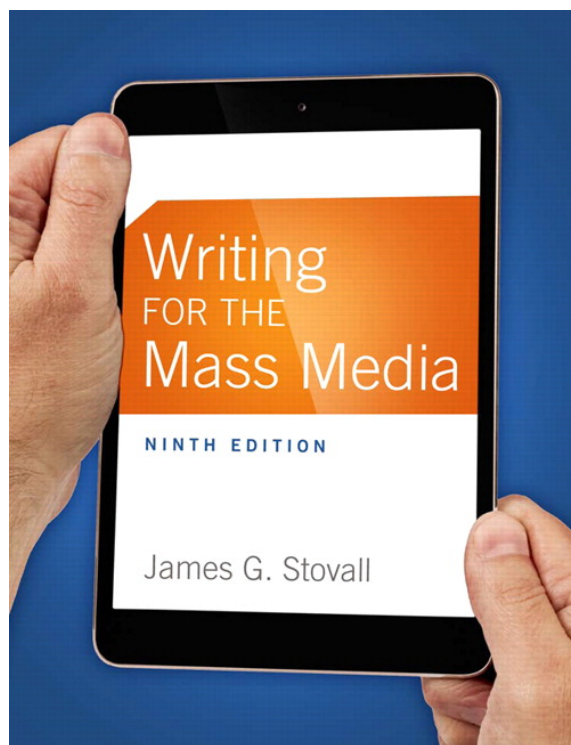


2

Basic Tools of Writing

This chapter attempts to make the point that a good writer knows the tools he or she has to work with. The basic analogy in the text is with the carpenter, who has a hammer and a saw. The carpenter must know what tasks he or she can accomplish with a hammer and what he or she must use the saw to do. A carpenter may have a great idea for something to build, but unless he or she knows the difference between a hammer and a saw, it is unlikely to get built. The writer is the same way. The writer may have some great ideas, but those ideas won't come into being unless the writer knows the tools he or she has to work with.

This chapter is a brief review of some of the basic tools a writer must work with. You may feel that grammar and punctuation are not subjects you wish to spend time on in your course. If that is the case, I would strongly recommend that you have your students read those sections and that you spend some time on the word usage section. This is an area I have found consistently that students have difficulty with. Knowing when to use a word for its precise and generally accepted meaning is particularly important in writing for the mass media.



Key terms and concepts

One of the purposes of this chapter is to give students a brief review of types and structures of sentences. Another is to point out some of the most common grammar and punctuation mistakes

that students make. Instructors should use this chapter to their best advantage by deciding what emphasis needs to be placed on these subjects. The exercises at the end of the chapter and the grammar exam and diagnostic exam in the appendices of the textbook could help you in making this assessment. Students should leave this chapter with an understanding of the following:

Sentence structures – Simple, complex, compound and compound-complex.

Sentence types – Declarative, interrogative, imperative and exclamatory.

Parts of speech – Nouns, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, verbs, conjunctions, prepositions and interjections.

Use of the comma – Overuse and underuse of the comma are both problems that students have. Commas should be used for clarity; that is, to separate items that would be confusing if they were not separated.

Agreement – Getting verbs and subjects to agree in number, and especially getting pronouns to agree with their antecedents, are among the most common problems that students have with their writing.

Apostrophe – Proper use of the apostrophe is the mark of an intelligent and well-educated writer. The apostrophe is most often used to indicate possession. It is only rarely used to create a plural.

Comma splices and run-on sentences – The joining of two independent clauses with only a comma is another common problem among student writers. Students should learn that for two independent clauses to be joined, they require a comma and a coordinating conjunction or simply a semicolon.

Spelling – The rules of spelling are important to learn, even at this stage of a student's development.

Links and resources

Guide to grammar and writing. The guide to grammar and writing contains scores of digital handouts on grammar and English usage. This site is a general guide to producing accurate writing and is helpful for aspiring and practicing journalists alike. The site is interactive, as visitors can select from a variety of grammar topics as well as writing situations and forms.

<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/>

Professor Gibson's wonderful world of editing. The site offers an all-around guide to editing complete with grammar and media writing particulars such as attribution, writing headlines and strategies for improving copy. The site is very deep and is a valuable resource for writers and editors.

<http://web.ku.edu/~edit/index.html>

Hypergrammar at the University of Ottawa. One of handful of online writing labs, visitors of this site may find grammar tips based on parts of speech, parts of a sentence, punctuation and more. Under the main page, visitors may also find links to other online writing labs in both the United States and Canada.

<http://www.writingcentre.uottawa.ca/hypergrammar/grammar.html>

Chapter notes

Rules for using commas. Ever wish you had a single sheet with all the basic rules for using commas on it? You could hand that to your students and say something like, "Here, learn this. We'll have a test next week. You won't ever have an excuse for misusing a comma again." Well, your dream has been fulfilled. JPROF.com offers a single-sheet (HTML or PDF file) that contains all the basic rules for using a comma — along with examples for each. The same material is also available on an HTML page. And in the quiz center of the site, there are a couple of comma quizzes you can use to help your students learn the rules. Look in the **Writing** section of JPROF.com. <http://www.jprof.com/writing/%E2%80%A2grammar/%E2%80%A2rules-for-using-commas/>

Grammar terms and rules. Just as any competent artisan knows the tools of his or her trade, the professional writer should know the basics of the English language. That includes knowing the terms of grammar (verbal, antecedent, etc.) as well as the rules. How is the writer to avoid a run-

on sentence if he or she doesn't know what it is? To learn these things, students must do the ditch digging of the intellectual process: repeated study and memorization. JPROF.com contains a thorough (but not overly long) list of terms and rules for using the language that the professional writer should know. The site also has an extensive primer on grammar, spelling, punctuation and diction in the editing section.

<http://www.jprof.com/2013/05/12/grammar-terms/>

Exercises

2-1 Writing skills

1. He is one of the greatest choreographers who has ever lived. **Correct**
 2. The general assumed what was then described as **dictatorial** powers.
 3. The couple has two children. **Correct**
 4. Inside the box **were** a man and a woman.
 5. Absent from the meeting were the mayor and two councilmen. **Correct**
 6. Every **firefighter** in the city, 250 in all were called out.
 7. A total of 650 Eskimos was examined and tested. **Correct**
 8. Only two in four were urgent cases, a group that included cardiacs, asthmatics and those found unconscious. **Correct**
 9. The chairman stated that response to the committee's activities has convinced him that the money for renovation can be raised. **Correct**
 10. Business administration and journalism courses provide the student with good background for work in public relations. **Correct**
 11. Here **come** the famous Kilgore College Rangerettes onto the field to perform at halftime.
 12. Leading the United States' show of strength were Arthur Ashe and Clarke Graebner. **Correct**
 13. The investigation revealed that none of the team members **was** involved in illegal endorsements of sports clothing.
 14. "There's two knocked out cold on the floor!" the sportscaster shouted.*
 15. Every one of us **has** asked that question sometime in our lives.
- **Although "There's" is incorrect in this sentence, you may not want to change it because it is contained with a direct quotation.**

2-2 Writing skills

1. Their rival forces, meanwhile, prepared to meet Wednesday to patch up peace. **(Add commas)**
2. Pasadena, Calif., is the site of the Rose Bowl.
3. It was O. J. Simpson (who, **whom**) the coach praised so highly.
4. The tomb of the pharaoh had (**laid**, lain) buried in the desert for centuries.
5. I heard the whistle of the train that was going to Denver at the crossing.
6. She borrowed an egg that was rotten from a neighbor.
7. For a year we heard almost nothing from our former neighbors.
8. There was a canary that never sang in a cage.
9. We hope that you will notify us on the enclosed postcard if you can attend the banquet.

10. Come here, Mary, and help us.
11. I know she (swum, **swims**) the channel regularly in this weather.
12. The children looked forward for several weeks to celebrating Christmas.
13. After **he (or she)** set foot on the uninhabited island of Europe, off Africa, to direct the filming of the sea turtles, a hurricane whirled across the Indian **Ocean** and hit the island.
14. He ran swiftly, the dog in front of him, and plunged into the forest.
15. The casings had (tore, **torn**) (**loose**, lose) from their bearings.

2-3 Punctuation

1. I subscribe to the New Yorker, Harper's Magazine and the New Republic.
2. Seven legislators from the southern part of the state changed their votes, and with their help, the bill was passed.
3. Do you like your steak rare, medium or well done?
4. A tape recorder gives very accurate reproduction, and it has the great advantage that it can be used at home as well as at the studio.
5. The gun went off, and everyone jumped.
6. The new cars are certainly more powerful, but it is doubtful that they are any safer.
7. Light entered the room through cracks in the walls, through holes in the roof and through one small window.
8. Hundreds of church bells, ringing loudly after years of silence, announced the end of the war.
9. The book was lying where I left it.
10. The advisor who is never in his office makes registration difficult.*
11. Some years ago, I lived in a section of town where almost everyone was a Republican.
12. Hearne was still disclaiming with great eloquence, but no one in the crowd was listening.
13. I bought a large bath towel.
14. We were sitting before the fire in the big room at Twins Farms, and Lewis had rudely retired behind the newspaper.
15. The ranchmen rode with their families into the little town and encouraged their sons to demonstrate their skill with broken horses.

***The context of the sentence will determine whether or not the phrase "who is never in his office" is essential or non-essential.**

2-4 Pronouns and verbs

1. He is the player (**who**, whom) probably will play shortstop.
2. Is this the person (who, **whom**) you want?
3. Each of the three quarterbacks (**is**, are) good runners.
4. Both Baylor and Arkansas (has, **have**) won six games and lost two.
5. Either of the two players (are, **is**) eligible.
6. Each of the members (**was**, were) in (**his [or her]**, their) seat(s)

when the session began.

7. (Who, **whom**), then, would the tax hurt?
8. Do you know to (who, **whom**) that notebook belongs?
9. (**Who**, Whom) is going with the reporter to get a picture of the crash?
10. He declared that everybody must play (**his [or her]**, their) part.
11. This story is between you and (I, **me**).
12. No matter how you look at it, it was (**she**, her) (who, **whom**) they opposed.
13. Bryan is the kind of man (whom, **who**) always thinks before he acts.
14. This is the only one of the typewriters that (**is**, are) working.
15. Everyone was on (their, **his or her**) best behavior.

2-5 Verbs

1. What (**lays**, lies) in the future for Alaska?
2. He had been (lain, **laid**) on a stretcher.
3. "(Lay, **Lie**) down and be quiet for an hour," he ordered.
4. The 6-year-old boy was just (setting, **sitting**) there in the ruins, trying not to cry.
5. The Ohio State football team (**sat**, set) back and enjoyed the movie of its game with Michigan.
6. The men worked all night (**raising**, rising) a monument in spite of the (raising, **rising**) tide of the river.
7. After lunch she had (laid, **lain**) down for a nap.
8. The hard tackling by the Georgia Bulldogs had really (began, **begun**) to tell.
9. Suddenly a cloud of dust (**rises**, raises) in the west.
10. Had the tight end simply (fell, **fallen**) on the ball, he would have (caught, **caught**) it.
11. Spillane (**led**, lead) you to believe that the butler was the murderer.
12. Chris Gilbert had (**proved**, proven) to be the outstanding player.
13. He said that he could (loose, **lose**) his fortune, but he had (chose, **chosen**) to gamble all he had.
14. The Smiths (use, **used**) to live in San Francisco.
15. The man was lucky he wasn't (drown, **drowned**).

2-6 Clauses

The independent clauses are underlined and the subordinate clauses are in italics.

1. They agreed to open negotiations *when both sides ceased fire.*
2. *If he had known,* he would never have said that.
3. *Since the current was swift,* he could not swim to shore.
4. The horse came up to the first jump, *when he stumbled and threw Jean*

off.

5. This is called the cryptozoite stage, after which the plasmodia break out of the liver cells and float about in the blood stream.
6. An especially big wave rolled in, when I finally managed to get my line unsnagged.
7. While walking past the building, the night watchman noticed the door was unlocked.
8. Harkey's injured knee has failed to heal completely; therefore, he may see little action against Notre Dame on Saturday.
9. The Ace Manufacturing Company, where I used to work, went bankrupt.
10. This last semester, if it has done nothing else, has given me confidence in myself.

2-7 Punctuation

1. Nobody knows the trouble I've seen; nobody knows but Jesus. (This is a line from a Negro spiritual. Punctuate it as if it were in the middle of a paragraph.)
2. The responsible reporter, one who is scrupulously honest, will still encounter problems.
3. Abraham Lincoln died on April 15, 1865, after being shot while attending a play at Ford's Theater.
4. My son was born on Nov. 15, 1980. It was a Saturday, so I didn't get to go to the football game
5. Why do you come over to my place?
6. Writing for the mass media takes much skill, perseverance and hard work.
7. Wow, I couldn't think of any place better to eat myself.
8. According to my professor, the world is absolutely, positively flat, and you should never forget it.
9. Where are the carpenters, where are the bricklayers, and most of all, where are the gardeners when we need them the most.
10. I couldn't come to class today, Joe said, because I had the flu.
11. Joe got a new computer, which set his parents back a good bit, and he's been dying to tell everybody about it.
12. "Help, I need somebody," the Beatles sang. "Not just anybody. Help, I need somebody. Help."

2-8 Word choice

1. There are good reasons why they're about to sell their house. (there, their, they're)
2. It's not too late to give the cat milk. (its, it's, to, too)
3. If you're going home, take your books with you. (your, you're)
4. Do you know whether the weather is pleasant there? (whether, weather, there, their, they're)
5. They have known for a long time that you would have gone if you had heard of the game in time. (have, of, 've)
6. Where there are many opinions, most people feel justified in

holding on to their own; and while there are several scientific explanations for stubbornness, there'll be few changes unless we can convince men that they ought to be more open-minded. (there, their, they're, there'll)

7. My principal objection to the principal of that school is that he is a man of no principle. (principal, principle)
8. Not until then will you be able to tell whether you have more than you need. (than, then)
9. If your strap is loose, you may lose your books. (lose, loose, you're, your)
10. Not even in the desert would I desert the table before eating dessert. (desert, dessert)
11. "Who's going to punch whose nose?" (whose, who's)
12. We accept the ruling without protest, although we (either one depending on the meaning of the sentence) all those over 45. (except, accept)
13. His speech affected the audience greatly. (affected, effected)
14. More than 50,000 people attend the opening game of the World Series. (Over, More than)
15. He was always one to do things differently. (different, differently)

2-9 Word choice

1. The bomb, which was to wreak havoc on the whole block, killed so many people that their bodies soon began to reek. (reek, wreak)
2. The newsmagazine that she subscribed to never seemed to tell her all that she needed to know. (that, which)
3. When he put the book down, he decided that he had just read something very unusual. (unique, unusual)
4. The reign of Queen Victoria was a long and prosperous one. (rein, reign)
5. He decided to pedal his bike down to the town square to see if he could peddle the things that he had made. (peddle, pedal)
6. The priest chose not to alter the cloths that were spread across the altar. (alter, altar)
7. We visited the Capitol building, where we saw the state legislature in session. (Capital, capital, Capitol)
8. All of the fraternities on campus came together to form a voting bloc that could not be overcome by the independent students. (block, bloc)
9. He flouted the poor child's way of speaking. (flouted, flaunted)
10. The professor tried her best to make the grading system more equitable. (equal, equitable)
11. I did not make it to the movie last night because of all the homework I had to do. (due to, because of)
12. She was irritated by the officious tone he used when he said, "And what have you been doing all week long?" (official, officious)

2-10 Writing problems

1. Gilligan was so charmed by the desert isle that he decided to marry the movie star.
2. As that nice professor said, we should always study for our exams.
3. The cantaloupe-throwing contest was canceled because of adverse weather.
4. Rushing to the scene of the crime, the prosecuting attorney was horrified at the grisly murder scene.
5. The criminal eluded police by hiding under a Toyota Corolla.
6. Feigning illness, the president refused to make the trip to Tulsa.
7. Morgan canceled the funeral after the dead man turned out to be alive.
8. Fewer than 100 pumpkins were piled in Smith's car.
9. Hurricane Bubba ravaged the Gulf Coast, causing \$10 billion in damages. **Correct**
10. The dancing troupe refused to buy their tights at wholesale. **Correct**
11. The restaurant owners raised the price of rutabagas by 100 percent whenever Mark Arnold came to town.
12. The journalist's canon of ethics prohibits taking gifts from sources.
13. Journalists should be guided by one principle: Always be accurate. **Correct**

2-11 Agreement

1. The team, consisting of three boys and three girls, has (has, have) a tough schedule this season.
2. None of the candidates has (has, have) accepted the invitation to the forum.
3. The faculty has (has, have) a meeting scheduled for this afternoon to discuss its (its, their) grievances.
4. The drug he took and his lack of sleep were (was, were) beginning to take its toll.
5. All of the students in the class tried hard to pass their (its, their) final exam.
6. The neighborhood association had certain issues it (it, they) wanted to address at the city council meeting.
7. Every journalist should try to write news stories that are as accurate as he or she (they, he or she) can make them.
8. The U.S. Supreme Court normally begins its (its, their) annual session on the first Monday of October.
9. Many people in the audience see (sees, see) this commercial and react (reacts, react) negatively to it.
10. Each parent had his or her (his or her, their) own way of dealing with unruly children.

2-11 Comma splices and run-on sentences

In some of these sentences, you can correct them by turning the comma into a semicolon or you can make them into two sentences. There are examples of each below.

1. I don't know of anyone who went. I didn't go myself.
2. The horses came loping into the barn, but there was no food for them.
3. There, I said it again; don't do that any more.
4. Many are the times the farmer wished he had bought more land because years ago it was cheap, and it was plentiful.
5. The trees in that forest were doomed; they had to be cut down.
6. The St. Louis Cardinals won the National League pennant, while the New York Yankees triumphed in the American League; they will meet in this year's World Series.
7. Where was the truck going? Which direction was it heading?
8. He has just finished his seventh mystery novel, and he has yet to have one published. He just keeps on trying.
9. John bought a cheap set of watercolors thinking he would be a great painter. He just wanted to be like Picasso.
10. He has an unusual hobby; he transplants trees, but he says he likes doing it because it gives him a chance to get outside most of the time.

Question bank

1. Choose the correct word that should begin the following sentence:

_____ time to feed the cat.

- a. Its * b. It's c. Its'

2. The major use of punctuation in writing is to

a. slow the reader down

b. bring the reader to a stop

* c. help the reader understand the writing

3. Choose the sentence that is correct:

a. Everyone ate their cake.

b. Everyone ate there cake.

* c. Everyone ate his or her cake.

4. Which of the following sentences uses the active voice?

a. The ball was thrown by John.

b. He was taken to the hospital by an ambulance

* c. The pitcher stared at the hitter with hatred in his eyes.

5. Which of the following sentences is correctly punctuated?

a. The man went into town and he bought a car.

* b. The man went into town, and he bought a car.

c. After the man went to town he bought a car.

6. The underlined phrase in the following sentence is an example of what?

John, my brother, left home for the Army.

a. preposition b. gerund * c. appositive

7. What kind of error is contained in the sentence below?

The police arrived just as the shooting ended.

a. Cliché

* b. Spelling error

- c. Error in agreement
- d. Redundancy
- e. Punctuation error

8. What is the correct punctuation for a direct quote?

- a. "The Congress should pass this legislation" the president said.
- b. "The Congress should pass this legislation" , the president said.
- * c. "The Congress should pass this legislation," the president said.
- d. "The Congress should pass this legislation." The president said.

9. Which of the following sentences is punctuated correctly?

- * a. The cat ate its food, and then it went outside.
- b. The cat ate its food and then it went outside.
- c. The cat ate its food and, then, it went outside.

10. Dr. Smith, an all-around nice guy, lectures on Monday mornings.

The underlined material is:

- * a. an appositive phrase
- b. an example of parallelism
- c. a dependent clause

11. Which of the sentences below represents a comma splice.

- a. George could not make it, so we left without him.
- * b. George could not make it, we left without him.
- c. George could not make it; we left without him.

12. Looking through the window, the couch is on the left.

The sentence above is an example of

- * a. a comma splice
- b. a gerund
- c. a dangling participle

13. What is the definition of a non-essential clause?

- * a. a group of words that is not essential to the meaning of the sentence and may be set off from

the rest of the sentence by commas

- b. a group of words that is essential to the meaning of the sentence but is set off by commas
- c. a group of words that is not essential to the meaning of the sentence but must not be set off from the rest of the sentence by commas

14. What is wrong with the sentence below?

Having just finished the exam, George saw the sky and it looked bright and wonderful.

- a. AP style error
- * b. punctuation error
- c. pronoun-antecedent agreement

15. Which of the statements below is correct?

- a. Grammatical mistakes are ok as long as the meaning of the writing is clear.
- b. Grammar rules change so rapidly that no one can write something that grammatically perfect.
- * c. Everything a professional writer writes should be grammatically perfect.

16. In which voice is the verb in the sentence below?

Jim was asked by his closet friend to be a groomsman.

- a. active
- * b. passive
- c. subjective