BELOVED MOTHER WHO
LOVED CORRECTING THE
GRAMMAR OF OTHERS.
SHE EITHER LAYS OR
LIES HERE .

Grammar and Writing Mechanics Review

Part I – Building Blocks: Clauses, Commas, & Sentence Structure

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The Writer's Mantra:

It's <u>all</u> about the reader
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Correct Grammar is Key to

Clear Communication

Rules of grammar ease communication by helping the audience (reader or listener) to process the information.

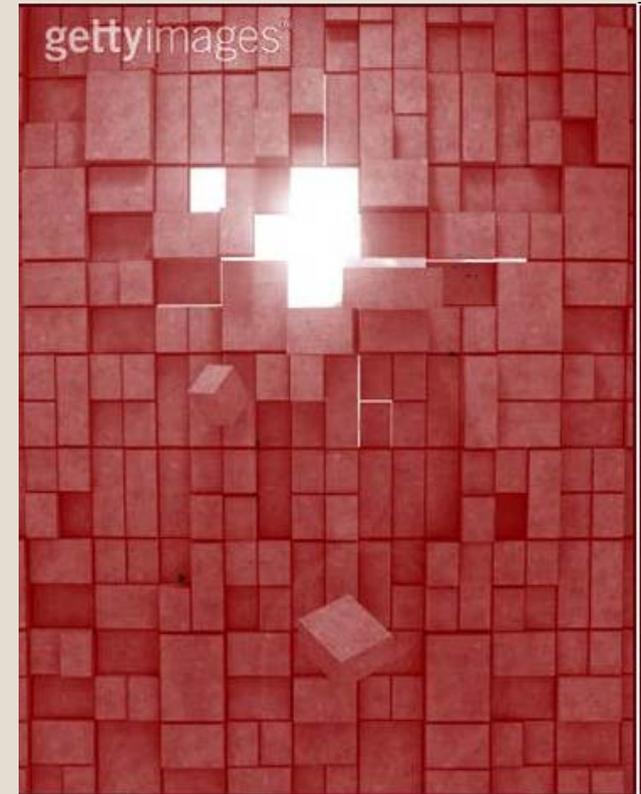# My computer has a grammar checker - isn't that enough?

- Grammar checkers are not only unreliable but often don't tell you how to fix an identified problem.

- Most U.S. students never cover grammar in their English classes; for many students, their only exposure to formal grammar is through foreign language classes.

- However, knowing the rules of English grammar will always be critical to clear communication.

- Poor grammar can distract from your message and might lead some to discount the validity of your thoughts.

- In addition, correct grammar is a key part of developing a professional persona and professional communication skills.

The smallest block is the weakest part of the wall

The sentence is the basic unit of communication.

Not surprisingly, the most common writing problems occur at the sentence level, specifically with the use of the comma.

Therefore, this review begins by looking at the building blocks: **clauses**, **sentence structure**, **and correct use of commas**.

A brief glossary…

- **Subject** – the **who or what** that is story of the sentence
- **Verb** – indicates **action or existence** of the subject
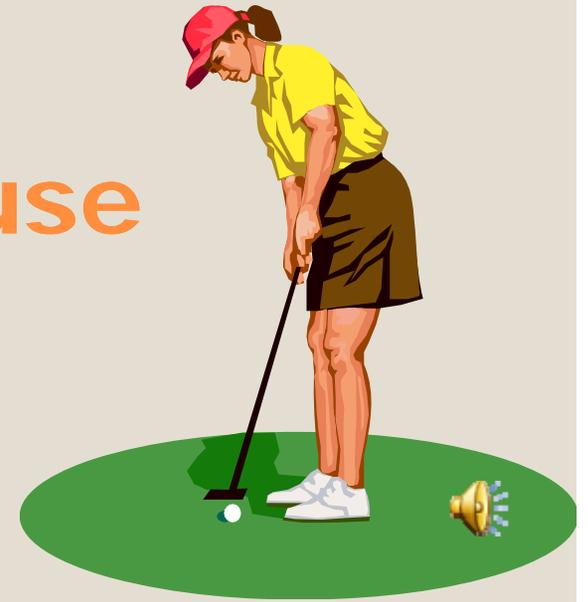- **Verb tenses** –indicate the **timing of the action**, such as past, present, future, and past perfect

Clauses vs. Phrase

- A clause is a group of words that **contains both** a **subject** and a **verb** that complement each other.

- A phrase is a group of words that **does not** contain a subject or a verb that complement each other.

Sentence Structure: Independent Clause

- An **independent clause** has a **subject**, a **verb**, and forms a **complete thought**.

The woman putts.

- An independent clause can stand alone as a **complete sentence**.

The man drives.

Sentence Structure: Compound Sentence

- A compound sentence contains **two independent clauses** joined by a **coordinating conjunction**.

- A conjunction joins words, phrases, and clauses in a sentence.

- **Conjunctions**
  - for
  - and
  - nor
  - but
  - or
  - yet
  - so

= FAN BOYS

Sentence Structure: Compound Sentences

- In a compound sentence (two complete thoughts joined by a conjunction), a **comma** is placed **before** the coordinating conjunction.

$$S \qquad V$$

The <u>case manager</u> <u>talked</u> with her client**,**

$$S \qquad V$$

and the <u>counselor</u> <u>spoke</u> with the child.

Where would you add the comma in the following sentence?

The agency ran short of funds**,** so the staff had to supply their own paper clips.

As shown in the underlined phrase below, a comma isn't needed when a conjunction is not joining clauses:

The agency ran short of funds, so the staff had to supply their own <u>paper clips and pencils.</u>

Sentence Structure: Dependent Clause

- A **dependent clause** contains a subject and verb, but the clause **cannot** stand alone as a complete sentence.

- Certain marker words help the reader identify dependent clauses

*APA style has special limitations on use of *since* and *while*.

Dependent clause markers include

because	though
~~since~~	although
when	unless
~~while~~	after
until	before
if	once
as	whether

Sentence Structure: Dependent Phrases and Clauses

- Dependent phrases and clauses help to clarify by **adding detail** to an independent clause.
  - may appear at the beginning, middle, or end of a sentence.

Combining & Punctuating Clause Combinations

IC. IC.	I went to the store. I didn't buy any bread.
IC; IC.	I went to the store; I didn't buy any bread.
IC, CC IC.	I went to the store, but I didn't buy any bread.
IC; IM, IC.	I went to the store; however, I didn't buy any bread.
DC, IC.	When I went to the store, I didn't buy any bread.
IC DC.	I didn't buy any bread when I went to the store.

* IC = independent clause; DC=dependent clause; CC=coordinating conjunction; IM= independent marker word

Dependent clause at beginning = Introductory clause

Place a comma between the independent clause and the dependent clause **when the dependent clause is placed at the beginning of a sentence.**

- **When the dependent clause is placed at the beginning of a sentence,** place a comma between the independent and dependent clauses.

In the above examples, the dependent clause is "when the dependent clause is placed at the beginning of a sentence." The placement of this clause within the sentence determines whether a comma is needed.

Intro clauses can give context or establish a rationale

□ **Although the semester was more than half over**, Maria had not started her research project.

□ **Given that the effects of living in poverty have been well documented**, agencies need to invest in asset-building programs designed to break the intergenerational cycle of dependence.

A comma follows the introductory element, which might be a word, a phrase, or a clause:

- **However,** recent evidence has shown….
- **After their interviews were finished,** the participants took part in a planning session…
- **Although the immigrant population in North Carolina has more than doubled in the past 2 years,** few research efforts have studied the needs of youth who are adjusting to a new country and new culture.

Dependent Clauses

When a dependent clause follows the independent clause,
DO NOT place a comma between the two clauses.

- Compare,

The participants took part in a planning session after their interviews were finished.

with

After their interviews were finished, the participants took part in a planning session.

The dependent clause in the first sentence follows the independent clause, so no comma is needed. In the second example, the dependent clause precedes the independent clause and requires a comma.

Sentence Structure Determines Emphasis

- Even though the immigrant population in North Carolina has more than doubled in the past 2 years, few research efforts have studied the needs of youth who are adjusting to a new country and new culture.

- Few research efforts have studied the needs of youth who are adjusting to a new country and new culture even though the immigrant population in North Carolina has more than doubled in the past 2 years.

Other sentence connectors

- **Semicolons** –are used to connect two independent clauses with closely related topics
  - ◦ Creates two points of emphasis
  - ◦ Also used to separate items in a complex list
- **Colons** – are used to connect an independent clause and a dependent clause or phrase.
  - ◦ The **independent clause** must precede the colon
  - ◦ In other words, what's to the left of the colon **must** form a complete sentence.

Misconnections

- **Wrong-** The agency provides counseling; emergency shelter; and legal aid services. (semicolons aren't needed for simple lists)

- **Revised-** The agency provides counseling, emergency shelter, and legal aid services. (use commas between items in a simple list)

- **Wrong-** Agency services include: counseling, emergency shelter, and legal aid. (Independent clause must precede colon)

- **Revision 1-** Agency services include counseling, emergency shelter, and legal aid.

- **Revision 2-** Our agency provides three critical services: counseling, emergency shelter, and legal aid. (Complete sentence precedes colon)

Semicolons: A hinged gate

- Some people write on the computer; others prefer to write using paper and pencil.
- But however parents choose to raise their children, it is their choice; thus, efforts to ensure better child outcomes must start with the parents.
- The agency has offices in Bangor, Maine; Lockport, Illinois; Ames, Iowa; and Hilo, Hawaii.
- Program services were offered to the mothers; the cherub group (children ages 3 to 6 years); and family support members.

The Colon: A Closed Door

- **Before revision-** The survey asked participants' opinions on several areas of consumer satisfaction. These areas were satisfaction with services, customer-care satisfaction, and whether they were satisfied with follow-up services.

- **Revision-** The survey asked participants' opinions on **three** areas: satisfaction with services, satisfaction with customer care, and satisfaction with follow-up services.

The Colon: A Closed Door

Before revision - The strategies of Regan's *trickle-down economics* have proven to be ineffective. The strategies required economic compromises and concessions that have left the most vulnerable of our population without the safety net of social services.

Revision -The strategies of Reagan's *trickle-down economics* have proven ineffective: compromises and concessions have left the most vulnerable of our population without the safety net of social services.

Punctuation & Clauses

- Punctuation and signal words are used in combination to indicate the **relative importance** of information or details.

- What are the **most important** details in the sentence below?
  - One of the panels on the north side of the solar receiver will be repainted with Solarcept during the Febuary plant outage.[1]

[1] Example taken from Michael Alley's *The Craft of Scientific Writing.*

Put less important info in dependent clause or infinitive phrases.

Before revision-One of the panels on the north side of the solar receiver will be repainted with Solarcept during the Febuary plant outage.[1] (click forward for revision)

Revision- Because the February plant outage gave us the opportunity to repair the north side of the solar receiver, we repainted the panels with Solarcept, which is a new paint developed to increase absorption of solar energy rays.[2]

[1-2] Examples taken from Michael Alley's *The Craft of Scientific Writing*.

Show relative importance through subordination

Because the February plant outage gave us the opportunity to repair the north side of the solar receiver, we repainted the panels with Solarcept, which is a new paint developed to increase absorption of solar energy rays.

The relative importance of the information is indicated by the use of dependent clauses and infinitive phrases.

Most important info? Panels were painted with Solarcept.

Information Hierarchy
Restrictive vs. Nonrestrictive Clauses

- A restrictive clause contains info that is **essential** to the meaning of the sentence.
- Usually introduced by *that*
- **Do Not** enclose in commas

- A nonrestrictive clause contains additional but **nonessential** info that can be omitted with losing the main message.
- Usually introduced by *which*
- Enclose with commas

Sentence Structure Helps the Reader Process the Information

- Violence has several negative sequelae that affect careers, friendships, and families.[restrictive, essential clause]

- The negative health sequelae of violence, which affects careers, friendships, and families, have been linked with …[nonrestrictive, nonessential clause]

- The aim of this evaluation is to determine which of the three current interventions…[which is also used to indicate certain items among many]

APA Uses the Serial Comma

- In a list of items, the **serial comma** precedes the conjunction that joins the last item of the list.
  - ◦ …such as books, journals, videos, **and** films.
  - ◦ The serial comma functions as **important signal** to the reader
    - · helps reader process information
    - · use prevents **mental whiplash**
    - · **carries over** to APA citation and reference formats
      - ◦ Example: (Anderson, Cooper, Barnes, **&** Noble, 1999)

No commas = Confusion

The students left Dana a list of items to buy for their breakfast with Dean Richman. The note listed cream cheese fruit rolls sugar substitute coffee and grits

What should Dana buy?
- - cream, cheese, fruit, rolls, sugar substitute, coffee, and grits?
- -cream cheese, fruit rolls, sugar, substitute coffee, and grits?
- cream cheese, fruit, rolls, sugar substitute, and coffee? (forget the grits!)

Complex sentence

- Contains at least one dependent clause combined with at least one independent clause by some means of **subordination**.
- (click forward for examples)

  ◦ **Although** I have the time, I am not going home this weekend.

  ◦ I am independently wealthy; **however**, I work for fun.

  ◦ **Because** of insufficient funding, the classes were limited to four couples.
  ◦ With her work and family responsibilities, the full-time program was too burdensome for Gilda, **whereas** single students had copious amounts of free time.

Ways to combine info of equal weight

- **Coordination**: join 2 independent clauses by using a **conjunction** or **semicolon** without a subordinating connector word.
  - ◦ Clues reader that both ideas are of equal importance
- The staff recommendation included interventions for substance abuse, **but** the council budget provided for educational programs.
- The university has eliminated funding for several important programs; continued pressure to reduce the budget will likely bring another round of cuts.

Grammar Resources

- UNC SOSW Grammar Tutorial
- CCC Guide to Grammar & Writing
  - http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/
- Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue Univ.
  - http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/
- ESL Englishpage.com Verb Tutorial
  - http://www.englishpage.com/verbpage/verbtenseintro.html