (media) when the singular (medium) is needed:

He blasted the television media.

To someone who knows better, that sounds as funny as

Three chairs is in the room.

Plural

The news media are often under attack by politicians.

Of all the communication media, I am most interested in radio.

He's studying journalism, but he doesn't know which of the media he wants to go into.

MISPLACED WORDS

If you don't think hard about what you're writing--about which words should go with which other words--it's easy to slip into mistakes or ambiguities. Words like only, just, nearly, even, and almost tend to end up in the wrong place in the speaking and writing of many people. For example, "He only scored six points" isn't as good as "He scored only six points," is it? I mean, if you stop to think about what the word only is doing in that sentence in the first place, it's there to make a comment on the number of points (only six) someone scored. Or consider this one: "She almost ate the whole sandwich." What in the world does that mean? Is it like "She almost dropped the sandwich"? No, the writer probably wanted to say "She ate almost the whole sandwich," but wasn't thinking very hard about what words go with what others. The same sort of mistake can be made with groups of words, too: "I bought a piece of meat from a clerk that smelled to high heaven when I got it home." Now, no one is going to think that it was the clerk who smelled to high heaven, but that sentence is a piece of terrible writing--the writer just poured out the words without thinking about what went with what.

There is no easy cure if your writing suffers from misplaced words and ideas, but there is a cure: you just have to start thinking harder about what words and ideas go with what other words and ideas in each sentence you write. There are dozens of kinds of errors that can be made if you don't put your words where they belong, but I don't think it's worth making a lot of distinctions about them, since the basic idea is always the same: something's in the wrong place, or doesn't go with something else in the right way. It can be very helpful to look at many different kinds of sentences, and to try to get the basic idea of what's going wrong:

He very seemed shocked.
He almost seemed shocked.

He seemed very shocked.
He seemed almost shocked.

One of those mistakes is so glaring it looks as if it must be a misprint, but it's basically the same as the other one, isn't it? In each of the two poor sentences, the writer stuck a word in the wrong place because he wasn't thinking very hard about what he was trying to say. Let's look at some more:

Racing around the mountain, my legs
gave out.
I borrowed a jacket from a friend
with paint all over the arms.
When she told me that story, I
nearly laughed till the tears
came.
I bought this carpet from a man
with yellow shag.
At the beach, they announced that
a little girl was lost in a red
bathing suit.
This warning is only to the ones
who've been making all the noise.

While I was racing around the mountain,
my legs gave out.
I borrowed a jacket with paint all over
the arms from a friend.
When she told me that story, I
laughed till the tears nearly
came.
I bought this carpet with yellow
shag from a man.
At the beach, they announced that
a little girl in a red bathing suit
was lost.
This warning is to only the ones
who've been making all the noise.

She uses red polish on her finger-nails, which she buys at this drugstore.

He said at the party he didn't have a cent.

She said when she drove to town she'd call him on the phone.

I got this TV set from a good friend that was completely burned out.

He bought a pair of shoes for his son that was cheap.

He bought a cheap pair of shoes.

He hoped not to carelessly spill his drink.

If you are still reading, congratulations, and I hope you'll keep going. But did you notice how that last example came out? "He hoped not to spill his drink carelessly"? What's that mean--that he wanted to spill it carefully? If you are going to spill a drink, of course, the best way to do it is carefully. But if I were writing that sentence, I would say simply "He hoped not to spill his drink."

If I were writing that sentence, I would simply say "He hoped . . ."

He put on one shirt right away, and put the other one for the party in the closet.

When ten years old, my mother married for a second time.

The student who was working frantically exclaimed that he'd never finish in time.

She went out for the team after her foot got better again.

Without an umbrella, the rain really soaked him.

He really got soaked.

What do you think of the phrase "really soaked"? I think it's poor, since "soaked" means "thoroughly wet." If you are thoroughly wet, that means you can't get any wetter. A towel that has been soaked in water is soaked.

I was able to resume running about a month after the doctor took the cast off my leg.

That man with the mustache is the woman who is sitting on the couch's husband.

She uses red polish, which she buys at this drugstore, on her finger-nails.

He said he didn't have a cent at the party. At the party, he said he didn't have a cent.

When she drove to town, she said she'd call him.

She said she'd call him when she drove to town.

I got this TV set, that was completely burned out, from a good friend.

He bought a pair of shoes that was cheap for his son.

He bought a pair of cheap shoes.

He hoped not to spill his drink carelessly.

If I were writing that sentence, I would say simply "He hoped . . ."

He put on one shirt right away, and put into the closet the one for the party.

When I was ten, my mother married for a second time.

The student who was frantically working exclaimed . . .

The student who was working ^eexclaimed frantically . . .

She went out for the team again after . . . She went out for the team after her foot again got better.

Without an umbrella, he got really soaked.

He got really soaked.

A month after the doctor took the cast off my leg, I was able to resume running about. About a month after the doctor took the cast off my leg, I was able to resume running. That sentence is so bad I won't bother to suggest a way to fix it.

MOST and ALMOST

If you never use the word "almost," in either speaking or writing, then you are probably making a mistake about half of the time when you say or write "most." That is, even though you are using "most" in the same way most of the people around you are using it, the editor of every newspaper in your state would say you are making errors, as would the editors of all of the magazines in your school's library. Here's the difference between "most" and "almost":

I did most of the things I wanted to do.

Most of the city's buses go by this bus stop.

Most of the people in the room laughed loudly.

Clear so far? OK. But

I've almost finished doing all of the things I want to do.

He was late and almost missed the bus.

I almost missed hearing the joke.

BE SURE TO READ THIS SECTION RIGHT TO THE END.

Editors call these correct:

Almost everyone arrived on time.

Almost everybody laughed.

He likes almost all sports.

She hits that jump shot almost every time.

Almost every adult around here says "most" all of the time.

Almost all of those boys know how to fire a rifle.

He thinks almost everyone is honest.

I think almost everybody is honest.

Editors call these incorrect:

Most everyone arrived on time.

Most everybody laughed.

He likes most all sports.

She hits that jump shot most every time.

Most every adult around here says "most" all the time.

Most all those boys know how to fire a rifle.

He thinks most everyone is honest.

I think most everybody is honest.

My advice: If almost everyone around you uses "most" for "almost," and if you have grown up doing the same, don't bother to make a change in your speech, especially if you hope to go into local politics. But do make a change in your writing. And if you are successful in politics, make the same change in your speech when you move from local to national prominence.

MUDDLED SENTENCES

Most people don't start writing a sentence until they have a pretty good idea of how they're going to finish it. That is, they have a plan for the whole sentence. If someone has told you that you change plans, without knowing it, in midstream, you probably have a writing problem that is going to take ~~you~~ a lot of work to correct. That work will be well worth it, however.

Here's an example of a muddled (mixed up) sentence. By the time the writer got near the end of the sentence, he had forgotten how he'd started it:

What a person himself wants to be is sometimes opposed to what someone else wants him to be also helps shape him as an individual.

Do you see what happened there? The writer created two sentences, not one, and they don't fit together:

What a person himself wants to be is sometimes opposed to what someone else wants him to be.

What someone else wants a person to be also helps shape him as an individual.

If you write sentences that show that kind of confusion, I would suggest that when you finish writing a paper, you go back and read it aloud, slowly, thinking about each sentence, trying to determine whether the parts fit together. Then start trying to do the same thing as you write each sentence. If all that doesn't help, you need to find someone--not necessarily a teacher-- who can go over some of your muddled sentences with you, and explain what is wrong with each one.

If you have trouble seeing what is wrong with any of the following sentences, you should find such a person right now, and go over these examples together.

I asked him whether he was going to join the religious group in which I was a part of.

We all add a little of ourselves to every situation we describe as it is.

The event about which I am going to describe happened yesterday.

By putting more emphasis on teamwork is going to help us win more games.

In all the confusion, he forgot where he was in the confusion.

Although she worked very hard at the mathematics course does not necessarily make her a good student of mathematics.

Because he loved football, however he did not become a good player.

After polishing the car for fifteen minutes was the reason her arm began to get tired.

No one person has shared the exact same experience.

I was ecstatic about my new job was so terrific.

The little red house on the top of the hill, which has such a nice view, is red.

Professor Cox told us we could have until Friday to turn in our papers by then, and please try not to be late.

If you had any trouble seeing what was wrong with any of those sentences, you

should try to find someone to help you, right now, as I said. If no one is available, try to read what follows with great attention. Turn off the radio, TV, or record player, and concentrate.

Confused

In the snapshot, the girl's face is turned to the left in the picture.

I asked whether she planned to join the club in which I was a member of.

By goofing off so much is the reason he got fired.

Although he's smart does not mean he's popular.

of ← In all her attempts to be well liked had just the opposite effect.

Because of her allergy to hay is the reason she got choked up.

There is the house in which I was born in.

Among all the new records, I didn't see any of which I wanted to buy.

By keeping your shoulders straight will make you walk better.

After staying in bed with a cold for three days was the reason she wobbled when she tried to walk.

The play in which she was hoping desperately to get a part, even a small part, in was a comedy.

OK

In the snapshot, the girl's face is turned to the left.

The girl's face is turned to the left in the picture.

I asked whether she planned to join the club I was a member of.

I asked whether she planned to join the of which I was a member.

By goofing off, he got himself fired. He got fired for goofing off.

Goofing off is what got him fired.

Although he's smart, that doesn't mean he's popular.

In all her attempts to be well liked she failed.

All her attempts to be well liked had just the opposite effect.

Because of her allergy to hay, she got choked up.

Her allergy to hay is the reason she got choked up.

There is the house in which I was born.

There is the house which I was born in.

There is the house I was born in.

Among all the new records, I didn't see any that I wanted to buy. (That is a weak sentence, but better.)

Of all the new records, I didn't see any that I wanted to buy.

Of all the new records, I didn't see any I wanted to buy. (Best yet.)

By keeping your shoulders straight, you will walk better.

Keeping your shoulders straight will make you walk better.

After staying in bed with a cold for three days, she wobbled when she tried to walk.

The fact that she had stayed in bed with a cold for three days was the reason she wobbled when she tried to walk.

The play in which she was hoping desperately to get a part, even a small part, was a comedy.

The play which she wanted to get a part, even a small part, in was a comedy.

The play that she wanted to get a part, even a small part, in was a comedy.

NEITHER and NOR

This pair is just like "either" and "or," so it should be easy to use it right. Here's how it works:

There seems to be no middle ground. You'll either love this dish or you'll hate it. It looks as if neither this team nor the other team has a star player.

Error: It looks as if neither this team or that team has a star.

It has to go either this way or that way.

Neither the boys nor the girls could come up with a plan everyone agreed on.

Error: Neither the boys or the girls could come up with a plan.

She said, "Either love me or leave me," and then started singing a song!

I'm afraid neither Ted nor Bob loves her.

Even if they did, I don't ~~she'd have either one or the other.~~

Neither Ted nor Bob? But they're both so handsome!

Well, I don't think she cares about either one or the other.

The idea here is pretty simple, isn't it? The only mistake I've ever seen with these two pairs of words is this:

He liked neither biology or chemistry, but he worked at them anyway.

That's no good. "Or" can't go with "neither" in a sentence like that. The pairs are either-or and neither-nor, always.

NOTE: Notice that each word of the four under consideration here refers to one thing, ~~so when you use it in a sentence~~, you have to be sure to use the right verb:

Correct

Either one is fine by me.

Either one of them is fine by me.

Neither one is appealing to me.

Neither plan is appealing to me.

Neither of them is appealing to me.

Neither of the two plans is appealing to me.

Neither one of the two plans is appealing to me.

Neither Ted nor Bob is the right man for her.

Not so good

Either one are fine by me.

Either one of them are fine by me.

Neither one are appealing to me.

Neither plan are appealing to me.

Neither of them are appealing to me.

Neither of the two plans are appealing to me.

Neither one of the two plans are appealing to me.

Neither Ted nor Bob are the right man for her.

If the forms I call "correct" seem rather odd or unnatural to you, you probably should read the section called "Agreement in Number between Subject and Verb." That section deals with a lot of examples related to "neither" and "nor."

NOT ONLY X BUT Y

Why some people are confused about this one is easy to understand. Although they are focusing the structure of a sentence on one thing, they are thinking about two things:

Correct

Not only Jim but Sue was present.
Both the horse and the cow are sick.
Not only the horse but the cow is sick.
Not only the stove but also the refrigerator
is on the blink.
Not only this one but that one too is
coming apart.
He found that not only Sam but Ben was
ready to fight.

Not so good

Not only Jim but Sue were present.
Not only the horse but the cow are sick..
Not only the stove but also the
refrigerator are on the blink.
Not only this one but that one too
are coming apart.
He found that not only Sam but Ben
were ready to fight.

In the last example, the idea is this: Sam is ready to fight, and Ben is ready to fight, so although the point is that both are ready to fight, the way the words are put together expresses the idea that each one is ready to fight.

There are some other tricky pairs of words similar to "not only" and "but" (there is a section on each of them in this book):

Correct

Neither this group nor that group is ready
to go.
Neither this one nor that one is ready to
go.
Either going out for the night or inviting
people over here is all right with me.
Either this plan or that one is all right
with me.

Not so good

Neither this group nor that group are
ready to go.
Neither this one nor that one are
ready to go.
Either going out for the night or
inviting people over here are all
right with me.
Either this plan or that one are all
right with me.

Now, if you have had trouble with "not only X but Y" in one of your papers, you should probably go back and re-read the first half of this section. It'll take only a couple of minutes, and it'll help you remember the point.

ONE OF THOSE

See whether you can get the idea here. A lot of people get this wrong all of the time. I don't think it's so difficult:

Correct

She isn't fooled by flattery.

She is one person who isn't fooled by flattery.

She is one of those people who aren't fooled by flattery.

He is one person who tries hard.

He is one of those people who try hard.

He is one of those people who are always late.

But he is the only one in the whole group who has a good sense of humor.

She is one of the leaders who have given us some good ideas.

Not so good

She is one of those people who isn't fooled by flattery.

He is one of those people who tries hard.

He is one of those people who is always late.

But he is the only one in the whole group who have a good sense of humor.

She is one of the leaders who has given us some good ideas.

If you don't see why the examples I call "not so good" are not so good, you need to read very carefully the section called "Agreement in Number between Subject and Verb." There is something you can learn from that section that will permit you to learn easily from this one. If you don't learn it now, you are going to have all kinds of trouble with your writing. It's best to learn it now and prevent that trouble.

PARALLELISM

Here are some pairs of sentences, some good, some poor. Study them until you figure out what the difference is.

POOR

I like baking cakes and to eat them.

The man gave not only money, but also advised me.

The kids felt tired and wanted to eat.

I choose coats for the color and how they fit.

Not only the cheating, but that teacher resents

what he thinks is laziness in certain students.

Whether on the job or when he was home, all he

thought of was work.

I like to eat cakes and also baking them.

We were hot, tired, and needed to take a bath.

Better to have loved, even though you lost out,
than never to have loved at all.

It's easier to admire lawyers in general than
admiring the one who lives across the street.

The coach said we needed more dedication, dis-
cipline, alertness, and needed to work better
as a team.

She judges boys by their looks and how smart they
are.

He wanted an apple or banana.

He is a man who knows his own mind and he knows
where he is going.

She is a young woman with good work habits and
who wants to be a doctor.

He likes to fish and playing basketball.

Neither pain nor being tired can keep him off
the football field.

He was silent and in a melancholy mood after
she told him to get lost.

This stuff is affected by both the air tempera-
ture and how humid it is.

They began to feel unwanted and not valued much
either.

He picked up a knife, fork, spoon, and salt.

GOOD

I like baking cakes and eating them.

The man gave me not only money but advice.

The kids felt tired and hungry.

I choose coats for the color and fit.

That teacher resents not only the cheating done by certain
students but the laziness of some of them.

Whether on the job or at home, all he thought of was work.

I like to eat cakes and to bake them. Or: I like baking and
eating cakes. Or: I like to bake and eat cakes.

We were hot, tired, and dirty. Or: hot and tired, we needed
a bath.

Better to have loved and lost than never to have loved
at all.

It's easier to admire lawyers in general than to admire the one
who lives across the street. Or: It's easier to admire
lawyers in general than the one who lives across the street.
The coach said we needed more dedication, discipline, alertness,
and teamwork.

She judges boys by their looks and brains.

He wanted an apple or a banana.

He is a man who knows his own mind and where he is going.

She is a young woman who has good work habits and who wants to
be a doctor. Or: She is a young woman who has good work
habits and wants to be a doctor.

He likes to fish and play basketball. Or: He likes fishing and
playing basketball.

Neither pain nor tiredness can keep him off the football
field. Or: Neither pain nor fatigue can . . .

He was silent and melancholy after she told him to get lost.

This stuff is affected by both air temperature and humidity.

They began to feel unwanted and unvalued.

He picked up a knife, fork, and spoon, and a saltshaker.

PARENTHESES INSIDE OF PARENTHESES

If you are writing something by hand, here's the form you should follow:

There have been many famous speeches, but few people know even the first line of most of them. (An exception: "Four score and seven years ago [Can you name the author?], our forefathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation," etc.) Yet a great many people know the first lines of hundreds of songs.

Time to quit writing, as I must go to bed. (Oh, by the way, in the story I told at the beginning, I didn't mean he [I mean my father] was really upset with you--just a little concerned.) That's it for now . . .

The funny marks are called "brackets." To make them with a typewriter, you use the brackets key if your typewriter has one. If it doesn't, you read the section called "brackets" in this book and find out how to make them. If you don't own a typewriter, it might be worthwhile to read that section anyway. Who knows, some day someone might give you a typewriter.

PERIODS FOR QUESTION MARKS

At the end of a question you need to write a question mark: How many people are going? This is no good: How many people are going.

If you have been ^{having} trouble with this matter, there are five possible reasons that I can think of:

- 1) In the first or second grade, your teacher failed to teach your class that at the end of a question a question mark is needed.
- 2) Although the teacher taught it, you failed to understand the concept--that is, you failed to learn it.
- 3) Although the teacher taught it, and you learned the concept--that is, you learned that at the end of a question a question mark is needed--you have trouble telling whether a group of words you've just written is a statement ("I'm going to the hardware store") or a question ("Are you going to the hardware store?")
- 4) Although the first grade teacher taught the concept, and you understood it, and you do know the difference between a statement and a question, you have such a short memory that by the time you get to the end of a series of connected words, you can't remember whether you started out to write a statement or a question.
- 5) Although the teacher taught it, you got it, you do know, and you can remember what you were up to when you started writing a series of words, you don't care.

If your trouble is described by 4), you've got to start checking the words you've just written to see whether they add up to a statement or a question, and you've got to start proofreading your papers after you finish writing them to check on that.

If your troubles are described in 1), 2), or 3), you should be able to figure out the correct practices by paying attention to the following examples:

Statement	Question
It's five o'clock.	Is it five o'clock yet?
It was a hot day.	Was it a hot day?
I'm feeling good.	How are you feeling?
I'm feeling terrible.	Oh? What's the matter?
I've lost my dog.	What kind of dog is it?
It's a Beagle.	Where did you lose it?
It just wandered away from home.	When was that?
I last saw that dog three days ago.	Was it wearing a collar?

PART II

Quoting questions gives some people trouble, though it's a simple matter. The question mark goes where it reasonably (logically) should go:

Right way	Wrong way
She asked, "Where's the light switch?"	She asked, "Where's the light switch"?
Did she say, "Let's have some light in here"?	Did she say, "Let's have some light in here?"
She asked, "where's the light switch?", in a low voice.	She asked, "Where's the light switch," in a low voice.
	She asked, "Where's the light switch," in a low voice?

Periods for quotation marks--Part II--p.2

I asked one boy what his name was.	I asked one boy what's your name?
I asked one boy, "What's your name?"	I asked one boy, "What's your name."
I asked one girl, "What's your name?", and she told me it was Doris.	I asked one girl, "What her name was?", and she told me it was Doris.
I asked one girl, "What's your name?", and she said, "Doris."	
She said "I'll be seeing you soon."	Did she say "I'll be seeing you soon?"
Did she say "I'll be seeing you soon"?	
Did he say, "Are you going?"	Did he say, "Are you going?"
Did you hear him ask, "Can't you two argue calmly?"	Did you hear him ask, "Can't you two argue calmly?"
"How can you do that to me?", he asked.	"How can you do that to me," he asked.
"How come," she asked, "these dishes haven't been washed?"	"How come?", she asked, "these dishes haven't been washed?"
	"How come," she asked, "these dishes haven't been washed."

If you continue to have trouble with the matters dealt with in this section, you need to study the examples harder. There's nothing difficult about these matters; all you need to do is put your mind to figuring them out by thinking harder about the examples. Just reading them isn't enough. You've got to figure out the differences between the right ways and the wrong ways.

PHENOMENON

If you like this word and want to use it, it is best to get it right:

This phenomenon is very interesting.

That second baseman is a natural
phenomenon!

The phenomenon you are now seeing is
most curious.

These phenomena are very interesting.

The Great Lakes are natural phenomena.

The phenomena you are now seeing are
most curious.

Here's the catch. "Phenomenon" and "phenomena" have been used, in the past, mostly by scientists and academicians. In scholarly or scientific writing, there is no such word as "phenomenons." But in popular talk or writing, there is such a word. It refers to remarkable people: ~~or things~~:

That professional basketball team is made up of three excellent players
and two phenomenons.

I think I can safely say that if you ever want to use this word in a paper for a college professor, you should use "phenomenon" as the singular form, and "phenomena" as the plural form.

PLACEMENT OF CERTAIN PUNCTUATION MARKS

There are certain conventions you should know, whether you type or write with a pen.

1) Commas and periods go inside the quotation mark:

"I don't like him," she said, "but after all, he's rich."
"I'll go," he said, "when I'm good and ready."
The first section of that book is called "The Custom House."
He used the word "leafmeal," a word he made up, in a poem.
The poem is titled "Spring and Fall."
At one time nearly everybody knew about a movie called "City Lights."

Notice that some of those placements aren't "logical." Don't let that bother you. What this whole section is about is American conventions, not logic.

2) Colons and semi-colons go outside the quotation mark:

He said, "It's a hot day, and I'm parched"; someone else said,
indent) "My throat is scratchy"; someone else said, "Boy, this road sure
is dusty"; so I said, "Maybe we should look for a place to have a drink."
Here is a list of characters in "City Lights": Charlie Chaplin

Those placements are also not "logical"--it's just a matter of American conventions. (The conventions are different in Britain, Spain, and many other countries.)

3) Question marks and exclamation points go where they should reasonably be, depending on the sense of the words. Use of them is logical:

"Move it!" shouted the coach from the bench.
You mean he asked you to "move it"?
Did she say "Let's have some light in here"?
She asked, "Where's the light switch?"
My, she seems to have made quite a fuss about the lack of light!
Did you say, "She made quite a fuss over it"?
What a nerve! He said to me, "Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty"!

POSSESSIVES

The idea of possession is rather simple: we own things. We say "my coat," "your house," "his glass," "her shoes." The trouble for writers comes when they want to follow the traditional practices in using the apostrophe on the right occasions. Correct use of the apostrophe to show possession is a rather simple matter. If you will take your time, and read what follows carefully--that is, thinking about what you're seeing--you should be able to learn all you'll ever need to know about this matter.

The idea

John has a book.
Rhynette has a new car.
The dog has fleas.
The city has many streets.
The cover of the magazine is torn.

What could be simpler than that?

Now, notice that the next group of examples is just as simple:

James has a sore shoulder.
Dolores has new shoes.
Mrs. Jones has a new stove.
Texas has a lot of oil wells.

The correct way to write it

That is John's book.
There is Rhynette's new car.
I want to get rid of the dog's fleas.
They cleaned the city's streets.
Look at that magazine's cover.

That's James's sore shoulder.
Look at Dolores's new shoes.
That's Mrs. Jones's new stove.
I'd like to own some of Texas's oil wells.

WARNING: The most common mistake in getting it right with examples like those is this: some writers lop off part of someone's name, which is about as dirty a trick as you can play on a friend. For example, James is named James, five letters. If you want to talk about his sore shoulder, you should not change his name. You must write the full name, James, then add the apostrophe and the s: "Let's examine James's sore shoulder." If you write "Jame's shoulder," you are claiming he is named Jame. Well, he isn't. It's James, and James's shoulder.

And it's the same way with the other examples in that group. If you write "I'd like to own some of Texa's oil wells," you're claiming the name of the state is Texa. If you write "That's Mrs. Jone's stove," you're claiming her name is Mrs. Jone.

All that should be easy to understand and remember. All you have to do to get it right with a word like Delores or Los Angeles is to be sure to write out the whole name without chopping off the end of it:

Los Angeles has many parks.
The coat belongs to Louise.
Mrs. Pierce has a friendly smile.

I like Los Angeles's parks.
That's Louise's coat.
Mrs. Pierce's friendly smile gives me
a lift.

Poor Charles broke his leg.

Let's call and ask how Charles's leg is.

Notice that when you're dealing with a tricky word like "Louise," it turns out not to be tricky at all: you just write the word fully, then tack an apostrophe and an s onto it: Louise's coat.

The next step is just as simple as the ones so far, though this is where a lot of writers fall all over themselves. ~~They should be a pinch.~~
~~not forgetful at these points:~~

A WORD OF ADVICE: If you're the least bit shaky about any of the sections so far, go back and study them till you've got the point firmly in mind.

Possessives--2

Or if you aren't sure whether you've got everything straight so far, cover up the right hand column of the following examples and test yourself:

THE PROBLEM

You want to write about a book owned by Bill.
You want to write about the flag of France.
You want to write about the collar on the dog.
You want to write about a pistol belonging to Eloise.
You want to write about the City Commission of Dallas.
You want to write about the radio Maggie owns.
You want to write about the cast Louis has on his leg.

COVER UP

Then you write "Bill's book."
It's France's flag.
It's the dog's collar.
It's Eloise's pistol.
It's Dallas's City Commission.
It's Maggie's radio.
It's Louis's cast.

The next step, as I've said, is just as simple as the ones so far--in fact, for the person doing the writing it's simpler, as it's less work. So far you been looking at examples involving just one thing: one woman, one boy, one dog, one city, and so on. When you're writing about more, you write less. Here's how it works:

The situation

The boys have thrown their coats all over the place.
The girls threw a party.
The senators got into an argument.
The kids put on a little play.
The senior citizens got together.

What you write

The boys' coats are all over the place.
I went to the girls' party.
I heard the senators' argument.
I attended the kids' play.
The senior citizens' get-together was a success.

Am I right that that is fairly easy? As I say, when you write about more, you have to write less--you just add an apostrophe, and don't bother with the s:

I want to know that boy's name.
Let's watch the girls' softball game.
The boy's name is Sam.
The girls' softball team won their game.
The town's road crew was hard at work.
All of the surrounding towns' road crews got together for a dance.

Before going on, I want to present different kinds of examples of what's been presented so far--or at least examples that might seem different from the simple names (John, the dog, Texas, etc.) that have been used so far:

Singular (one)

Someone's socks are on the floor.
I went to my friend's house.
That coat isn't mine; it's another's.
He said, "One's home is one's castle."
I've just found somebody's glasses.
The Royal Navy's ships are impressive.
This is a lady's bicycle.
It wasn't his. It wasn't hers. It wasn't either's.
That little store is my brother-in-law's.
The diner is called Sam and Mary's.

Plural (two or more)

The townspeople's votes were counted.
My friends' houses are all different.
Those are other people's coats.
Adults' homes are their castles.
The boys thought they deserved heroes' welcomes.
She's gone to the ladies' room.
The Joint Chiefs' statement was read to us.
Icelanders' boots are very warm.
Both cats' kittens were playing together.
The records used at the party were Sam's and Mary's. (?)

If you have been having trouble getting the possessive forms right in your

Possessives--3

writing, you should probably re-read this whole section in a day or two, just to make sure you've got everything straight. All you need after that is practice to make the correct choices second nature.

As with most standard procedures, the rules I've been explaining have a few exceptions, but unless you are one in a million, you already write these correctly and automatically, so you probably shouldn't even read them, unless you are very sure you're confident about everything else in this section. The exceptions are all little words, and you never use apostrophes with any of them:

his hers its ours yours theirs whose

For example:

See that bird? Its wing is hurt.
Whose book is this?
That's not mine; it's his.

See those tomatoes? They are ours.
Whose books are these?
~~They're not ours; they must be theirs.~~

POSSESSIVES (REFINEMENTS)

If you haven't mastered all of the things covered in the main section on possessives, don't read this section yet. This section can wait.

Some phrases you might not think of as involving a possessive do:

He has a week's wages coming to him.

She said "For heaven's sake!"

She didn't like Henry's looking at her that way.

She didn't like Henry's always interrupting people.

With words that end with s or z, what you do about the possessive depends on how the last part of the word is pronounced. If you knew a store-owner named Mr. Glass, and you wanted to refer to his store in speech, the words would sound like this: Mr. Glasses store. You wouldn't say "Mr. Glass store." When you write that phrase, you indicate that the last s is pronounced: "Mr. Glass's store." If you don't want an extra s-sound, you do it like this: "He said he wanted his beard to look like Moses' beard." It would sound funny to stick an extra s-sound on Moses--that would be Mo-zez-zez--so we don't do it. Here are some more examples:

An extra s-sound

People were distributing the freshman
class's pictures.

No extra s-sound

He likes Dickens' novels.

When a word that refers to just one thing ends in s, you have a choice in how much to add. Although I started the list on the right that you've just finished reading with Dickens', strictly speaking that can be done in two ways, as is true of the others that follow:

He likes Dickens' novels.

He likes Dickens's novels.

That's James' book.

That's James's book.

PREPOSITIONS and IDIOMS

When someone gets a preposition wrong, it usually looks weird to people who write well:

I needed a job regardless to which choice I made, college or marriage.

The event about which I am going to describe took place a year ago.

Suddenly I was brought by to reality.

And it is the same with idioms--common expressions--and cliches (very common expressions):

On a whole, I like these better than those.

He had a tough road to hoe.

At that point and time, it seemed the best thing to do.

That's the one, beyond the shallow of a doubt.

People who have trouble with prepositions and idioms have a real problem. Half of the problem--getting prepositions right--can be cured with a little work, mainly by learning (memorizing) some phrases (such as "relevant to," "in search of," "in accordance with"). The other half of the problem--getting idioms, fad sayings, and cliches right--is much more difficult: it can be solved only by paying much more careful attention to what others say and write. If someone else says "At that point in time," and you hear it as "At that point and time," you need to start working at the problem.

If you have trouble with any of the expressions that follow, you should make a checkmark in the margin beside them. Then, when you finish the whole section, you should go back and learn the acceptable forms. That is, memorize them. You were able to memorize things in the second grade, and the fourth grade, and the sixth grade, and you can still do it.

(To next page)

No good

The points he brought up were such things

like . . .

These things are different to those.

He was incapable to do it.

She was superior than her sister in the

high jump.

I did it according with his directions.

The truck pulled along to where my house

was.

I needed a job regardless to which choice

I made.

I take a nap ever now and then.

I presented my thoughts of the event.

His point was irrelevant for the argument.

She was capable to master the material.

I think this idea is relevant for the

subject.

She was in search for her dog.

Let's enter on an agreement.

I prefer this over that.

This is preferable over that.

She was making fun over his sore foot.

She made fun at him.

He had to wait on her to get dressed.

She is independent from her parents.

Sleep was out of all question.

Standard

The points he brought up were such things

as . . .

These things are different from those.

He was incapable of doing it.

She was superior to her sister in the

high jump.

I did it according to his directions.

The truck pulled up to where my house

was.

I needed a job regardless of which choice

I made.

I take a nap every now and then.

I presented my thoughts about the event.

I presented my thoughts on the event.

His point was irrelevant to the argument.

She was capable of mastering the material.

I think this idea is relevant to the

subject.

She was in search of her dog.

Let's enter into an agreement.

I prefer this to that.

This is preferable to that.

She was making fun of his sore foot.

She made fun of him.

He had to wait for her to get dressed.

The waitress waited on us.

She is independent of her parents.

Sleep was out of the question.

Standard

such things as

different from

incapable of

superior to

according to

pulled up.

regardless of

every now and then

thoughts about

thoughts on

irrelevant to

capable of

relevant to

in search of

enter into

preferable to

make fun of

make fun of

wait for a person

wait on a customer

independent of

out of the question

Pronunciation and spelling--2

highth	high-t	<u>height</u>
"On her thirteenth birthday, she'd reached a height of five feet."		
take for gran-it	take for gran-ted	<u>granted</u>
Incorrect: Many people take the fact that we have many freedoms for granite.		
Correct: Many people take the fact that we have many freedoms for granted.		
Klu Klux Klan	<u>Ku Klux Klan</u>	<u>Ku Klux Klan</u>
"The police chief said he might stop the Ku Klux Klan's rally."		
preh-spir-ay-tion	per-spir-ay-tion	<u>perspiration</u>
"It was so hot I had beads of perspiration all over my forehead."		
weh-ther	whe-ther	<u>whether</u>
"I can't figure out whether I want to do it or not."		
high-ever	how-ever	<u>however</u>
"Let's go." "OK. I'll go. However, I don't really want to."		
sim-you-lar	sim-ih-lar	<u>similar</u>
"Those two songs are so similar that at first I thought they were identical."		
orr-ee-en-tate	orr-ee-ent	<u>orient</u>
Incorrect: With this map, I can orientate myself in a minute.		
Correct: With this map, I can <u>orient</u> myself in a minute.		
pree-ven-tah-tive	pree-ven-tive	<u>preventive</u>
Incorrect: To prevent getting sick, he took preventative measures.		
Correct: To prevent getting sick, he took preventive measures.		
every-where	every-where	<u>everywhere</u>
Incorrect: The stuff was everywheres around us.		
Correct: The stuff was everywhere around us.		
Ear-reh-gard-less	reh-gard-less	<u>regardless</u>
Incorrect: Irregardless of the facts they presented, I still think he's innocent.		
Correct: regardless of the facts they presented, I still think he's innocent.		
any-wheres	any-where	<u>anywhere</u>
Incorrect: He couldn't have left it anywheres around here.		
Correct: He couldn't have left it anywhere around here.		
any-ways	any-way	<u>anyway</u>
"I understand you think I shouldn't go, but I'm going anyway."		
some-wheres	some-where	<u>somewhere</u>
Incorrect: It must be around here somewheres.		
Correct: It must be around here somewhere.		
in re-gards to	in re-gard to	<u>in regard to</u>
Incorrect: In regards to the popular vote, it was evenly split.		
Correct: In regard to the popular vote, it was evenly split.		

There are other words that some people misspell because they mispronounce them, though these mispronunciations and misspellings do not embarrass me:

ac-cih-dent-lee	ac-cih-den-tal-lee	<u>accidentally</u>
can-ih-date	can-dih-date	<u>candidate</u>
dis-ass-ter-ous	dis-ast-russ	<u>disastrous</u>
en-vie-err-ment	en-vie-run-ment	<u>environment</u>
in-cih-dent-lee	in-cih-den-tah-lee	<u>incidentally</u>

PRONUNCIATION and SPELLING

I once knew a girl who, when she wanted to say "wear" (as in "What are you going to wear to the dance?") said "WHere":

What are you going to WHere to the dance?

Her older sister corrected her, in my presence, by saying "It's not like WHore, it's like Were: Wear!" I was only fifteen, and this was the old days; I'd never heard a young lady use such a word, so I was somewhat embarrassed, but I remember thinking to myself, "She made the point very well!"

I suppose the girl who said "where" for "wear" also misspelled the word in her writing. There are several words that many people misspell because they mispronounce them. If you say "He preformed the action very expertly," then you probably write "preform" instead of "perform." The basic error there is in pronunciation, not spelling; the spelling error can be corrected easily--just alter your way of saying the word. It's p e r-form, not p r e-form. Simple as that. If you say "I don't know wether I can go," instead of "I don't know whether I can go, you probably write wether (incorrect) instead of whether (correct). Again, what needs fixing is the way you say the word. If you can change the way you say it, a change in your spelling will follow.

To me, the most important thing about this subject is the embarrassment caused by some--not all--mispronunciations. That, to me, is more important than the misspellings. For example, when a college coach says, in a television interview, "I've got a great bunch of athahletes here," large numbers of listeners GROAN in embarrassment. They know that most educated people pronounce it "athletes," not "athahletes," and they know the word is spelled "athletes," not "athaletes." Other faculty members at the college or university groan even more loudly. After all, the coach is speaking as a representative of their school--just as, from now on, a lot of people who hear you speak, or read your writing, will be thinking of you as a representative of your school. Back to the coach: for some of his audience, his remark will be as bad as if he had said "We're going to play them again in Cincittani."

Most errors in pronunciation do not cause embarrassment, just as most misspellings do not. But there are several mispronunciations (and resultant misspellings) that do cause embarrassment. I want to list the ones that embarrass me when I hear or see them:

Embarrassing pronunciation	Standard pronunciation	Correct spelling	Correct spelling
reh-veh-lant	reh-leh-vant	relevant	relevant
"Your point is not relevant to the subject we're discussing."			
ir-reh-veh-lant	ir-reh-leh-vant	irrelevant	irrelevant
"Your point is irrelevant to the subject we're discussing."			
new-kew-lar energy	new-klee-ar		<u>nuclear</u>
"Nuclear energy is a complex subject."			
ath-ah-leet	ath-leet		<u>athlete</u>
"She's our best athlete. She plays all sports well."			
ath-ah-leh-tics	ath-leh-tics		<u>athletics</u>
"That school had a fine athletics program a few years ago."			
prah-blee	prah-bub-lee		<u>probably</u>
"You've probably thought of this, but I'll suggest it anyway."			
lie-bary	lie-brair-ee		<u>library</u>
"I want to get some books from the library."			

(alpha-
betize)

highth	high-t	<u>height</u>
"On her thirteenth birthday, she'd reached a height of five feet."		
take for gran-it	take for gran-ted	<u>granted</u>
Incorrect: Many people take the fact that we have many freedoms for granite.		
Correct: Many people take the fact that we have many freedoms for granted.		
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"The police chief said he might stop the Ku Klux Klan's rally."		
preh-spir-ay-tion	per-spir-ay-tion	<u>perspiration</u>
"It was so hot I had beads of perspiration all over my forehead."		
weh-ther	whe-ther	<u>whether</u>
"I can't figure out whether I want to do it or not."		
high-ever	how-ever	<u>however</u>
"Let's go." "OK. I'll go. However, I don't really want to."		
sim-you-lar	sim-ih-lar	<u>similar</u>
"Those two songs are so similar that at first I thought they were identical."		
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Incorrect: The stuff was everywhere around us.		
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Incorrect: Irregardless of the facts they presented, I still think he's innocent.		
Correct: regardless of the facts they presented, I still think he's innocent.		
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Incorrect: He couldn't have left it anywhere around here.		
Correct: He couldn't have left it anywhere around here.		
any-ways	any-way	<u>anyway</u>
"I understand you think I shouldn't go, but I'm going anyway."		
some-wheres	some-where	<u>somewhere</u>
Incorrect: It must be around here somewhere.		
Correct: It must be around here somewhere.		
in re-gards to	in re-gard to	<u>in regard to</u>
Incorrect: In regards to the popular vote, it was evenly split.		
Correct: In regard to the popular vote, it was evenly split.		

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dis-ass-ter-ous	dis-ast-russ	<u>disastrous</u>
en-vie-err-ment	en-vie-run-ment	<u>environment</u>
in-cih-dent-lee	in-cih-den-tah-lee	<u>incidentally</u>

Pronunciation and spelling--3

(alpha-
betize)

math-ma-tics
prah-blee
quan-ih-tee
rep-ree-sen-ah-tive
sen-sah-tive
soph-more
suh-prize
fine-lee
pre-dom-ih-nate-lee
deh-fin-uht

math-eh-ma-tics
prah-bah-blee
quan-tih-tee
rep-ree-sen-tah-tive
sen-sih-tive
soph-oh-more
sur-prize
fine-ah-lee
pre-dom-ih-nant-lee
deh-fin-it

mathematics
probably
quantity
representative
sensitive
sophomore
surprise
finally
predominantly
definite

If you know the word "finite," it should not be hard to remember this spelling: "definite," or "de-finite." The same with "definitely," or "de-finite-ly."

pub-lick-ah-lee

pub-lick-lee

publicly

I misspelled that one till I was thirty years old. I thought it was "publically," but it isn't. I felt rather bad about all those years of getting it wrong, but then I remembered a friend (an English professor) who misspelled "asinine" till he was forty-nine. He thought it was "assinine," but it isn't.

reh-dic-you-lus
ree-dic-you-lus

rih-dic-you-lus
rih-dic-you-lus

ridiculous
ridiculous

Pronunciation and Spelling

Add:

challange

devine

distroy

opportunuty

personel

personelly

relevance

relevant

PROOFREADING

Always proofread your papers before you hand them in. Correct errors. If you have written "His personalconduct," put in a line of separation with a pen or typewriter: "His personal/conduct." If you find you have typed "Here little borther was eight," fix it with the proper marks: "Here little borther was eight." If you have left a letter out of a word, insert it above the line, with a caret just under the line:

Her little brother^{was}^ eight.

If you have written two words in the wrong order, put in a transposition mark with a pen:

Now is the for time all good men to come to the aid of the partry.

If you've left out a punctuation mark, put it in. Do not leave such stuff for your reader to fix. Everyone should do his own proofreading.

Perhaps that should be phrased more strongly. Proofreading is like cleaning up; it is the dirty work of writing. When you finish a piece of writing, you are in the position of a cabinet maker who has built a piece of furniture. The cabinet maker must clean up: sawdust, sandpaper, chips of wood, tools, and so on. The writer must go through his manuscript one last time and clean it up. Neither the writer nor the cabinet maker should leave the cleaning up to someone else, unless of course he is willing to pay for such services. If you expect someone else (such as a teacher of writing, or history, or psychology) to clean up after you, you are acting in a manner that most adults will see as insulting. Do not let yourself do it.

One further word. If someone else types a paper for you, you must still proofread it. I have seen papers typed by "professional typists" that were loaded with errors of all sorts, much to the surprise of the students who wrote them.

PROOFREADING AS YOU TYPE

Two mistakes I make when typing I can usually catch on the spot. First, I hit a key right next to the want I want to hit:

He didn't mind being asked to help movr the chairs.

Like many other typists, I usually catch that kind of error as soon as I've made it; since I know the r-key is right next to the e-key, something tells me immediately that my fingers have gone wrong. Another example:

Let's stay here insteas of going out.

Same error: the s-key is right next to the d-key, and I misjudged slightly.

Another mistake my fingers like to make: they like to jump one letter ahead of where I want them. I am trying, for example, to type "hits," but the first three letters come out "his." Or I'm trying to type "type," and the first two letters come out "tp." That sort of mistake is also easy to spot, most of the time.

But there are other kinds of mistakes a typist can make and not be aware of them, and that is why it is essential to proofread a paper even though you've proofread it as you typed. For example, I recently typed the following:

No one in the room knew exactly what had gone wrong. At first,
At first, they suspected it might be

How did I happen to make that mistake? At the end of the first line, I returned the typewriter carriage to the margin so that I could continue with the second sentence. The phone rang. When I got back to my typing, I remembered that I'd typed "No one in the room knew exactly what had gone wrong," and I saw the carriage was positioned for me to start the next sentence, so I typed "At first" again, not remembering I'd already typed it.

And of course there are many other kinds of errors a typist can make without realizing it at the time. Even a professional typist makes such errors. For that reason, it is important to proofread your paper after you've finished typing it, even though you are sure you have corrected every mistake along the way. I am often sure, but I find later that I am wrong.

PROOFREADING MARKS

Most dictionaries contain a section on proofreading. Here are my recommendations for proofreading a paper for a college teacher.

She fed the dog~~g~~.

She fed ~~fed~~ the dog.

She the fed dog.

home.⁴¹_^ She fed the dog. (This means that "She" should have started a new paragraph.)

home.

2 She fed the dog. (This means that there should not have been a new paragraph.)

^{fed}_^ She the dog.

She f_ued the dog.

She f~~o~~ed the dog.

She fed the~~d~~og.

Punctuating dialogue correctly is simple and straightforward once you get the hang of it. On the left is an account of an experience presented roughly as it would be in a play; look carefully at the changes that occur when it is presented in story form--that is, with quotation marks, and the punctuation marks that go with them. This fictitious conversation, between a well-off young widow and one of her many servants (a virtuous, honest, handsome, slow-witted man who is nearly 21) is adapted from a book written in 1742.

The scene: Lady Booby's combination bedroom-dressing room. Lady Booby, in bed in her nightgown, sends for Joseph. He enters and she asks him to sit down on the side of the bed, and, after accidentally laying her hand on his:

LADY BOOBY: Joseph, have you ever been in love?

JOSEPH: (In some confusion) No, my Ladyship. There is time enough to think of such things.

LADY BOOBY: As young as you are, I am convinced you are no stranger to that passion, love.

JOEY: Come, Joey, tell me truly, who is the happy girl whose eyes have made a conquest of you?

JOSEPH: There is no such girl, my Lady.

LADY BOOBY: Oh, then, you are a general lover.

Indeed, you handsome fellows, like handsome women, play the field a long time. But you'll never convince me you haven't been, or aren't now, in love. I think you are being secretive, to protect the girl's reputation, which is highly commendable. Nothing can be more unworthy in a young man than to betray any intimacies with ladies.

JOSEPH: Ladies, madam! I am sure I never had the impudence to think of anyone who deserves that name!

LADY BOOBY: Don't pretend to too much modesty, for that sometimes may be impertinent. But pray answer me this question. Suppose a lady should happen to like you; suppose she should prefer you over all other men, and admit you to the same familiarities as you might have hoped for if you had been her social equal, are you certain that, later, nothing could tempt you to reveal what had passed, thus ruining her reputation?

Lady Booby sent for Joseph to bring up her tea kettle. The lady, being in bed, called Joseph to her, bade him sit down, and having accidentally laid her hand on his, she asked him, "Have you ever been in love?" Joseph, surprised and considerably confused, said, "No, my Ladyship. There is time enough to think think of such things." "As young as you are,"

replied the lady, "I am convinced you are no stranger to that passion, love. Come, Joey," she says, "tell me truly, who is the happy girl whose eyes have made a conquest of you?" Joseph replied, "There is no such girl, my Lady." "O then," said the lady, "you are a general lover. Indeed you handsome fellows, like handsome women, play the field a long time. But you'll never convince me," she went on, "that you haven't been, or aren't now, in love. I think you are being secretive, to protect the girl's reputation, which is highly commendable. Nothing can be more unworthy in a young man," she added, "than to betray any intimacies with the ladies." "Ladies, madam!" said Joseph. "I am sure I never had the impudence to think of anyone who deserves that name!" "Don't pretend to too much modesty," said she, "for that sometimes may be impertinent. But pray answer me this," she went on. "Suppose a lady should happen to like you; suppose she should prefer you to all other men, and admit you to the same familiarities as you might have hoped for if you had been her social equal, are you certain that, later, nothing could tempt you to reveal what had passed, thus ruining her reputation?"

Punctuating dialogue--2

Today's convention differs slightly from the eighteenth century convention: the paragraphing is different:

Lady Booby sent for Joseph to bring up her tea kettle. The lady, being in bed, called Joseph to her, bade him sit down, and having accidentally laid her hand on his, she asked him, "Have you ever been in love?"

Joseph, surprised and considerably confused, said, "No, my Ladyship. There is time enough to think of such things."

As young as you are," replied the lady, "I am convinced you are no stranger to that passion, love. Come, Joey," she says, "tell me truly, who is the happy girl whose eyes have made a conquest of you?"

Joseph replied, "There is no such girl, my Lady."

"Oh, then," said the lady, "you are a general lover. . . ."

Notice that with each new speaker, there is a new paragraph.

For more help on quotations, let me suggest that you read the last half of the section called "Quotations." Start with the paragraph that begins "If you're fairly confident . . ."

QUESTIONS

Getting the form of a question right is important. If you can see the differences between the sentences in each pair, and if you can make yourself read right through to the end, this section might do you some good.

Standard and acceptable

I asked one little boy what his name was.

I asked one boy, "What is your name?"

He asked me whether I wanted a ride.

He asked me, "Do you want a ride?"

She hit him over the head with "Where have you been?"

She hit him over the head with where he had been.

He asked why she cared.

He asked, "Why do you care?"

The teacher asked whether anyone knew the answer.

The teacher asked, "Does anyone know the answer?"

If you're having trouble with this, maybe you should read the section called "Quotations," get that matter straight, then try this section again. If you think you're doing all right, I hope you'll keep going:

He asked me, "Would you help me with a problem?"

He asked me whether I would help him with a problem.

"Don't ask me, 'Where are you going?'" she said.

ask her where she was going, she said.

Substandard and not acceptable

I asked one little boy what was his name.

I asked one little boy what is his name.

I asked one little boy what his name is.

I asked one boy, what is your name?

I asked one boy "what his name was."

I asked one boy "what was his name."

He asked me did I want a ride.

He asked me "whether I wanted a ride."

He asked me "did I want a ride?"

He asked me, Do you want a ride?

He asked me whether I want a ride.

She hit him over the head with "where had he been?"

She hit him over the head with "where he had been."

She hit him over the head with Where have you been?

She hit him over the head with where he had been?

He asked why did she care?

He asked "why did she care?"

He asked "Why did she care?"

He asked "why she cared."

The teacher asked did anyone know the answer.

The teacher asked "did anyone know the answer?"

The teacher asked "whether anyone knew the answer."

The teacher asked does anyone know the the answer?

The teacher asked "Did anyone know the answer?"

He asked me "Would I help him with a problem?"

He asked me would I help him with a problem.

He asked me would "I help him with a problem?"

"Don't ask me 'Where were you going?'" she said.

Don't ask her "where she was going," she said.

Don't ask "Where was she going?" she said.

Don't ask her where was she going, she said.

QUITE, QUIET, and QUIT

She was very quiet all evening.
It's a quiet time around here.

KWI-et

That was quite a game!
I don't quite understand what you're saying.

Rhymes with kite

She quit her job yesterday.
I'm going to quit lending her my things.

Rhymes with, and is spelled like,
it

The most common error here comes when people are trying to write quite:
"It was quite a nice day." If you can remember that "quite" rhymes
with, and is spelled like, "kite," you'll leave this problem behind you:

That is quite a kite!

QUIZ ENGLISH

Some people who know how to write rather well--and some people who don't write very well--let their writing go to pieces when they take an examination or a quiz. They start writing what can be called Quiz English, and teachers dislike it, not just English teachers but nearly all teachers. Teachers hate to see their students behaving as if they know nothing about writing, and they usually give lower grades to things written in Quiz English than they would to the same things written in Decent English. For example:

Quiz question: Identify James Boswell.

Quiz English answer: Was born in Scotland. Friend Samuel Johnson. Women. Wrote biog. of Johnson. Was lawyer, I think. Met famous men. Was lively . . .

People who lapse into stuff like that also tend to lapse when they write a note to a teacher, and that very much annoys an English teacher. For example:

Mr. Butler

Reason paper is late is my car wouldn't start and had to call garage, all kinds of trouble -- Finally got to campus couldn't find you Am tacking paper on your door -- Sorry See you tomorrow

Rick

I count sixteen mistakes in that note (which I made up, though I've received some nearly as bad).

A comparable note to a mathematics professor might look like this:

Dear Professor Bielli,

I've looked into the matters you mentioned, and I think I've got everything straight now. As you said, $2 + 2 = 5$, and $7 - 3 = 1$. That much was OK. I also find that $3 + 3 = 8$, and $3 - 3 = 1$. As for the multiplication stuff, I think I've got that straight too: $2 \times 2 = 5$, and $3 \times 3 = 7$. I couldn't find 8×8 ; that is probably covered in the second grade book.

Thanks again,

Rick

Which note is worse? Well, the level of the errors is the same: they're all first grade errors. But the second note contains only six mistakes, which is a lot better than sixteen. The second letter is the better of the two. I don't mean that, for a college student, it's a good piece of work, only that it's better than the other one.

THE HISTORIAN The phrase "Quiz English" was introduced by Professor W. H. Auden in his book "The Dyer's Hand" (1931). The phrase "Quiz English" was not one of his inventions.

QUOTATIONS

It's very important to learn the accepted ways of dealing with quotations. The standard practices are designed to make sense, and knowing that is the key to figuring out what is correct and what isn't. For example, let's say you and I are members of a large group of people going on a hike. We come to a resting place, and the leader of the group says, "I want all of you to sit down and relax for a while. I'm going to see what's on the other side of that hill over there, but I'll be back in a few minutes. Don't follow me." Stay here and relax." Back home, writing about this later, there are several ways you could report his remarks. Can you figure out, from the sense of each sentence, which ones are correct, and why they are, and which ones are incorrect (don't make sense), and why they are:

- 1 He said we shouldn't follow him.
- 2 He said "we shouldn't follow him."
- 3 He asked us "not to follow him" but to stay there and relax.
- 4 He asked us not to follow him but to "stay there and relax."
- 5 He asked us not to follow him but to stay here and relax.
- 6 He asked us not to follow him but to "stay here and relax."
- 7 He asked us not to follow him but to stay there and relax.

If you have had trouble figuring out which ones are OK and which aren't, before reading on you should try to find someone else you can discuss each example with, and do so until you can see clearly why the OK ones are OK, and why the poor ones aren't OK--that is, don't make sense. It's not a matter of punctuation, it's a matter of making sense, or of telling the truth.

If you can't find anyone to talk the examples over with, here is a hint: What did the leader actually say? He said "Don't follow me. Stay here and relax." If you later write down what he said, can you claim truthfully that his actual words were "we shouldn't" follow him? No. He didn't say "we" at all, did he? He didn't even say "you," as in "Don't you follow me." He said "Don't follow me."

Did he say "Don't follow him"? No, he said "Don't follow me." If you want to quote him--that is, write down the words he actually said--you can't claim he said "him" when he really said "me."

If you understand all of that, it's time to go back and look at the seven sentences again, and see whether you can now figure out which ones are correct and which ones aren't. I think you can do it if you give it a good try--that is, if you can keep track of what the leader did say, and what he didn't say. Give it a good try.

Now let's examine the seven sentences.

- 1) That's correct. The writer is paraphrasing what the leader said. The leader didn't use the word "should," but the writer doesn't claim that he did, so is on firm ground.
- 2) No, that's not right. The leader's exact words were not "we shouldn't follow him"; in fact, he didn't use the word "we" at all, and he didn't use the word "shouldn't," and he didn't use the word "him." If you put quotation marks around we shouldn't follow him, you're claiming those were the exact words he spoke. Well, they aren't, so that sentence is incorrect.

- 3) This one isn't correct. The writer is claiming that our leader's words included "not," "to," and "him," but our leader didn't say any of those words.
 - 4) Most of this one is OK, but it flops near the end. Our leader didn't say "stay there," he said "stay here." If this seems to you to be too trivial a difference to worry about, you are not seeing the point here, and need to discuss this example with someone who sees the example clearly.
 - 5) This too is all right until near the end. This writer is paraphrasing, not quoting, our leader's statements. Now, remember this: our leader was speaking in the woods. The writer, back home, is, at a later time trying to describe what went on. Thus when he writes "He asked us not to follow him but to stay here and relax," what does here refer to? It refers to where the writer is sitting as he writes, that is, back home.
- If you had trouble with 4), but understand this one all right, try re-reading 4) to see whether you can now understand it.
- 6) This one is fine till toward the end, where it flops for a different reason. Although the writer does quote our leader's actual words, "stay here and relax," "here" doesn't work right in the writer's sentence. This writer should have decided, toward the end of the sentence, not to quote our leader's words but to paraphrase them slightly, the way the writer of 7) does.
 - 7) This one is fine.

Another good way to do it, perhaps the easiest of all, is this:

He said, "Don't follow me. Stay here and relax," and off he went.

If you're fairly confident you understand all of this so far, you are ready to understand the general principles that can make this seemingly-complex matter a fairly simple matter:

- 1) When you quote someone in writing, the words you put between quotation marks must be the other person's exact words. If the other person said "here," you can't claim he said he said "there." But you can paraphrase him, without using quotation marks, if the word "there" makes better sense in your sentence.
- 2) The words you quote must work grammatically in the sentence you are are writing. For example, this one is no good:

He asked us, "Don't follow me."

"He asked us" has to be followed by something that fits with it, such as:

He asked us not to "follow" him; or

He asked us, "What time is it?"

Another way to do it correctly:

He said to us, "Don't follow me."

- 3) The sentence you write, including the quoted words, must make sense--that is, they must be accurate. That's why, when you're writing at home several hours hiking in the woods, you can't write

He asked us to "stay here and relax,"

because in that sentence "here" means "at home."

If you're not at all confident you understand this section so far, you probably should go back and read it all once more. That's a lot better than giving up. After all, you've done harder, more unpleasant things in your life than reading once more what you've just read. And, as I said, if you're beginning to understand the general principles, you can turn this matter into a rather simple subject--that is, a subject that will be simple for you.

If you are reasonably confident you do understand everything so far, then all you need is some more practice to gain more confidence. Here are some chances for more practice. Don't worry, I won't string any of them out as long as I did that first one.

Let's say you are at a party. After several hours, a friend says "I guess I'll leave. I'd better get home and feed the dog." That strikes you as rather peculiar, since you are almost certain he doesn't own a dog. The next day, you write a brief account of the party in a letter. Which of the following statements could you write and be sure they were correct?

- 1) He said, "I guess I'll leave."
- 2) He said "he guessed he'd leave."
- 3) He said "he had to feed the dog."
- 4) He said ~~he~~ wanted to leave so that he could go home and "feed the dog."
- 5) He said "he'd better get home and feed the dog."
- 6) He said he'd "better get home and feed the dog."
- 7) He came up to me and said he was leaving. Then I was really surprised when he told me "feed the dog."
- 8) He came up to me, and for a few seconds he didn't speak. "I guess," he said eventually, "I'll leave. I'd better get home," he added, and this is the part that really surprised me, "and feed the dog."

Comments:

- 1) OK
- 2) No good. He didn't say "he guessed he'd leave," he said "I guess."
- 3) No good.
- 4) OK
- 5) No good. He didn't say "he," he said "I."
- 6) OK
- 7) No good. "He told me 'feed the dog'" doesn't work right grammatically. You could write "He told me to feed the dog," or "He told me he was going to feed the dog," or "I was really surprised when he said the words 'feed the dog;'" but you can't correctly write "I was really surprised ~~when~~ when he told me 'feed the dog.'"
- 8) This one is OK. Even though the quoted words are broken up rather strangely, everything works right grammatically, and the words that are quoted are words that the friend actually said.

If you've read this far, and understand, congratulations. You deserve a pat on the back. If you've read this far and don't understand, I won't say you deserve a kick in the rear, because until a person understands the principles involved, this subject can be difficult, even though once you get the principles it's easy as pie. If you don't understand, instead of trying to re-read the whole section, I'd suggest you find a friend willing to work at this with you, and instead of starting at the beginning, start with the section on the man who leaves the party. When you figure out that one, go back to the beginning. This time I think you'll be able to make it.

NOTE For the rules about whether a quotation mark goes before or after a comma, period, etc., see the section "Placement of Certain Punctuation Marks."

QUOTATIONS INSIDE OF QUOTATIONS

"He wanted me to say 'Don't worry' to you."

"He said, 'She asked me to tell you "No dice," and she said you would know what that meant.'"

"After dinner, one of the girls said 'Let's take a walk,' so off we went." I bumped into Professor Heath, who said, "My wife wants me to say 'Hello' to you, and ask whether you've got the money you owe her."

You follow the same practice if you want to use parentheses inside of parentheses. If you're doing this while writing by hand, here's how it goes:

I have a long story to tell you. (Oh, by the way, before I forget it, she [Diane] asked me to invite you over for tomorrow night.) Now, as for my story, . . .

Those marks around "Diane" are called brackets, whether they're made by hand or typed. If you're typing, and your typewriter doesn't have a key for brackets, they come out looking like this:

[Diane]

If you don't know how to make them with a typewriter, see "Brackets," one of the most pleasant sections in this whole book.

QUOTING WORDS

The Correct writing shows, correctly, that, Poor is a word

The origin of the word "romantic" can be traced.

The origin of romantic can be traced.

He said "Melody is the prettiest word in the language."

But I think "cellar door" is prettier.

"A way of seeing" means a perspective, a point of view.

A way of seeing means a perspective.

Professor Pritchard says that "spaces" is not a bad rhyme for "race is."

Prof. P. says spaces goes all right with race is.

The origin of the word romantic can be traced.

He said "Melody is the prettiest word in the language."

But I think cellar door is prettier.

A way of seeing means a perspective, a point of view.

Professor Pritchard says that spaces is not a bad rhyme for race is.

In other words, when you are quoting or referring to particular words as words, tradition says to put them in quotation marks, or underline them. (When something is underlined in a piece of writing that is either typed or handwritten, that means that that part would be printed in italics if the manuscript were ever published.)

THERE IS and THERE ARE

A hat and a coat are on the table.

There are a hat and a coat on the table.

There are only a hat and a coat on the table.

If there are two things on the table, or more than two things, you would not want to write any of the following sentences, would you?:

Two things is on the table. (That's a first grade error.)

There is two things on the table.

There is only two things on the table.

To avoid making mistakes like those, you need to be aware of whether you're writing about one thing or more than one. It seems to me that that should be mighty simple--am I talking about one thing or more than one?--but some people have a lot of trouble with it. If you have trouble, look very carefully at the following pairs:

Correct

There are a lot of strange people in that room.

Because of his lack of leadership, there were rumors and general discontent.

In her new house there are a dining room and a den as well as three bedrooms.

He did poorly in chemistry and flunked biology; as a result, there are a D and an F on his record.

There are one-dollar bets and two-dollar bets.

There are three men in the room.

There are, in the room, a man with a mustache, a man with a beard, and a man with both mustache and beard.

There is more than one way to skin a cat.

Poor or incorrect

There is a lot of strange people in that room.

Because of his lack of leadership, there was rumors and general discontent.

In her new house there is a dining room and a den as well as three bedrooms.

He did poorly in chemistry and flunked biology; as a result, there is a D and an F on his record.

There is one-dollar bets and two-dollar bets.

There is three men in the room.

There is, in the room, a man with a mustache, a man with a beard, and a man with so much hair you can hardly see his face.

There are more than one ways to skin a cat.

THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU'RE SAYING

What do you think of these sentences:

She's liked boys for two years, but she hasn't fallen in love.
She's liked boys for two years, yet she hasn't fallen in love.
She's liked boys for two years, and yet she hasn't fallen in love.
She's liked boys for two years, but yet she hasn't fallen in love.
She's liked boys for two years, but yet she hasn't fallen in love yet.
She's liked boys for two years, and yet she hasn't fallen in love yet.

The first two sentences seem to me OK; the rest of them I think are mighty poor. The poor ones tell me, at least, that the writer wasn't thinking about the meaning of his words. And means the opposite of but, doesn't it? For example:

I like him, and I like his father.
I like him, but I don't like his father.

And and but don't go together. And it's the same with and and yet. What, then, do you make of the last four examples: "and yet she hasn't fallen in love"? "But yet she hasn't fallen in love"? If you write "and yet," to my mind that's like writing "and but." If you write "but yet," that's like writing "but but," or "yet yet." When I say "Think about what you're saying," I mean think about whether you want to connect two ideas with and, or whether you want to connect them with but. After all, there's quite a difference. For example, here is a miserably written sentence:

I like him, and I don't like his father.

That's as bad as

I like him, but I like his father,

isn't it? If I wrote either of those sentences, I'd expect to be accused of not thinking about the words I was using.

Here are some closely related sentences:

It looked like rain, so we changed our plans.
It looked like rain; therefore we changed our plans.
It looked like rain, so therefore we changed our plans. (Ugh!)
It looked like rain, and therefore we changed our plans. (Ugh!)

And what do you think of these:

I found the subject very difficult, thus got only a C for the course.
I found the subject very difficult, and thus got only a C for the course.

There is a tremendous difference between "and"--which means "link this with that"--and "thus"--which means "X caused Y."

There are a million ways a person can show he isn't thinking about what he's saying, and new ones are being invented every day. I'll list just a few, hoping you'll get the idea, and start thinking harder about the meaning of the words you're using. Which of these two do you think makes better sense:

The reason I enjoyed the game is that the players were excellent.
The reason I enjoyed the game is because the players were excellent.

What does the word "reason" mean? It means there is a cause of, or reason for, some result. What does the word "because" mean? It too points to a reason, a cause. If you write, "the reason I did it is because I wanted to," that is like writing "the becauseness of my action is because" Or it's like

Think about what you're saying--2

writing "The reason I didn't do it is this reason: I didn't want to." Or "The cause of my action is this cause: I didn't want to do it." Both of those sentences are terrible. They should be:

The reason I didn't do it is that I didn't want to.

The cause of my action is that I didn't want to do it.

The reason I didn't do it is this: I didn't want to.

The cause of my action is this: I didn't want to do it.

If you don't think about what you're writing, think about the meaning of the words you're using, you might write a sentence like this:

On the package it said to use this toaster on A.C. current only.

"A. C. current"? Do you know what "A. C." means? It means "alternating current," as opposed to "D.C.," or "direct current." If someone writes

On the package it said to use this toaster on A.C. current only,

that person is saying "it said to use this toaster on alternating current current only." "Alternating current current"? No, that can't be right. Whoever wrote that wasn't thinking about what he was writing.

Here's another example of what you might write if you're not thinking about what you're writing:

The biology class lasted for three months.

A class lasted for three months? No, the course lasted for three months. You sign up for a course, then you attend classes. A class lasts 50 minutes, or an hour, or three hours; a course lasts several weeks, or several months. There is a difference between a class and a course, just as there is a difference between a minute and an hour, or a day and a month.

I once had a colleague who worked with emotionally disturbed children. His field was called "Special Education." To get money for his research, he had to write proposals about his projects to both government agencies and private foundations, in the hope that they would grant him some money. Now, there is a tremendous difference between a proposal and a grant. One is a request, the other is a gift. I ask for money (proposal), and you decide to give it to me (grant). But my colleague couldn't get that difference straight. I would ask him, at lunch, "What are you doing these days?" He would say, "I am writing a grant." Writing a grant? No, he was writing a proposal. He was asking for money, not handing it out. But he did not think about what he was saying. He didn't think about the meaning of his words.

Here's another example of a sentence written by someone who is not thinking:

In high school, I was voted the most popular person in my class. One day, my friend and I decided to go to a movie.

The writer of those two sentences is saying two things: 1) I was the most popular person in my class, and 2) I had only one friend. Something has gone wrong there. The most popular person in a class has more than one friend, I think. It should be, "One day, a friend of mine and I . . ."

What do you think of this one: "The argument centered around the last play of the game"? That's poor. "Center" means in the middle, not around the middle. The phrase should be "center on." (If you want to hear more on that one, read the section called "Center On.")

Think about what you're saying--3

Here's another one: "She had a tough road to hoe." What do you think of that? Was the writer thinking about what he was saying? Do you hoe a road? No, you hoe a row in a garden. You hoe dirt, not cement.

If you are in the habit of not thinking very hard about what you're writing, only one person can help you: you. You'll have to work at it.

Here are some more sentences written by people who were not thinking about the meaning of their words. All of these were written by college graduates:

Every since I was married . . .

They make my skin scrawl! ("Make my skin crawl" is an idiomatic expression. "Scrawl" means to form letters in a careless, awkward way.)

She was punished. Did my heart ever breed when I heard this!

Tune things to consider are . . .

It shreds a fine line between church and state.

Not only were those writers college graduates, they were all (I hate to say it) high school English teachers!

Some people can be very funny by not thinking about what they're saying. When asked what had become of a certain old friend, Casey Stengel, who had managed major league baseball teams for many years, said "He is, at present, deceased."

THIS MAN

Here is a grammatically poor beginning to a story:

I was about to cross a street yesterday when this man came up to me.

This man? What man? The sentence should read:

I was about to cross a street yesterday when a man came up to me.

Many young people use "this" as if it meant "a," and although in speech that can often be all right, especially if the speaker knows what he or she is doing, in writing you should not use "this" to mean "a." Here's a rather extreme example of how not to do it:

Yesterday, I was downtown and about to cross this street when this truck pulled up and this guy about six feet six jumped out. This girl was with him, but she stayed in the truck. Then this other guy appeared out of nowhere carrying this briefcase. He opened it up and there was all this money, hundreds of dollars.

That's the kind of story that some people tell by asking questions rather than making statements. Imagine you are reading it aloud:

Yesterday, I was downtown and about to cross this street? And this truck pulled up and this guy about six feet six jumped out? And this girl was with him, but she stayed in the truck? Then this other guy appeared out of nowhere? And he was carrying this briefcase? And he opened it up and there was all this money?

If you're in the habit of using "this" all of the time, and of using it to mean "a," I'd suggest that you try to go for a week without using it at all, except when it's absolutely necessary. If you can get it out of your speech, you can get it out of your writing--at least, get it out of the places where it shouldn't be.

Where shouldn't it be? "This" shouldn't be used the first time you mention anything. Here's how the example above looks when it's improved:

Yesterday, I was downtown and about to cross a street when a truck pulled up and a man about six feet six jumped out. A girl was with him, but she stayed in the truck. Then another man appeared out of nowhere carrying a briefcase. He opened it up and there was a pile of money, hundreds of dollars.

Here are some good and poor beginnings:

OK

Last night I was reading the newspaper when I got a phone call from a man I used to know. This man is a friend of my parents.
I used to go to a school that was very strict about discipline. This school, which had 800 students, was the strictest in the city.
My father once owned a car that had a leaky roof. This car was a convertible Ford, and how I loved it!

Poor

Last night I was reading the newspaper when I got this phone call from this man I used to know.
I used to go to this school that was very strict about discipline.
My father once owned this car that had a leaky roof.

TOO and TO

Here's the way it works:

I think it's too big for me.
He's too late.
It's too hot in here.
You'll be too warm.
Not too many.
Maybe two. Not too many.
Whew! It's too hot! Here, let
me take your coat.
Not too much. Here, sit down.
Too far away. Over here.
I'd better sit down too.
Hey! If you're reading this for the story instead of paying attention to
the too's and to's, you'll never learn anything! Watch for too and to, and
figure out what the difference is.
Crowd in? I'm not too close.
Oh, not too much, really.
Hey! It's not too late! We
just got here.
Well, I've got to get comfortable
too, you know.
It's not too close. Just comfy.
You're a friendly person too,
aren't you?
That's exactly what I think, too.
You don't mind too much, do you?
Me too, just nice and relaxed.
Actually, not too much of any-
thing. You comfortable too?
Just want you to be comfy too,
you know.
Actually, I wasn't thinking too
much about wrapping you up
at all.

I'm going to the store.
He didn't want to be late.
I don't want to take off my coat, though.
How many girls have you said that to?
Two? Three? Four? To how many?
What are you up to, anyway?
Well, OK. What did you want to talk
to me about?
Where do you want me to sit? Here?
OK. Now, what did you want to talk about?
You don't need to crowd in right next to me!
OK. What'd you want to talk to me about?
I've got to go pretty soon.
Well, OK. Hey! Where's your arm
wandering to?
You don't have to move your arm to the
top of the couch almost touching me.
Comfy to you, maybe. Maybe not to me.
Well, sure, after I really get to know
someone. Friendship needs to have time.
Hey, who gave you permission to hold hands?
Well, I don't like to feel rushed.
What did you want to talk to me about?
Fairly. Hey! You don't have to put your
arm around my shoulder!
Comfy? You don't have to practically wrap
me up like a package to make me comfy.

That conversation, which may be the most interesting section of this whole
book, has gone far enough.

Now, if you don't have to and too straightened out, go back over those
examples and try harder. First, though, consider this: most people who
have trouble here make only one mistake with too and to--they leave the
second o off the end of too when that word means "also," as in "Me too,"
"You're a friendly person too," "That's what I think, too."

TOO and VERY

Not So Good

I don't feel too good.
I don't like this knife too much.
What do I feel? To tell you the truth,
I don't feel too much of anything.
It's not too good a day to work outdoors.

In other words, it is best not to use "too" for "very." Here are some better (or correct) uses of "too":

I don't like this knife too much to sell it.
There are too many people in here for me to feel comfortable.
We've had too little rain for the garden.
It's too nice a day to sit indoors.
I don't feel too sick to go to a movie.

"Too" is like "so" in many instances:

Not So Good

That car is so expensive!
That car is too expensive!
It's so hot in this room!

The photography in the movie is so beautiful.
The photography in the movie is too beautiful.

And "such" is often like those two words:

Not So Good

It was such a pretty dress!
That dress is so pretty!
That dress is too pretty!

We had such a good time!
She's such a good singer!
She's so good!

I have such a headache!

He's such a pain in the neck!

OK

I don't feel very good.
I don't like this knife very much.
What do I feel? To tell you the truth,
I don't feel much of anything.
It's not a very good day to work outdoors.

OK

That car is very expensive.
It's too hot in this room.
It's very hot in here.
The photography is so beautiful I could hardly keep track of the plot.
The photography is too beautiful for words.
The photography is very beautiful.

OK

It was such a pretty dress that I bought it.
That dress is so pretty I wish it were mine.
That dress is very pretty. (Better: That dress is beautiful.)
We had a very good time.
She's a very good singer.
She's very good! She's excellent!
She's such a good singer I think she should turn professional.
She's so good I think she should turn professional.
I have a bad headache.
I have such a bad headache I can't think.
He's such a pain in the neck I can't stand to be around him.

Of course, when an idiom becomes a fad, such as "He's too much!", its commonness makes it immediately acceptable for speech on informal occasions, and even some formal ones, but that doesn't make it acceptable in reasonably formal writing.

Some people would argue that all of the examples I list under "Not So Good" are all right for informal conversation. I'm not one of them. Every time I hear someone say "That car is too expensive," I think, "Too expensive for whom or for what?" With "The party was such a drag!", I think, "Such a drag that you what? Cried? Left early? Complained? Tried to liven it up?" Of course I don't say those things; I just think them. But there are many other people like me.

THUS and THUSLY

"Thus" is a perfectly good word, and doesn't need to be dressed up to make it sound more impressive. "Thusly" sounds pretentious to many people, including me. "Thus" is like "First" and "Second," all good words just as they are. There's no need to add "ly" to any of them.

TITLES OF BOOKS, MOVIES, POEMS, etc.

Titles of books, movies, poems, short stories, newspapers, and so on must be underlined or put in quotation marks. Before we had movies and TV, the rule was simple:

If the work is big enough to be published as a book all by itself, you underline the title. If the work is so small that it takes up only part of a book, magazine, newspaper, etc., you use quotation marks:

It took me a month to read War and Peace; it's a huge novel.

His article, "Jane Austen in Time of War," appeared in Cosmopolitan in 1943.

Kafka's short story, "The Hunger Artist," is very interesting.

Have you read Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind"? I like that poem.

The first section of The Scarlet Letter is called "The Custom House."

The rule today follows the same principle: if it's big enough to appear all by itself (a movie, a pamphlet, a play), you underline the title. If it's so short it appears as part of something else (a regular column in a newspaper, a chapter in a book, a poem in a collection of poems), you put the title in quotation marks. If it's a ship, statue, speech, etc., notice where it goes:

War and Peace (novel)

60 Minutes (TV program)

Citizen Kane (old movie)

The Jack Benny Show (old radio program)

The Providence Journal (newspaper)

The Thinker (statue)

The Titanic (ship)

Apollo I (spacecraft)

The Beggar's Opera (**musical**)

The Gettysburg Address (published speech)

Romeo and Juliet (play)

The Chattanooga Choo Choo (old train)

Paradise Lost (book-length poem)

"Moon River" (song)

"Walking" (essay by Thoreau)

"Gooseberries" (short story)

"Mr. Flood's Party" (poem)

"The Bertolini" (chapter in a novel)

"Politics and the English Language"
(article)

"As We See It" (regular column in a
weekly newspaper)

"Section III" (subdivision of a book)

NOTE: Curiously, although the Bible is obviously a full-length book, and its title is "the Bible," when you refer to it in writing you don't underline the title but you don't use quotation marks either: "In the motel room, he found a copy of the Bible, which he moved from the desktop to give him more space."

TRY TO and TRY AND; SURE TO and SURE AND

"And" always implies, to me at least, two things: X and Y, this and that, these and those, here and there. Suppose I see a man who is about to try moving a heavy object. I see that as a single action: he going to try to move it. If he wants to explain to me what he's up to, which of these two remarks do you think makes the most sense:

I'm going to try to move it,

or

I'm going to try and move it?

Suppose I don't want him to move it. Do you think I should say

I'm going to try to stop you,

or

I'm going to try and stop you?

Suppose I want to remind someone to be sure to check all of the lights before leaving a building. Do you think I should say

Be sure to check the lights before you leave,

or

Be sure and check the lights before you leave?

Although a lot of people use and in sentences like all of those--so many that it has come to be acceptable in speech on most informal occasions--it is worth saying that a lot of people don't do it. They still follow what used to be the only "correct" way, in both speech and writing, and is still the only correct way in writing: they say try to, and be sure to. To me that makes more sense anyway.

Correct

I think I'll go to see that movie.
He wanted to be sure to leave plenty of time to get dressed.
She wanted to go to see a dentist.
Be sure to call the dentist.
He said he was going to try to pick up a heavy rock, then try to put on top of the stone wall, then try to fit it in tightly.

Maybe OK in speech, but not in writing

I think I'll go and see that movie.
He wanted to be sure and leave plenty of time to get dressed.
She wanted to go and see a dentist.
Be sure and call the dentist.
He said he was going to try and pick up a heavy rock and try and put it on top of the wall and try and fit it in tightly.

That last sentence on the right really stinks, if you ask me. It uses "and" five times.

There are a few occasions on which I use "and" in sentences like those above. "Sit down and take a load off your feet" would sound funny with a "to" in the middle of it. When food is on the table, "Come and get it" seems to me to be both amusing and acceptable. "Come and get me," and "Try and stop me" have been said so many times they'd sound funny any other way. "Come and see what I have here" is OK because it refers to two actions, and the same is true of "Go and have a look for yourself."

VERBAL and ORAL

No one ever makes a mistake with oral:

He gave an oral report, in the seventh grade, on Big Business.
He's trying to get on tape an oral history of the tribe.
She took the medicine orally.

"Oral" means "spoken," or having to do with the mouth.

"Verbal" is the troublemaker here:

Right

Wronger

She's a highly verbal person.
He scored well on the verbal aptitude part of the test.
A courtroom lawyer needs verbal dexterity.
He gave the report orally.
He's trying to get an oral history of the tribe.
Instead of writing you a letter, why don't I just call you and tell you orally?

He gave the report verbally.
He's trying to get a verbal history of the tribe.
Instead of writing you a letter, why don't I just call and tell you verbally?

(Omit this section?)

VERY and VERY MUCH

Good writers used to make a careful distinction between occasions that called for "very" all by itself, and "very" with another word added, such as "much." Here are some examples of traditional usage, and usage that today ~~are~~ sometime acceptable, sometimes not:

Traditional

I was very much interested in the movie.
She was very much pleased by the gift.
He was very deeply disappointed.
I'm not very much taken by that idea.
I'm not very greatly excited by the plan.
I'm very much inclined to vote "no."
He was very much irritated over it.
They're not very much concerned about the postponement.
Like everyone else, I always feel I'm very much overworked.
I was very much surprised by his actions.

Questionable

I was very interested in it.
She was very pleased by the gift.
He was very disappointed.
I'm not very taken by that idea.
I'm not very excited by the plan.
I'm very inclined to vote "no."
He was very irritated over it.
They're not very concerned about the postponement.
Like everyone else, I always feel I'm very overworked.
I was very surprised by his actions.

Of course, it is traditional and correct to say or write:

He's very happy.	They're very open.
She's very sick.	He's very snooty.
He's very nice.	You're very kind.

UNFINISHED

THIS SECTION NEEDS HELP.

The traditional explanation is that "very" should be used to modify an adjective only; "very much" should be used to modify a verb or past participle.

VOCABULARY: MYTH

I have met a lot of young people who thought they wrote poorly because they didn't have a big vocabulary. That is a lot of baloney, and if you have been taken in by it, you should get it out of your head, as it's holding you back as a writer.

The students I have in mind thought they needed to know a great many big words in order to write well for Freshman English, or for any other subject.

Every college course presents the student with a particular vocabulary, which of course may include some big words, and the student is expected to learn that vocabulary, and to learn to use it. Other than that, only rather ordinary words are needed. Good writing is good ideas, not big words. A good idea on paper is an idea that's clearly expressed, I should add; if an idea is expressed fuzzily, then it's a fuzzy idea, not a good one.

If your writing is poorer than you wish, and if you consider your vocabulary to be poor, you should work at improving both, but you shouldn't kid yourself into thinking your lack of vocabulary is the cause of the poorness of your writing. If you have any doubts about this matter, I'd suggest you ask your teacher for his or her opinion. And I think you would be wise to accept the teacher's view, since I know nothing about the size of your vocabulary; maybe that is what is holding you back. But I doubt it.

WAIT ON and WAIT FOR

Although in some sections of the country, particularly the south, wait on is used for wait for, a simple distinction between the two is observed by teachers, editors, and most educated people in all fifty states. Here's how it works:

I'm waiting for the bacon to fry.
I'm sick of waiting for spring to come.
Every day she waited for the mailman to
 deliver the mail.
Hurry up! I can't wait for you forever!
I'm waiting for a train.

The waitress waited on us immediately.
The manager of the restaurant waited on
 us himself!
We were treated like royalty! They
 waited on us hand and foot.
In the train's dining car, I was waited
 on by a cheerful young man.

WAS and WERE

Educated people used to follow a particular practice with those two, in both speech and writing. Today, many educated people continue to make the old distinction, but others, especially in speech, do not. I make the distinction. In fact, I am very fond of it. Here's how it works:

The old standard way

If he were to work from now till doomsday, he'd never finish at that rate.
If I were you, I'd do it this way.
She wishes she were a queen.
He talked as if he were a king and I were a peasant.
It roared as though it were going to blow up, but of course it didn't.
If I were rich, I'd surprise my friends with nice presents every now and then.
If I were a carpenter, and you were a lady, would you marry me?
If he were heavier, he'd have a better chance of making the first team.

All of those statements are called "contrary-to-fact" statements, and that pretty well names the main idea, doesn't it? If you have studied a foreign language, you have probably recognized this use of "were" as what is called "the subjunctive."

Incorrect by the old standard

If he was to work from now till doomsday, he'd never finish at that rate.
If I was you, I'd do it this way.
She wishes she was a queen.
He talked as if he was a king and I was a peasant.
It roared as though it was going to blow up, but of course it didn't.
If I was rich, I'd surprise my friends with nice presents every now and then.
If I was a carpenter, and you were a lady, would you marry me?
If he was heavier, he'd have a better chance of making the first team.

WELL, HERE'S HOW IT IS.

You should be able to get a feel for this one by paying attention to a bunch of examples:

GOOD

Well, it's like this.
Well, give me a minute to think.
Yeah, I guess so.
Hell, I can't do that!
Well, let me see.
Well, the way it turned out
was

POOR

Well it's like this.
Well give me a minute to think.
Yeah, I guess so.
Hell I can't do that!
Well let me see.
Well the way it turned out
was

The comma tells your reader to pause after the first word of the sentence. Not everyone who speaks sentences like the ones above pauses after the first word, but most people do, at least slightly. Anyway, when you write such sentences, you have to tell your reader to pause, if the **rhythm of the sentence is like the rhythm** of the sentences above. Some more examples:

Now, men, I want you to listen.
No, I don't agree.
Yes, you've got a good point.
Well, you'll be surprised to hear
what happened next.
Shucks, I'm just a lil ole country
boy.
Now, three things must be under-
stood about this procedure.

Now men, I want you to listen.
No I don't agree.
Yes you've got a good point.
Well you'll be surprised to hear what
happened next.
Shucks I'm just a lil ole country
boy.
Now three things must be understood
about this procedure.

Now, all of the first-words I've listed could be used in sentences with a different rhythm, and wouldn't need a comma after them, but you don't have to worry about this because the different rhythm is **obvious**. If it isn't obvious immediately to you, all you have to do is read the sentences aloud:

Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the country.
Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.
Well said, well said!
Well done!

No fooling?!
We checked into the matter. No bottles were found on the beach.
"Shucks" is a word you often hear in certain areas.
"Yeah" is sometimes spelled "yeh," though I like the other spelling better.
"Would you please slice the meat very thin?" "Yes Ma'am."

As I said, few people make mistakes with sentences like those. You can forget about them. But if you have made a mistake with a sentence like those in the first two lists, you should probably re-read those lists right now, and get this matter firmly fixed in your mind. It'll take only a couple of minutes.

WHERE IT'S AT

"Where it's at" is an idiom used by many people in certain parts of the country; "where it is" is used by the rest. Most college teachers expect their students to write "where it is," since that is the form accepted as "written, edited American English."

Accepted

Where is she?
This is where my car is.
I don't know where it is.
Where's the dog?
Where do you live?
Where are those people?

Not so good

Where is she at?
This is where my car is at.
I don't know where it's at.
Where's the dog at?
Where do you live at?
Where are those people at?

WHO and WHOM

This one is nowhere near as hard as a lot of people think. If you've been having trouble with it, it may be that you've never had a good chance to see what the difference is between "who" and "whom." I think you can get the point rather easily by reading, and thinking a little about, the following examples:

Correct

Who is that man?
Who called?
She is a woman who is capable.
He is a man who is trustworthy.
He is a man who has the reputation of being trustworthy.
The boy whom he trusted cheated him.
The boy, whom he trusted, cheated him.
The boy (whom he trusted) cheated him.
The boy whom he trusted cheated him.
The man who called said he would call back.
For whom are you going to vote?
Whom are you going to vote for?

With whom are you going?
Whom are you going with?

That's the man who my brother said owed him some money.
That's the man who owed my brother money.
That's the man who (my brother said) owed him money.
The woman whom we all liked best left the room.
The woman (whom we all liked best) left the room.
The woman whom we all liked best left the room.
She's sitting with whom?
I can't remember the name of the man with whom she's sitting.
I can't remember the name of the man whom she's sitting with.

If you're following so far, there's no reason in the world why you can't figure out some harder ones:

He always liked to speak highly of whoever was working for him.
But he made no bones about the fact that he would always, when he felt it necessary, speak critically of whomever he pleased, especially those above him.
But he said he always spoke critically of whomever he pleased.
Of whom did he speak critically?

Incorrect

Whom is that man?
Whom called?
She is a woman whom is capable.
He is a man whom is trustworthy.
He is a man whom has the reputation of being trustworthy.
The boy who he trusted cheated him.

The man whom called said he would call back.
For who are you going to vote?
Who are you going to vote for? (That's OK in speech, except on very formal occasions.)
With who are you going?
Who are you going with? (OK in speech except for very formal occasions.)
That's the man whom my brother said owed him some money.
That's the man whom owed my brother money.
That's the man whom (my brother said) owed him money.
The woman who we all liked best left the room. (OK in speech, probably.)

She's sitting with who?
I can't remember the name of the man with who she's sitting.
I can't remember the name of the man who she's sitting with. (OK in speech.)

He always liked to speak highly of whomever was working for him.
But he made no bones about the fact that he would always, when he felt it necessary, speak critically of whoever he pleased, especially those above him.
But he always spoke critically of whoever he pleased.
Of who did he speak critically?

Who/whom--2

You say he spoke critically? Of whom? You say he spoke critically? Of who?

Do you see how those last five examples hang together? And do you see how, when you are thinking about a rather long, complicated sentence, you can figure out whether "whoever" or "whomever" is best by reducing it to its most important parts? That is, by eliminating, in your mind, the excess baggage words. For example:

In my hometown there used to be a hotel owner, rest his soul, who would give a free hot meal to whoever went to the kitchen door and said he was hungry but penniless.

In my hometown, there used to be a hotel owner who would give a free hot meal to whoever went to the kitchen door and said he was hungry.

That's the man who went to the kitchen door.

Who went to the kitchen door?

You were at the party? Tell me, who went?

If you've been having trouble with "who" and "whom," I'd suggest that you make a note to re-read this whole section tomorrow, even if you're sure you understand it. If you do understand it, what you need now is CONFIDENCE, and re-reading it will help.

WHO, WHOM, and THAT

There are enough forces in society that try to depersonalize us--such as procedures for registering for college courses--that we should not add another one if we can help it. In some constructions, you have a choice between "who" or "whom" and "that" when you are talking about a person. "He is the man that sold me the car" sounds less human to me than "He is the man who sold me the car."

More human

She is the woman I love the most.
She is the woman whom I love the most.
He's a man whom I don't trust.
He's a man I don't trust.
The woman who gave me directions was very friendly.
The boy who delivers my newspaper is very shy.
The boy who delivered that newspaper is shy.

Less human

She is the woman that I love the most.
He's a man that I don't trust.
The woman that gave me directions was very friendly.
The boy that delivers my newspaper is very shy.

The sentences in the right-hand column are not incorrect, but, as I say, I don't like them as well as those on the left. Life is hard enough without having us transformed from who's and whom's to a bunch of depersonalized that's.

THE HOLT GUIDE TO ENGLISH on who, which, that

Who is characteristically used to refer to people and some animals, which to things and animals, and that to both beings and things. Which to refer to people (Joe which was here) occurs in nonstandard dialects.

In some constructions, which and that can be used interchangeably, particularly if variety is needed: Coordination is a relationship which /that/ shows two ideas are to be considered equal. However, that is commonly preferred in restrictive clauses: It is the kind of music that I like. Which tends to be preferred in nonrestrictive clauses: The text, which was first published in 1964, is now out of print.

WHO'S and WHOSE

Whose car is that?	Who's going to the game?
Whose house should we go to?	Who's going to volunteer to move the piano?
Whose dog is that awful looking thing?	Who's ready to get moving?
I don't know whose towel that is.	I don't know yet who's interested in going.

In those examples, who's = who + is. Who's also can mean who + has:

Who has just left the room?	Who's just left the room?
Who has enough money?	Who's got enough money?
Who has been cluttering up this place?	Who's been cluttering up this place.

The apostrophe stands for missing letters here, as it does in the following related examples:

You had better watch what you say.	<u>You'd</u> better watch what you say.
She would prefer to sit here.	<u>She'd</u> prefer to sit here.
I wish he had not done that.	I wish he <u>hadn't</u> done that.
I wish he had arrived earlier.	I wish <u>he'd</u> arrived earlier.
You should not have swatted him.	You <u>shouldn't</u> have swatted him.
But I can not stand him.	But I <u>can't</u> stand him.
Well, I would not have swatted him.	Well, I <u>wouldn't</u> have swatted him.
Yeah, but I would have.	Yeah, but I <u>would've</u> .

If you want more help on this, look up the section titled "Can't."

SHALL, WILL and SHALL

Here's how it used to be--and how it still is for some educated people, especially people born before 1930 or 1935:

I shall help you tomorrow, if I can.
You will help us tomorrow, I hope.
He will help us, if he can. She will help us, if she can. It will be a help to us.

We shall help you, if we can.
You two will help us, I hope.
They will help us, I hope.

Shall I stop in to see you?
Will you stop in to see me?
Will he help us? Will she help us? Will it help us?

Shall we dance?
Will you two please help us?
Will they help us?

I should like to ask you a question.
You would help us if you could, I am sure.
He would help us if he could. She would help us if she could. It would be helpful if you came over.

We should like to raise a question.
You two would like to go, I am told.
They would like to raise a question.

Today most people use "will" in all shall/will situations, except for some questions: ~~and would situations.~~

Shall I get you a cup of coffee?
Shall we begin?
Shall we dim the lights?
Shall I call the doctor?
Shall we take a vote?

Most people use "would" in all should/would situations. "Should" is reserved for sentences like these:

You should take better care of yourself.
You should have seen Harry!
He should have been on time.

"Should" is also used frequently on formal occasions in writing: "I should like to point out to the readers of your newspaper that . . ."; "I should be most happy to accept the position you have offered"; "We should be delighted to have you attend this special occasion."

In the old days, if you wanted to express determination, you simply reversed the shall/will word:

I will go, by God!
You shall go!
He shall go, if I have anything to say about it!

We will win, by God!
You two shall behave yourselves!
They shall go, if I have anything to say about it!

WRITTEN EDITED AMERICAN ENGLISH

Spoken dialects vary from one geographical region to another, and even from one local area (such as the countryside) to another (such as a city in the middle of the countryside). Each dialect serves its own purpose, and is complex enough to handle the needs of its speakers. Spoken dialects differ in vocabulary (couch, sofa, divan, davenport; porch, veranda, vestibule, portico), pronunciation (greasy, greazy*), and other matters. It used to be thought that some dialects were more prestigious than others; it was better to speak as if you came from Philadelphia or Boston than from Dallas or Atlanta. Today, linguists and many others who have looked into the subject say that, to them, no dialect is more prestigious than another.

As far as writing is concerned, however, there is a prestigious form, and just one; it has come to be called, by English teachers, Written Edited American English. And whereas different ways of speaking are considered normal and acceptable in different parts of the country, and even different parts of a state, comparable differences are not considered acceptable in writing.

In other words, if you want to write something for publication in a newspaper (a Letter to the Editor, for example), magazine, or book, you have to follow certain conventions that are the same from Maine to California. If you traveled all over the country, and bought newspapers in one city and two small towns in each state, you would find that all of the writers for all of those newspapers followed the same conventions of grammar, punctuation, and mechanical matters. I won't say you would find 100% uniformity, but very close to it. I have checked this myself in 42 states, and have been amazed that even in backwoods towns, which have only a weekly newspaper, the standard is upheld.

When I say "all of the writers for all of those newspapers," I must admit that many of the sportswriters--even those on the largest newspaper in the state, often--don't live up to the standard, in several ways that seem to me to be important.

If you are a college student, or a secretary, or an aspiring writer in any walk of life, you need to know one fact: if you want others to read what you write, or if others are going to read it whether you want them to or not, you need to learn the conventions of Written Edited American English. Most of the matters in this book have to do with those conventions.

*In the first pronunciation, the s is pronounced as the c in nice is; in the second, it is pronounced as the s in eyes is.

(I prefer to use a comma in "Written, Edited American English," but my recollection is that NCTE does not. I am checking on this.)

RAEISM IN LANGUAGE

For White Students

Obvious racism in language, like obvious sexism, I don't have much to say about, except that I hate to see it. But I have something to say about unthinking, unconscious racism in the writing of people who are decidedly not racist in their values and actions. For example, suppose a newspaper columnist writes:

We Americans have grown up with the idea that this is the "land of opportunity," and a quick glance at our history shows that it is true: if you had an idea, and energy, you could rise in the business world; if you were bright, energetic, and bookish, you could become a scholar or scientist; even if your parents stepped off the ship from Europe only a few years earlier, and still spoke broken English, nothing could stop you from becoming a millionaire. if you had the right idea at the right time, and worked hard enough, and had a little luck.

Stuff like that is written all the time, and published all the time, and has been for years. Is it racist? Certainly not consciously so. But if you pause to consider the matter, what does the word "Americans" mean in the first line? Who are the people the author calls "We Americans"?

To see the racism in the passage, all you have to do is imagine you are black, and re-read it. Have Blacks always "grown up with the idea that this is the 'land of opportunity'?" What a wild idea! When Blacks take a "quick glance" at their history, do they find that their ancestors could become owners of big businesses, scholars, scientists, or millionaires? Wild!

"Americans" in the passage means "White Americans," no doubt about it. Does the passage imply that Blacks are not Americans? Yes, it does, clearly. I take that to be unconscious, unthinking racism.

Here is another example. Suppose someone feels strongly ^{about} ~~that~~ federal subsidies to private schools, and writes a Letter to the Editor, saying somewhere in it,

Since the entire population of our country has always gained by our system of public education, we should all pay for it.

Is that racist, or is the writer speaking of whites only? Here is a fact you might not know: until 1865, it was against the law for anyone, in some states, to teach a Black to read or write. Another fact: even as late as 1930, there were many towns and cities in which Blacks could not attend high school, since there were no black high schools, and they were barred from attending white high schools. In the 1950's, Blacks were barred from "their own" state universities. So the writer who says that "the entire population of our country has always gained by our system of public education" is writing about whites only. "Our system" means the system of whites; "entire population" means "entire white population," Blacks excluded. Is the writer a racist? I assume he would be shocked at such an accusation. Is his language racist? Yes. He believes one thing, but unconsciously says something else.

What is my advice? When you are speaking or writing for a group, or about

a group, be sure to think hard about whether your language applies to all parts of the group. If it doesn't, change some of your words.

Unconscious racism I define as speaking or acting as though one or more groups didn't exist. A minor social equivalent would be this: five people are in someone's house. The host says, "Well, it's time for dinner," sets the table for four people, and proceeds to eat, not noticing that the fifth person is sitting across the room with no food.

Although I have focused this section on Blacks, it shouldn't take more than a split second to realize that my central argument applies to American Indians, and, depending on the section of the country, other minority groups.

Here are more examples of what I take to be unconscious racist remarks:

We are a sun-loving people. In the summer we throng to the beaches and are willing to swelter day after day in the hot sun just so we'll have a good tan.

Studies have shown Americans trust people more if they have a good tan. If you want to apply for a loan at a bank, ~~get~~ credit at Sears, or ~~for~~ a credit card at a clothing store, it has been shown that you will be treated better--trusted more readily--if you are tanned. (What does "American" mean in the first line? Who is the "you" in the second sentence?)

We must be careful to choose carefully the words we use to speak or write of Italians, Jews, Blacks, and other minorities. (That writer assumes that the reader of his book is not Italian, Jewish, or black, doesn't he? He also assumes the reader is not a member or any other minority group. The word "we" in that sentence refers to whom?)

I don't know why that stranglehold has such a bad effect on Blacks. I think maybe their windpipes are different from those in normal people.

REAL and VERY

OK

He worked very hard on that project.
I was very glad to see him.
She looked very good.
I feel very bad about his accident.

Although in some sections of the country, a lot of people regularly use "real" for "very," it isn't considered acceptable in papers written for college courses, articles in newspapers, articles in magazines, and so on.

As for saying "real" instead of "very," that's a social matter. I see nothing wrong with it most of the time, if that's the way everyone around you speaks. Still, it's worth knowing that "very" is the "proper" word in sentences like those above, and being ready to use it on occasions you deem appropriate. It's also worth knowing that in those sections of the country in which a great many people say "real" instead of "very," most of the educated people say "very."

Here are some related forms:

He worked very hard.
She looked very good.
I feel very bad about it.

Not so good

He worked real hard on that project.
I was real glad to see him.
She looked real good.
I feel real bad about it.

He worked really hard.
She looked really good.
I feel really bad about it.

REDUNDANCY

That means you say something twice when you need to say it only once.
For example:

My proposal is one I dreamed up myself.

That sentence expresses the idea of "my-ness," of possession, twice, when only once is needed:

This proposal is one I dreamed up myself. (Or omit "myself" also?)

Saying something twice without knowing it is more common than you might imagine; you might be doing it often. How quickly can you recognize why these sentences are poor:

The little bugs on the leaves of that plant are not visible to the eye, but they are there just the same.

After the earthquake, dead corpses were taken to several neighborhood centers.

In color, the shirt I want will have to be blue or dark brown.

Here are the words that should have been omitted: "to the eye," "dead," and "in color." Here are some more:

As a football player, he's a good quarterback.

Financially, she has quite a lot of money, people say.

In appearance, they both dressed neatly.

That music sounds, to the ear, as if it had been composed by a deaf man.

That is how bad, in my opinion, I think it is.

Although the examples I've given so far are probably more than enough for you to see the point, I have something more to say. A person who has trouble writing sentences that consistently are good probably needs more practice in 1) thinking about the meanings of the words he's using, and 2) thinking about the relations among those words. Those two kinds of practice are harder to get than I wish they were. A good way to get them is by studying sentences like the ones above. If you want more practice, here are a lot of sentences for you; I suggest you work hard at any that puzzle you before checking the right-hand column:

Redundant

The girls didn't want to cooperate together to build the treehouse.

What consensus of opinion did they reach?

Boswell started writing an autobiography of his life at an early age.

The President appointed a Future Planning Committee.

We no longer know, in today's world, when war is going to break out someplace on this globe of ours.

Exactly how large in size was the man who threatened you?

At that point in time, all we knew was that somewhere down the road in the future we'd have to pay up.

OK

The girls didn't want to cooperate to build the treehouse.

What consensus did they reach? ("Consensus" includes "of opinion.")

Boswell started writing an autobiography at an early age.

The President appointed a Planning Committee.

We no longer know when war is going to break out.

How large was the man who threatened you?

At that time, all we knew was that sometime we'd have to pay.

(I'd like more examples.)

REGARDLESS and IRREGARDLESS

The right word is "regardless," always. Some years ago, the writer of a book such as this one would have said "There is no such word as irregardless."

"Regard" means concern, or interest, or liking for: "I have a great regard for him" means "I have much liking and respect for him." To make "regard" negative, you can do two things to it. You can add a negative part to it in this way: "Dis-regard the instructions." Or you can add a negative part to it in this way: "Regard-less of how it turns out, I'm not interested." But since "regardless" is already a negative word, you can't logically, or properly, add another negative element and expect the word to retain the same meaning: "ir-regard-less" is a double-negative, which logically would mean the opposite of what you want "regardless" to mean.

Using "irregardless" instead of "regardless" is one of those errors that have long been called "illiterate." It's considered a bad mistake by most educated people.

SALUTATIONS etc.

Dear Pete,
Dear Mr. Chairman:
Dear Doctor Wise:
Dear Mom,
Dear Senator Foghorn:
Dear Sir:
Dear Abby,
Dear Mr. President:
Dear Amy,

Sincerely,
Yours Truly,
Sincerely Yours,
Love,
Very Truly Yours,
Best Wishes,
Sincerely,
Yours Truly,
As always,
Cordially,
Regards,
Best Regards,

SEEING AS HOW

"Seeing as how" might be called a perfectly good backwoods expression that isn't acceptable in papers for college courses. Here are the two easy ways to solve the problem:

Not so good

Seeing as how the snow was knee-deep,
she decided to stay indoors.

Seeing as how the horse was limping, he
decided not to ride it.

I decided to call her up to see whether
her electricity were off, but, seeing
as how the phone was dead, I couldn't.

Acceptable in college writing

Since the snow was knee-deep,
she decided to stay indoors.

Because the snow was knee-deep, she
decided to stay inside.

Since the horse was limping, he decided
not to ride it.

Because the horse was limping, he
decided not to ride it.

I decided to call her up to see whether
her electricity were off, but, because
the phone was dead, I couldn't.

I decided to call her up to see whether her
electricity were off, but since my
phone was dead I couldn't.

I see nothing wrong with "seeing as how" when it is used in the right circumstances--that is, when it is said in a conversation with other people who have grown up saying it. But, as I say, it is considered too colloquial (backwoodsy) to be used in writing in more formal situations.

In the last example ("I decided to call her up,") if the word "were" seems funny to you, you should read the section called "WAS and WERE."

SEMICOLONS

My advice is to forget that this punctuation mark even exists, but to do so only after reading the section entitled "However, Part II," which deals with sentences like these:

He promised to meet me at 10; however, he never showed up.
She gave birth to a mighty fine looking boy; however, he's completely bald!
She's bright, witty, and articulate; moreover, she's good looking!

On other kinds of occasion, I'd advise you not to bother with semicolons, unless you're a pretty good writer. If you are a good writer, read on.

There are only two other uses of the semicolon, both of them rather simple for someone who has control of his writing. The first is in joining two complete sentences:

It's a beautiful day; I feel great.
The world is going to the dogs; most foreign countries are misbehaving.
She's a soft drink addict; she even has a Coke with breakfast.
Dr. Johnson's writings are full of semicolons; they dot the landscape.

The other use:

In Vermont, each season has its special pleasures: in winter, snow; in spring, mud; in summer, warm days; in fall, leaves on trees; and, all year long, bright blue skies.

What a week! On Monday, we had rain, sleet, and snow; on Tuesday, we had rain and sleet; on Wednesday, we had a howling wind; and on Thursday we had a blizzard, from which we're still recovering, three days later.

The parade contained fifteen marching bands, five marching groups, and seven groups of cheerleaders; twelve big, highly decorated floats; four small, highly decorated joke-floats; a dozen or more convertibles with smiling, waving, important people in them; and lots of policemen on polished, smelly motorcycles.

SET and SIT

TODAY: I want to sit down.
Come in and sit down.
Let's all sit on this side.
The cat has trouble sitting down.
Why are you sitting around? Get busy!

Here, set that down on the table.
Don't set your wet glass on the bare table.
Set that light bulb down carefully, please.
A hen will set on another hen's egg.
That's a setting hen.
Don't start setting those wet things down in here.
He's setting the table for lunch.
Please set it on the floor for now.

YESTER- I went in and sat down.
DAY: She came in and sat down.
They all sat on one side.
The cat had trouble sitting down.
Why were they all sitting around?
She sat down.
We sat down.

He set it down on the table.
She set her wet glass on the bare table.
He set the lightbulb down carefully.
He set the trap in the woods.
The hen was setting on some eggs.
They started setting their wet things down on the furniture.
He was setting the table for lunch when the phone rang.
She set it on the floor for the moment.

EARLIER TODAY OR YESTERDAY:

By the time he called, I had already sat down and started working.
Having sat for three hours, I was getting restless.
Having sat in the theater in the dark for a couple of hours, they were half-blinded by the bright sun.

By the time he called, I had already set the TV up on its stand.
I'd already set the table when she came in.
Having set the pile of books on the table, he began to look for his glasses.
Having set her coat on the back of the couch, she sat down on the couch.

The big idea here is that sit and sat are used about people, dogs, cats, and other such creatures; set is used about objects only.

SEXISM IN LANGUAGE

THE PROBLEM

The question, to my mind, is whether our most common ways of talking influence us in discriminatory ways as we grow up. If they do influence us unfairly, then we have a problem.

Imagine that as you were growing up the Right Name for certain people in Washington--both men and women--was "Congresswoman." Would that have increased or decreased the chance that you would have thought that you might want that job someday? Can you imagine, when you were a senior in secondary school, asking a boy in your class, "What do you want to be when you grow up?," and having him say "I think I might like to be a Congresswoman"?

Or suppose the only name for the person who heads a committee had been "chairwoman." That could have led to the following scene. You and others have been appointed to a committee, in high school. The committee meets for the first time and the Faculty Advisor says, "I'd like everyone who would like to be the chairwoman of this group to raise her hand. I'll write the names on the board, then I'll ask those students to leave the room. The rest of you will vote by secret ballot, and the winner will be our chairwoman for this year." How many boys do you suppose would have put up their hands?

Suppose you had grown up reading and hearing sentences like the following. Would you have been influenced?

A good professor of physics knows how to use examples her students can understand.

Courtroom lawyers often have to be careful not to tell even their husbands things they have been told in confidence.

A psychiatrist who tells the police about one of her patients, without permission, is violating a professional trust.

When addressing the annual meeting of the stockholders, the Chairwoman of the Board tries to choose her words carefully.

The typical owner of a new small business underestimates her expenses for the first year.

Studies have shown that the average banker, when she was in high school, did not think she would become a banker; she had a quite different goal.

Eighty percent of all doctors first thought of becoming a doctor when they were little girls.

The question, I repeat, is this: If you and your classmates had grown up hearing and reading sentences like those, would you have been influenced in the ways you thought of the possibilities of life?

I remember reading, many years ago, that the vast majority of doctors and engineers in Russia were women. I suppose that Russian boys and girls grew up reading things like "What does a typical engineer do in her spare time?," and "A doctor who treats her patients as if they were idiots is doing them a terrible disservice."

The problem, as I see it, is that for centuries we have used the language of a male-dominated society, and the habit of using that language has caused millions to plan their lives in unnecessarily unequal ways.

DO WE NEED TO CHANGE?

I think we do. The most important change is occurring in society itself, of course; we are more equality-minded, and less sexist in actions (admitting women to law and medical schools, for example) than we used to be. But we

also need to make some changes in the way we talk and write.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

The changes in our relation to sexist language have already been substantial. Consider just one example:

All men are created equal.

When that was written, in 1777, everyone who read it knew what "men" meant: it meant "white men only"; they knew that it didn't include white women, white girls, black men, black women, black boys, or black girls. They also knew that "equal" meant only "equal under the law," and they knew it meant that only in a theoretical way, as the rich were "more equal" than the poor.

If you asked a hundred Americans today, "What does the word 'men' mean in the statement, 'All men are created equal'?", I would expect ninety five to say "It means 'men and women'." No, that's probably not right. But if you asked a hundred white college graduates, I think 95% would say "Men and women." (I would expect minority group members to respond differently.)

Where are we now? A long way from where we were. Here is a list of words that almost everyone in 1900 took to mean man, whereas I, and I assume you, take them to mean man or woman:

scientist	doctor	athlete	engineer	golfer
lawyer	pediatrician	track star	math teacher	mayor
professor	dentist	tennis champ	biologist	governor
commissioner	judge	senator	poet	chemist

It would be easy to extend the list--architect, champion swimmer, political columnist, writer, stockholder, member of the Board of Directors--but I think the point is clear: the meaning we give to many important words has changed. They mean something quite different from what they once meant.

But we continue to use other ways of talking and writing that imply it's a man's world in areas where it no longer is a man's world.

THE PROCESS OF MAKING A CHANGE

People who care deeply about language hate basic changes in names or ways of putting words together. People who don't care deeply about language--I think that would be 499 out of every 500 people, or perhaps 999 out of every 1000--don't give a second thought to basic changes. When I say "basic changes," I am thinking of moving from "each student picked up around his chair" to "each student picked up around his or her chair," from "chairman" to "chairperson," or from "Congressman" to "Congressperson." I have several thoughts on this subject:

- 1) Any word you grow up with sounds fine. That is true for both people who care deeply about language and people who couldn't care less about it.
- 2) Many of the words you grew up with sounded awful to educated people when they were first used. They sounded fine to uneducated people, who didn't give the matter much thought, and since there have always been more uneducated people than educated people, the awful-sounding words gradually became standard. For example, after the first railroad trains were built, a name was needed for the man who was in the driver's seat. "Driver"? No, a locomotive is not like a horse and buggy. Coachman? No, for the same reason. Someone came up with this possibility: "engineer." Educated Americans howled loudly against that word: it was ugly, it was barbaric, it showed that the person who spoke or wrote it was uneducated (or, if educated, an idiot), and so on. Why was "engineer" such a

Sexism in language--3

barbaric word? Well, although the word "engine" had been accepted, it was felt that adding "eer" to it, and then applying the whole word to a person, was dehumanizing. Educated people howled for years, but the word became standard. Today, since we've grown up with it, it sounds fine.

- 3) Thus, although I find "chairperson" a rather ugly word, I realize that if I had grown up with it I would find it as acceptable as "engineer."
- 4) Similarly, I dislike "his or her." Why? When I was in elementary school, I was taught that "or her" was excess baggage. I was told that in a sentence like this,

At the end of the school day, each student cleaned up around his seat,

anyone with half a brain would know that "his" referred to girls as well as boys. That seemed to me a sensible supposition, as it still does.

THE SOLUTION

But what about "A physicist or engineer needs to use the mathematics he learned in college, or college and graduate school, nearly every day"? Would everyone with half a brain interpret "he" to mean "he or she"? Well, no, I don't think so. Every educated adult might interpret it that way, but children wouldn't, and high school students might not, and uneducated people might not. In that sentence, although I have disliked "he or she" for many years, I prefer it to "he." There are still too many people around who would take "he" in that sentence to mean "males only," and some of those people are girls and young women who are wondering about the possibilities of their lives.

As I see it, there is a simple test that can be applied to a word or phrase: is the present practice likely to imply, to a growing girl, that she should look on one of the possibilities of life as being cut off from her? If the name or phrase implies that, I think we need to look for sensible ways to change.

Here are some examples of usages that, as I see them, don't pass my test, with alternative suggestions:

These flunk the test

A mayor should always be certain that his police force does not feel it is above the law.

These pass the test

A mayor should always be certain that the police force does not feel it is above the law.

SHORTENED SPELLINGS: Thru, Tho, Slo, etc.

In the early 1900's, under the administration of President Theodore Roosevelt, the government made an effort to simplify spelling. The effort did not work very well, but it had some effect. "Through" became, for some people, "thru," "though" became "tho," "slow" became "slo," and so on. We see a comparable phenomenon today on the part of businesses that try to attract our attention through signs and advertising. For example, the first people to advertise doughnuts as "donuts" attracted plenty of attention: the new spelling surprised nearly everyone, and kept surprising them every time they saw it. Of course, in time the novelty wore off, and today it would be surprising to see a sign that said "DUNKING DOUGHNUTS." ("Dunkin" was also a surprise, of course.)

Here are some words that have two forms, a traditional and a simplified one. In formal or even semi-formal writing, it is usually best to use the standard, longer form, unless you are writing for an audience that is used to, and accepts, the simplified form:

Traditional	Simplified
although	altho

(I want to restrict these lists to words that might be used in papers for college courses.)

SIGNATURES

A person's signature expresses something about him. At the very least, it expresses

- 1) his view of his own importance,
- 2) his view of his relation to those who will read his signature, and
- 3) his view of the art of forming letters--penmanship.

I am in favor of having a distinctive signature, but I am not in favor of a person's showing contempt for others (by writing something illegibly), or of a person's trying to appear to be ten times more important than he is.

An illegible signature says this: "I am such an important person that if I can save a split-second of my time by scribbling rather than forming fully the letters of my name, it will be worth it, even if it means you will have to devote considerable time and attention to trying to figure out what I have written--after all, you are not an important person, and your time is not important."

If it doesn't say that, it says this: "I am so famous that, although you can't read what I am writing, I know you will recognize my signature in the same way that you recognize famous trade marks." If you are famous, that's OK.

If an illegible signature doesn't say either of those two things, it says this: "I have so little control over my body--that is, I have so little control of my muscles--that I can't make a pen or pencil move in the directions I want it to move in. Sorry. I wish I had full control of my body, but I don't."

You can, of course, guarantee that in writing your name you will never express an exaggerated view of your own importance, or contempt for your reader, or an exaggerated view of your fame. Sadly, none of us can guarantee that age won't enfeeble us so much that our signature will not express the idea that we do not have much control of our muscles.

SLANG, CLICHÉS, COMMON EXPRESSIONS, and QUOTATION MARKS

If you know a word or phrase you want to write is not quite appropriate for the occasion, that means you are rather sophisticated about social and linguistic distinctions. That also means that you might feel an urge to disown the phrase or word, even though you are choosing to use it, by putting quotation marks around it:

After his third drink, he began to act "clobbered."

When I criticized her, she put on her "high and mighty" act.

It fell to the floor with a "dull thud."

He thought of himself as being a member of the "upper crust," so

I couldn't stand him.

No one dislikes a "born loser" more than I do, but I found this particular fellow very amusing, and very good company.

Here is what the quotation marks mean to me in those examples: in each one, the writer is telling me, by the use of quotation marks, "I wouldn't use this phrase, since I know it's not quite appropriate, or socially acceptable, but it's the phrase some other people who are less educated, or less sophisticated than I am, might use."

To that I can only say, "What do you mean you wouldn't use it?! You've just used it, haven't you? It looks to me as if you're trying to tell me (by using quotation marks) that you are above using such an expression as clobbered, or born loser, but it appears to me that you haven't been able to think of a better expression. If you'd thought of a better expression, you would have used it, wouldn't you?"

I am not in favor of a writer's using slang, clichés, common expressions, and fad expressions in serious writing, such as in papers for college courses. But I am also not in favor of a person's saying "I wouldn't use this expression" and then going ahead and using it because he or she can't think of anything better. My advice is:

If the best you can do at the moment is to come up with a word or phrase you feel uncomfortable with, write it down, but make a mark in the margin so that you can go back to it later, and try to replace it with something you aren't ashamed of.

Later, if you can't come up with something better, play it straight: don't put quotation marks around the phrase you're uncomfortable with. After all, the words you're uncomfortable with are the best words you've been able to think of. If you feel the urge to put quotation marks around them, thus indicating to your reader that you wouldn't use those words, think twice. You have just used them, haven't you? And you weren't able to think of a more appropriate way of saying it, were you?

That is, my advice is not to pretend to be better, or more knowing, or more talented than you are. If the best way of saying it that you can think of is "He got clobbered," say it that way, and admit you are not above saying it that way. You can also hope, however, that sometime in the future you will be able to say it better, and won't feel the urge to use quotation marks around whatever word or phrase you use.

SLOPPINESS

Sloppy writing looks like a beautiful new car spattered with mud. If you are in the habit of splattering your writing with mud, I would urge you to stop doing so. Here's the sort of thing I have in mind:

He said, "My only regret is that I have but one life to give for my country.

It's neither right or wrong.

The father of the bride (who was not very happy about the wedding, put on a good act.

Born in Akron, Ohio he went to college in California.

My life has had wonderful parts, such as; having a child, helping a patient, and finishing a painting.

He said, "Are you ready."

He got into a automobile.

She CAN bE VErY ConVinCIng whEn shE aCts on stAgE. (Handwriting.)

The winer is the frist player to acheive 100 pointes. (Spelling.)

The rules of hte game are $\frac{1}{2}$ perfectlu clear. (Proofreading.)

SO and VERY

OK

He was very glad to get the money.
She was very excited over the plan.
The photography in the movie is
very beautiful.
I'm so hungry I could eat a horse.
He was very much embarrassed.
She was wearing a very pretty
dress.
She was wearing such a pretty
dress that when I saw her I
flipped.
The house is so big I wouldn't
want to live in it.
That car is very expensive.

When I say "not so good" about the sentences in the second column, I mean they're not so good in papers for college professors, unless you're writing dialogue.

As for using them in your talk, that is a social decision, at least as I see it. Some years ago, all of the forms in the right-hand column were considered "incorrect." Today they are considered all right in some social situations, and not so good in others. And of course there are still plenty of people around who consider them incorrect. If this subject interests you, I think you'd be interested in reading the section entitled "Knowing Better," which will take you only a couple of minutes.

Using "so" for very has become habitual for many people, some of whom use it in nearly every sentence at times. If someone like that wants to get control of "so," he or she should try to go a week without saying or writing it at all except when absolutely necessary.

Not So Good

He was so glad to get the money.
She was so excited over the plan.
The photography in the movie is
so beautiful.
I'm so hungry.
He was so embarrassed.
She was wearing such a pretty dress.
She was wearing such a pretty dress.
When I saw her I flipped.
The house is so big! I wouldn't
want to live in it.
That car is so expensive.

SPELLING: ALLY

At the end of a word, there is no such spelling as "aly." It's always "ally" or something other than "aly":

accidentally
conscientiously
generally
humorously
incidentally
mischievously
occasionally
optimistically
personally
practically
probably
publicly
separately
similarly
specifically
temperamentally
undoubtedly
usually

SPELLING: IE and EI

Is it receive or recieve, believe or beleive? There's an easy rule--sort of a nursery rhyme--that can be memorized in a few seconds. Millions of people have memorized it, after which they've had no trouble with ie and ei. Here's the rule, which you should read aloud if circumstances permit:

I before E
Except after C,
Or when sounded like A,
As in neighbor or weigh.

Easy enough? Before you read on, be sure you have the rhyme memorized.

Here are some examples that follow the rule. Read each one and check it for yourself. That may seem like a stupid thing to do, but it will be worth doing.

achieve	perceive	believe	receipt	yield
receive	chief	conceive	priest	niece
relieve	ceiling	friend	brief	

See? Those words all illustrate the first two lines of the nursery rhyme.

A lot of people who learn the rhyme forget the last two lines: "Or when sounded like A, / As in neighbor or weigh." You would do well not to forget them. Here are a few words governed by that part of the rule:

reign vein freight neighbor sleigh weightless sleighbell neighborhood

If you didn't say each of those words aloud to yourself, I think you should go back and do so. Now is the time to get this rule, and the way it works, fixed in your mind.

Most rules have a few exceptions. Fortunately, this rule has mighty few among the words most people are ever likely to write. The most important exception is their. To spell their correctly, you merely write the, then add ir:

the + ir = their.

Simple? Simple.

The other important exception is neither. That one can be remembered in this way:

neither = n + either.

Even poor spellers seem to have no trouble with either, perhaps because it looks so weird when it's misspelled (iether).

The only other exceptions I can think of that are worth mentioning are leisure, seize, and weird, none of them written very often by most people.

SPELLING: TT, RR, NN, etc.

If you've been having trouble trying to remember whether its traveling or travelling, counseling or counselling, commited or committed, this section may very well astound you. I had trouble with stuff like that for years; then I found out it's amazingly easy. I could hardly believe just how simple it is.

Look carefully at these patterns:

Pronunciation Spelling of related words

ad-MIT	ad <u>mi</u> tted
be-GIN	be <u>gi</u> nn <u>ing</u>
e-QUIP	equ <u>ip</u> ped
pre-FER	pre <u>fe</u> rred

Isn't that simple? If you're writing a two-syllable word, and if you stress the second syllable as you pronounce the word, then you double the final consonant when you add to the word. There's a bit more to the subject than that, but this part is a cinch:

com-PEL	com <u>pe</u> lling
re-FER	re <u>fe</u> rred

Here is a longer list, with several variations:

adMIT	admitted admitting admittance
acQUIT	acquitted acquittal
alLOT	allotted allotting
begin	beginning
commit	committed committance committing
compel	compelled compelling
control	controlled controlling
defer	deferred
equip	equipped
excel	excelled <u>excellent</u> excellence
occur	occurred occurring <u>occurrence</u>
omit	omitted
prefer	preferred
refer	referred referral
regret	regretted
transFER	regre <u>tt</u> able transferred

Spelling: tt, rr, nn, etc.--2

I can still remember what a relief it was when I learned about that. Of course, that list contains only two-syllable words, and all of them are accented on the second syllable. Here are some one-syllable words:

bat	batted
	batting
beg	begged
	begging
drop	dropped
	dropping
	droppings
flag	flagged
get	getting
map	mapping
mop	mopped
	moppet
plop	plopped
run	running
slap	slapped
spin	spinning
stir	stirring
swap	swapped
	swapping
swim	swimming
trap	trapped
	trappings
win	winning
yap	yapping
zap	zapped

Notice that all of these words end with a vowel--a single-vowel--and a consonant: at, eg, op, ag, and so on.

All of that is very easy, isn't it? And the rest of it is easy too, though you'll have to pay attention to some finer distinctions.

The two-syllable words in the first part of this section are all accented on the second syllable:

adMIT admitted beGIN beginning oMIT omitted reFER referred

If a two-syllable word is accented on the first syllable, it doesn't work that way:

COUNsel	counselor
	counseling
LABor	labored
	laboring
	laborious
TRAVel	traveled
	traveling

There are some words that you accent on the second syllable in their short form--such as "preFER"--that you accent on the first syllable in some of their longer forms--"PREferential," "PREference." Those words behave just like "COUNsel," "LABor," and "TRAVel":

deFER	DEference (not "deference")
	DEferential
preFER	PREference
	PREferential

Spelling: tt, rr, nn, etc.--3

proCLAIM	PROclamation (not "proclamation")
reFER	REference

There's only one more category to go, and that's a simple one too. But before I hit you with that one, here's a quick review:

- 1) Two-syllable words (admit, begin, occur)
accent on second syllable (adMIT, beGIN, ocCUR)
ending with one vowel and a consonant (it, in, ur)

adMIT	admitted
conTROL	controlled
preFER	preferred
reGRET	regretted

- 2) One-syllable words (bat, beg, drop)
ending with one vowel and a consonant (at, eg, op)

bat	batted
mop	mopped
stir	stirred
win	winning

- 3) Two-syllable words, accented on the first syllable, ending with one vowel and a consonant:

COUNsel	counseled
	counseling
Labor	labored
	laborers
	laboring
TRAVel	traveled
	treveler
	traveling

- 4) Two-syllable words, accented on the second syllable, that move the accent to the first syllable in some longer forms:

deFER	DEference
	deFERRed
	DEferential
	deFERRing
preFER	PREference
	preFERRed
	PREferential
	preFERRing
reFER	REference
	reFERRed

If you've got everything straight so far, fine; it's time to tackle the next (and last) section. But if you're not quite sure, or are afraid you won't remember the major points so far, postpone reading this next section for a few days, or a week. Try to go over--that is, re-read--everything up to this paragraph every couple of days for a week, or however long it takes to fix it in your memory. Then look at the final section.

Spelling: tt, rr, nn, etc.--4

THE FINAL SECTION

Two-syllable words (conceal, despair, detain)
accent on the second syllable (conCEAL, desPAIR, deTAIN)
with two vowels before the final consonant (eal, air, ain)

conCEAL	concealed
desPAIR	despaired
	despairing
deTAIN	detained
	detaining
perTAIN	pertained
proCLAIM	proclaimed
reFRAIN	refrained
rePAIR	repaired

I don't think many people make mistakes with those words. Perhaps you should forget you ever read that part.

If the last syllable of a word isn't accented, either in its short form (BECKon) or in the lengthened form (preFER--PREFer-ence), you don't double the final consonant:

BECKon	beckoned
BENefit	benefited (I misspelled that one for years)
deVELop	benefiting
LABor	developed
	labored
	laboring
RECKon	reckoned
	reckoning

Except for "benefited" and "benefiting," I don't think many people make mistakes with those words either. If you can remember about "benefit," maybe you should forget this part too.

SUCH and VERY

Poor

It's such a nice day!

He's such a bore!

That's such a good idea!

We had such a good time!

Do you get the idea?

Do you get the idea?

"Such" is similar to "so" and "too" in the possibilities for using it poorly:

Poor

That woman is such a good actress!

~~That woman is so good!~~

That woman is so good!

This hamburger is just too bad.

This is such a bad hamburger!

This hamburger is so bad!

If you have been having trouble with "such," you should probably re-read this section, then read the sections on "too" and "so." I find both of them rather interesting.

OK

It's such a nice day I'm going to go out.

It's a very nice day.

He's such a bore I avoid him.

He's a terrible bore.

That's such a good idea that I'm going to use it.

That's an excellent idea.

We had such a good time that I'm going to try to go there again.

We had a very good time. ~~We had a [?] time.~~

We had a marvelous time.

We had a great time.

OK

That woman is such a good actress I would like to see her every night.

That woman is an excellent actress.

That woman is so good I'd like to watch her in a play or movie every night.

That woman is excellent.

This hamburger is too bad to eat.

This hamburger is terrible.

This is such a bad hamburger I'm not going to finish it.

This hamburger is so bad I'm going to throw the rest of it away.

This hamburger is terrible.

TAKE and BRING

I took some money with me when I went to the store.

Would you mind bringing that chair over here?

Please take this with you with you when you go.

Can you come on over and join the fun? No, you don't have to bring anything.

I've just had this thing two days and it's quit working. I'm going to take it back.

Did you bring your sales slip with you, sir?

Sales slip? Well, I remember I took it with me when I left the store.

But did you bring it back with you now?

Take and bring are words of direction: you take something away, and you bring something back. Few people have trouble with these words when talking or writing about themselves. The trouble comes when they're describing others.

[Incomplete.]

THAT . . . THAT

Here is a terrible sentence:

~~I said that if he did it, that he would be sorry.~~

Here's another terrible sentence:

~~She said that if we all behaved ourselves that we could join her.~~

And here's one that's even worse:

~~She said that yes, that she would.~~

If you have gotten into the habit of making that error, there is no easy cure except for thinking harder about the words you're writing (and perhaps speaking). When you're in the middle of a sentence, you'll have to pay more attention to what you have already written. Here's how the sentences I've quoted work:

I said that if he did it, he would be sorry.

She said that if we all behaved ourselves, we could join her.

She said that yes, she would.

They don't work like this:

I said that if he did it that he would be sorry.

She said that if we all behaved ourselves that we could join her.

She said that yes, that she would.

Do you understand what I'm saying? One "that" in each of those sentences is enough to do the job; two "that's" are an error.

OK

Poor

The first big point is that, when you are waiting for the ball, keep <u>you should keep your eye on it.</u> all the way.	The first big point is <u>that</u> , when you're waiting for the ball, <u>that</u> you should keep your eye on it all the way.
---	--

He said that if you want to get anywhere in life, you've got to work at it.	He said <u>that</u> if you want to get anywhere in life <u>that</u> you've got to work at it.
---	---

It was so warm that when I got a chance I took off my coat.	It was so warm that, when I got a chance, that I took off my coat.
---	--

She huffed and puffed so much that I was afraid, when we got to the top of the hill, she would collapse.	She huffed and puffed so much that I was afraid, when we got to the top of the hill, that she would collapse.
--	---

I thought that if I remained calm, and argued patiently and sensibly, they would come around eventually.	I thought that if I remained calm, and argued patiently, and sensibly, that they would come around eventually.
--	--

I could go on and on with examples, but there is probably no need to do so. If you see the point, then all you need to do is start working on this problem. When you realize you're writing a sentence with "that" in it, check to see whether you've used an extra "that." And when you proofread a paper or examination, be sure to check for extra "that's." Become conscious of this error, in both your speech and writing.

If you've had any trouble understanding the point in this section, I'd suggest you re-read the whole section, examples and all.

[I am uneasy about this section.]

THAT and WHICH

Here's how it's supposed to work:

I have a lot of cups, one of which is chipped:

The cup that is chipped is on the shelf.

I own several cars:

The car that burns oil is at the garage.

Several people brought beer to the party:

Let's drink some of the beer that Joe brought.

The birds that are flying around up there are gulls. The ones on the sand are terns.

The birds that you are looking at are gulls.

The basketball that I want to buy doesn't cost much. The others on display range all the way up to what I would call very expensive.

The baseball that we're playing catch with is very old. I should have brought out one of my newer ones.

All of that seems clear enough to me. What follows used to be equally clear to me, but I've heard and read "which" used where only "that" used to be used so many thousands of times that it now sounds quite normal to me. In fact, for twenty or more years I've been making the following mistake, at times, without even thinking about it:

This is the way they say it would be

The birds that are flying around up there are gulls.

The basketball that I want to buy doesn't cost much.

Let's drink some of the beer that Joe brought.

I do see the difference, of course, and now that I've written this section I'm going to be more careful with "which." After all, I do want to think of myself as a good writer.

I have only one cup, and it's chipped:

The cup, which is chipped, is on the shelf.

I own just one car:

The car, which burns oil, is at the garage.

Only one person brought beer:

Some of the beer, which Joe brought, is very expensive.

The birds, which are flying around up there, are gulls. I wonder where the terns are.

The birds, which I notice you are studying, are gulls.

The basketball, which I finally bought, doesn't seem to like to go through the hoop. Maybe I'd have more luck with a better one.

My baseball, which we're playing catch with, is very old. Tomorrow I'm going to buy a new one.

This is the way they say it shouldn't be

The birds which are flying around up there are gulls.

The basketball which I want to buy doesn't cost much.

Let's drink some of the beer which Joe brought.

THEIR and THIER

There's a simple way to remember this spelling. To write their, as in "Those are their proposals, not ours," all you have to do is write the word the, then add ir. If you can remember to write the word the first, you can't get into trouble on this one:

t h e + i r = their.