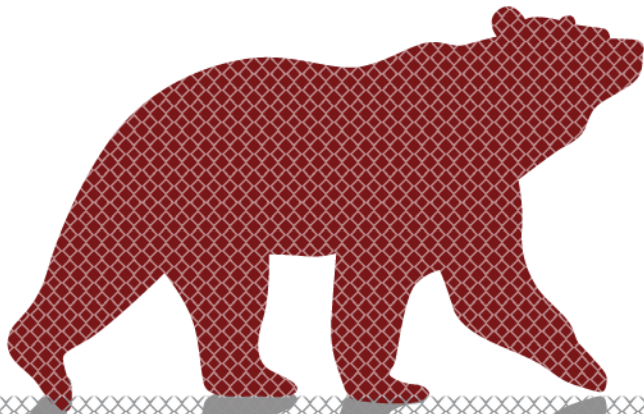


# 20 COMMON GRAMMAR ERRORS

Fix them -- fix the paper!

Michael Frizell, Director

The Writing Center



**Missouri State**  
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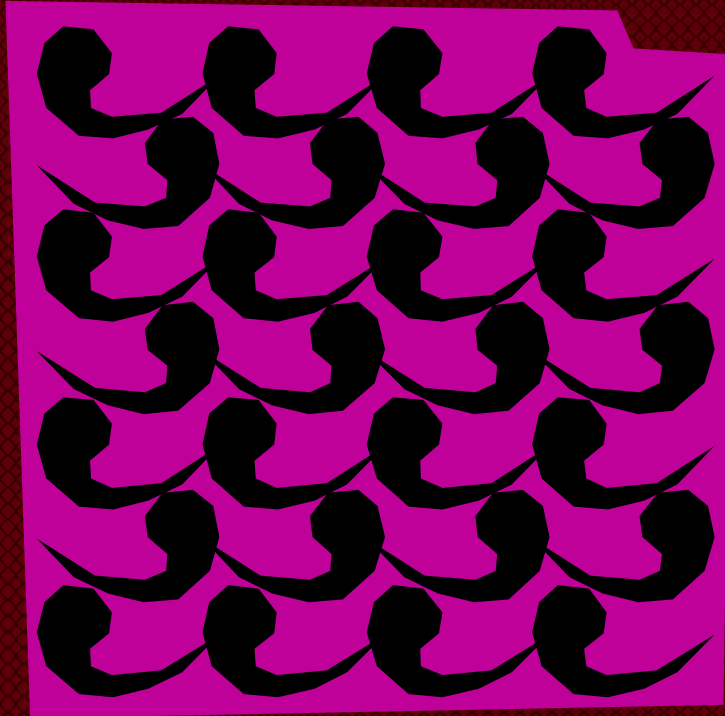


# Grammar is Ever-evolving and DULL





# Missing Comma After Introductory Clause





# Example

“After the devastation of the siege of Leningrad (introductory clause) the Soviets were left with the task of rebuilding their population as well as their city.”

Problem: A comma should be placed after “Leningrad” to separate the clause.



# Vague Pronoun Reference





# Example

“The boy and his father knew that he was in trouble.”

Problem: Who is in trouble? The boy? His Father?  
Some other person?



# Missing Comma in a Compound Sentence





# Examples

“Wordsworth spent a good deal of time in the Lake District with his sister Dorothy and the two of them were rarely apart.”

Problem: Comma should be placed before the "and."

- *'Store in a cool dry, odour free place'*

Problem: If I don't own a 'cool dry' and don't have a place that's free, what do I do? Even without the missing comma, I hope they don't mean that I store my Weetabix in a cool, dry odour place that's free. That doesn't sound appetizing.





# Using the Wrong Word

This speaks for itself.



# No Comma In Nonrestrictive Relative Clauses





# What's a Restrictive Clause?

*"My brother in the red shirt likes ice cream."*

- If you have TWO brothers, then the information about the shirt is restrictive.
- It is necessary to define WHICH brother likes ice cream.
- Restrictive clauses, because they are essential to identifying the noun, use no commas.



# What's a Nonrestrictive Clause?

If you have one brother, then the information about the shirt is not necessary to identifying your brother. It is NON-RESTRICTIVE and, therefore, requires commas:

*"My brother, in the red shirt, likes ice cream."*



# Wrong or Missing Inflected Ends


Refer to something you already understand.

A common mistake involving wrong or missing inflected ends is in the usage of **who/whom**.




# Wrong or Missing Inflected Ends

Dear Thorax,  
Recently I married a woman whom  
for many years I've been in love with.  
Every day now is replete with a  
passion and happiness I cannot  
help but look forward to.  
Every night is pure rapture  
nothing else can compare  
with. Have I any right, in  
such a world as this, to live  
with a woman I feel such  
insatiable ardor for?  
- Overawed in N.H.



Dear Overawed,  
If you end another sentence  
with a preposition, I'll kill  
you with my bare hands.



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Wrong/missing/misplaced prepositions.



# Examples

“different from” vs. “different than”

“different from” is considered correct

“toward” vs. “towards”

“toward” is correct



# Comma Splice



A comma splice occurs when two independent clauses are joined only with a comma.





# Examples

*"We could make better use of our land, parks and recreation areas could be set aside."*

Use a period or semi-colon instead.

*"I was strongly attracted to her, she had special qualities."*

Add "for" before "she."



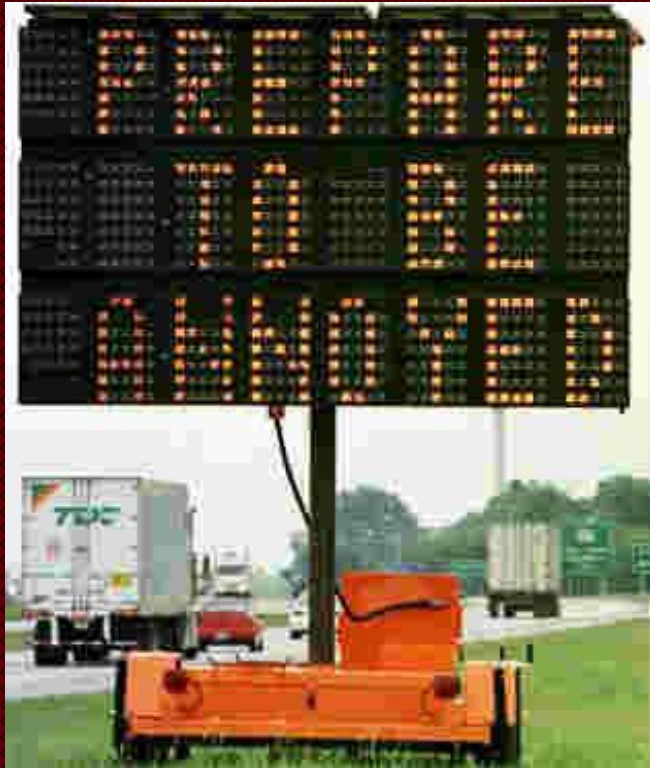
# Possessive Apostrophe Error



Sometimes apostrophes are incorrectly left out; other times, they are incorrectly put in (her's, their's, etc.)



# Tense Shifting



Be careful to stay in a consistent tense. Too often students move from past to present tense without good reason. The reader will find this annoying.



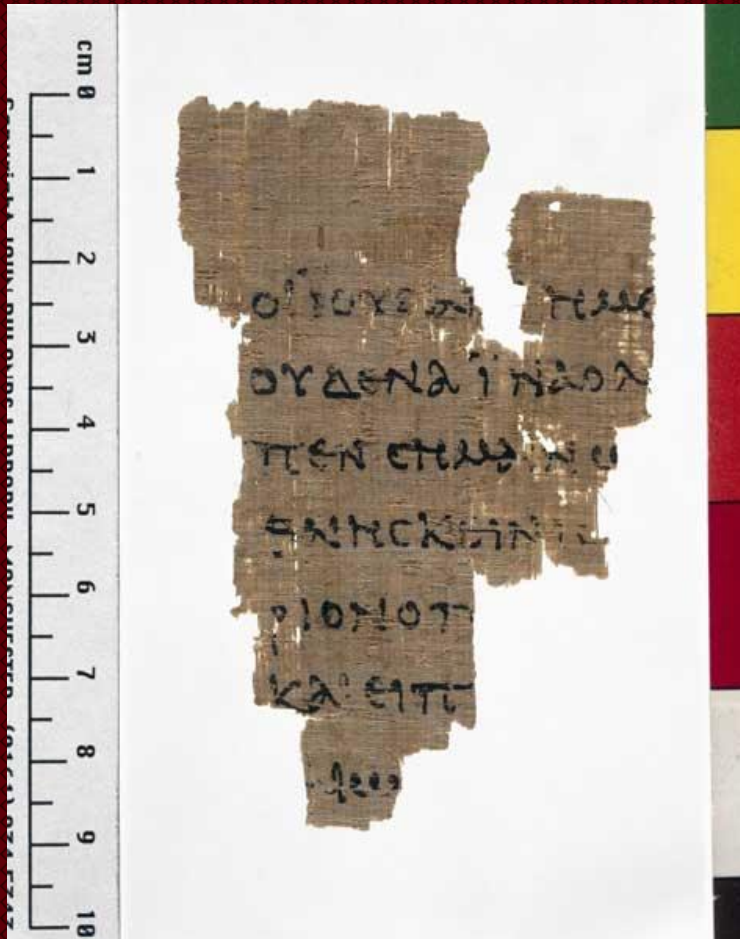
# Unnecessary Shift in Person



Don't shift from "I" to "we" or from "one" to "you" unless you have a rationale for doing so.



# Sentence Fragments



Silly things, to be avoided. Unless, like here, you are using them to achieve a certain effect.



# Wrong Verb Tense or Form





# Example

*“In the evenings, I like to lay on the couch and watch TV.”*

“Lay” in this instance is the past tense of the verb “to lie.”

The sentence should read: “In the evenings, I like to *lie* on the couch and watch TV.”

(Please note that “to lay” is a separate verb meaning “to place in a certain position.”)



# Subject/Verb Agreement







# Example



“We hates subject/verb agreement,” said Gollum.



# Missing Commas

“Difficult punctuation  
lies ahead, Harry.”



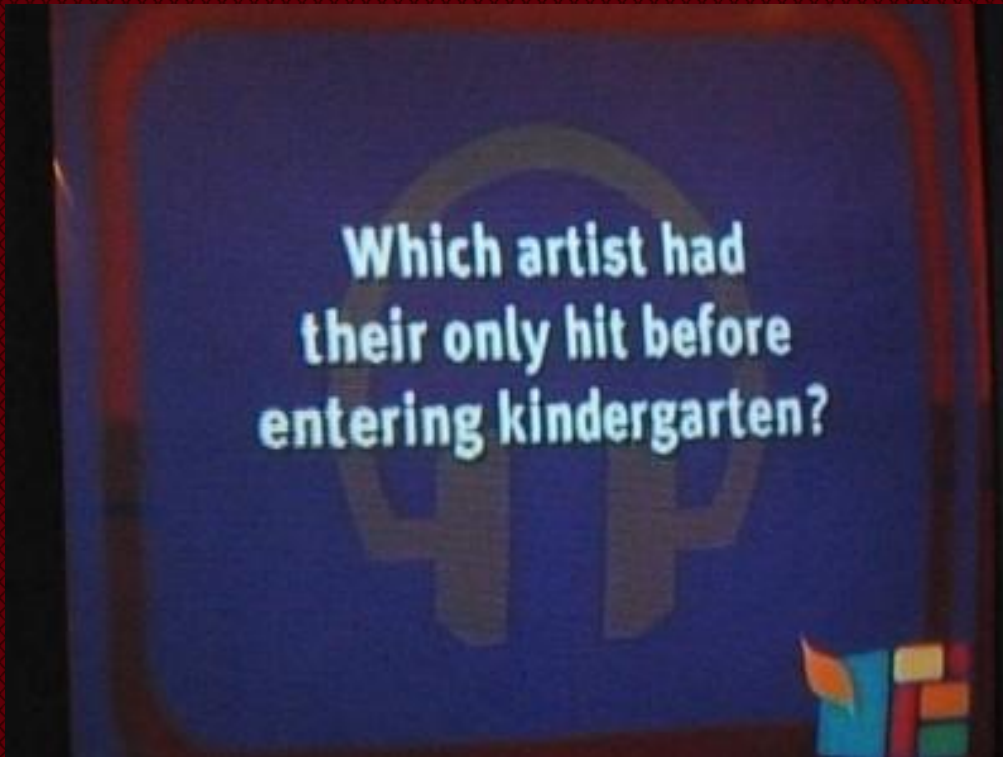


# Example

- Also include commas in a list: “Apples, oranges, pears, and bananas...”
- Difference of opinion as to if the last noun before “and” needs it...
- My advice? USE IT.



# Pronoun Agreement



*“Everyone is  
entitled to  
their opinion.”*  
**EVERYONE** is  
*singular!*



# Unnecessary Commas with Restrictive Clauses

*See No Comma in Nonrestrictive Relative Clauses*

This motion picture would have been rated





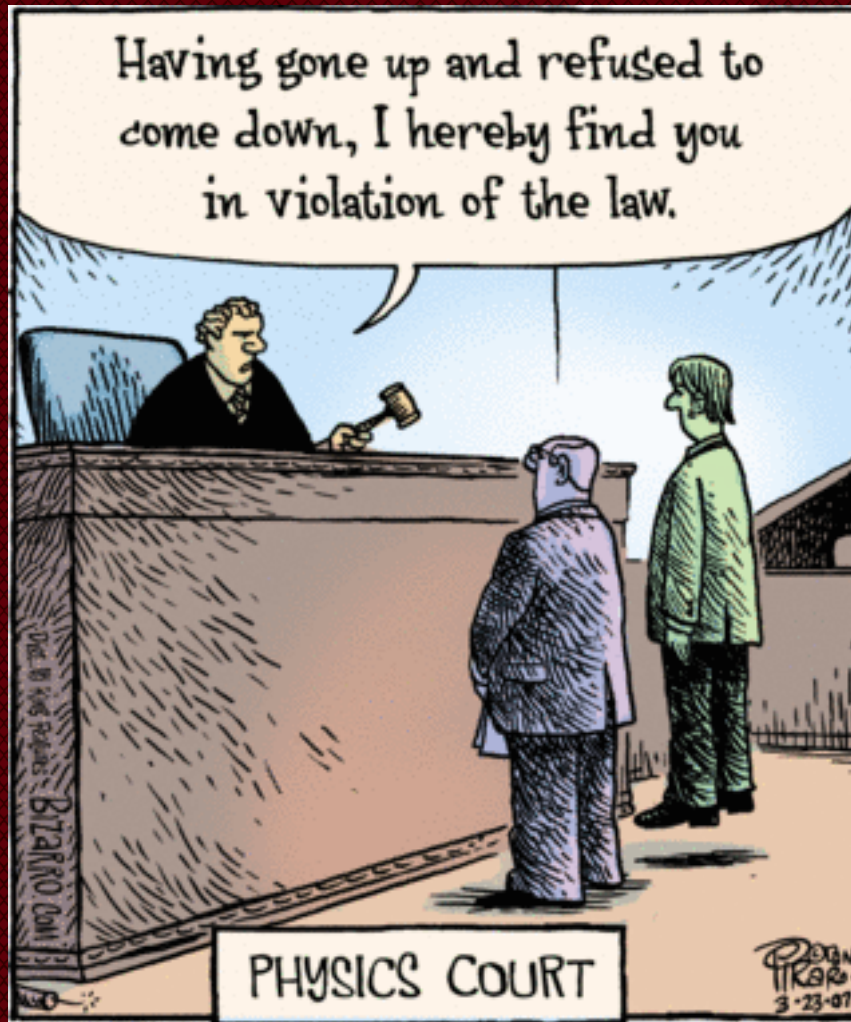
# Run-on, Fused Sentence



*“Researchers investigated several possible vaccines for the virus then they settled on one.”*



# Dangling, Misplaced Modifier



The subject of the participial modifier is supplied by the direct object in the main clause, not by the subject; it is the defendant, not the judge, who has gone up and not come down.



# Its Versus It's

## BOB'S QUICK GUIDE to ITS and IT'S, YOU IDIOTS

angryflower.com

**ITS = IT IS**

\* or "it has"

THAT'S IT, FOLKS!  
THAT'S ALL Y'GOTTA  
REMEMBER! CAN  
YOU SUBSTITUTE  
"IT IS"? THEN USE  
"IT'S". IF YOU CAN'T,  
**DON'T!!!**



### EXAMPLE:

The cat hurt *it's* feet  
The cat hurt *it is* feet.

**WRONG!**

THIS ONE'S STUPIDLY  
SIMPLE, PEOPLE!!!



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# BOB'S QUICK GUIDE to the APOSTROPHE, YOU IDIOTS

THERE'S A LOT OF FRUSTRATION IN THE NEWSPAPER CARTOON INDUSTRY ABOUT THE PUBLIC'S DEEP IGNORANCE ABOUT THIS ELEMENTARY PUNCTUATION MARK. HERE, THEN, IS A SIMPLE GUIDE TO SOME BASIC GRAMMAR, YOU ILLITERATE MORONS.



### CONTRACTION

The cat's out of the bag.

**CORRECT**

### POSSESSIVE

The cat's feet are out of the bag.

**ALSO CORRECT**

### PLURAL

All the cat's are out of the bag.

**NO! WRONG! TOTALLY WRONG! WHERE'D YOU LEARN THIS? STOP DOING IT!**

### SOME POPULAR BUT INCORRECT RULES

**1.** When pluralizing a word that ends with a vowel, add an apostrophe.  
taco's burrito's latte's  
tomatoe's potato's knife's

THIS IS WRONG!

**2.** When pluralizing any other word, add an apostrophe.

ball's kitty's  
car's VCR's  
sheep's gribbl's

AND SO IS THIS!

**3.** Add an apostrophe wherever you want.

AND OF COURSE SO IS THIS!



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# Now What?

When reading your papers for grammar errors...

- First, determine whether the error is a matter of carelessness, or a pattern of error.
- Second, prioritize among your errors.
- Third, practice writing sentences.
- And finally, understand that GRAMMAR COUNTS.

- Karen Goczik, Dartmouth:  
[www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student/ac\\_paper/grammar.shtml](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student/ac_paper/grammar.shtml)
- Kim Cooper, Harvard:  
<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/documents/GP.html>
- [www.angryflower.com](http://www.angryflower.com)
- [www.re-vision.com](http://www.re-vision.com)
- [www.missouristate.edu/writingcenter/resources.htm](http://www.missouristate.edu/writingcenter/resources.htm)



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