

Crimes Against the English Language

— First Edition —



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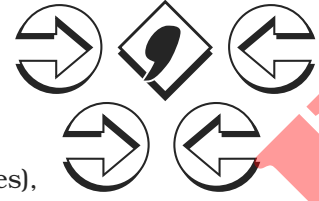
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The Case of the Sentence Splices



Common Violations

When writers incorrectly join two independent clauses (complete sentences), they create one of two common violations:

- In a *run-on sentence*, two sentences are joined without any punctuation whatsoever.
- In a *comma splice*, the sentences are joined by a comma alone, rather than by a comma and a coordinating conjunction (such as *and*, *but*, or *or*).

Both run-ons and comma splices are confusing because there are no clues to let readers know that a new sentence has started. The following are examples:

Run-On Sentence: The smoke was thick they had trouble advancing.

Comma Splice: The smoke was thick, they had trouble advancing.

Crime Prevention

Writers can use several options to avoid run-ons and comma splices. The best option will vary depending on the content of the sentences and the relation between them.

One fix is to write two separate sentences. However, this is not necessarily the best choice with short sentences, like those below, because the result can be choppy.

The smoke was thick. They had trouble advancing.

If two sentences are closely related, they can be joined with a comma and a coordinating conjunction (*and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, *for*, *so*, or *yet*).

The smoke was thick, so they had trouble advancing.

We know who killed her, but we can't prove it.

Two closely related sentences of equal importance can be joined with a semicolon. This option sometimes works better with a transitional expression that helps show the relation between the two sentences, such as in the second example below.

We know who killed her; we just can't prove it.

The smoke was thick; as a result, they had trouble advancing.

Often the most effective way to fix a run-on sentence or a comma splice is to make one clause subordinate to the other. Subordination generally shows the relation between ideas more clearly than any other option does. Subordination can be achieved either by joining two sentences with a subordinating conjunction (such as *after*, *although*, *because*, *before*, *unless*, and *whereas*) or by converting one sentence to a phrase that modifies the main idea.

They had trouble advancing *because* the smoke was thick.

The smoke was thick, *making it difficult for them to advance*.

The diagram shows a 5-way intersection. In the center is a diamond-shaped sign with a black border and a black exclamation mark. Surrounding the central sign are five circular signs, each with a black border and a white background. The signs are arranged in a circle: one at the top, one at the top-left, one at the bottom-left, one at the bottom-right, and one at the top-right. Each circular sign contains a black arrow pointing in a specific direction. The top sign has an arrow pointing straight down. The top-left sign has an arrow pointing straight up. The bottom-left sign has an arrow pointing straight up. The bottom-right sign has an arrow pointing straight down. The top-right sign has an arrow pointing straight up. A red arrow points from the bottom-right towards the intersection.

Example: CS The smoke was thick, they had trouble advancing.

 The smoke was thick, so they had trouble advancing.

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The Case of the Two-Clause Comma

Common Violations

If done properly, commas may be used between two sentences (also known as independent clauses). However, a number of violations can result from improper use of commas:

- Using a comma alone instead of a comma and a coordinating conjunction (such as *and*, *or*, *but*, or *so*), resulting in what is called a *comma splice*.
- Failing to use a comma and a coordinating conjunction where needed to separate two sentences.
- Putting the comma in the wrong location.
- Putting a comma in the middle of a compound predicate.

Crime Prevention

Two sentences can be joined with a comma and a coordinating conjunction (*and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, *for*, *so*, or *yet*). They cannot be joined by a comma alone. Using only a comma results in what is called a *comma splice*. (Refer to “The Case of the Spliced Sentences” for more information on preventing comma splices.)

Wrong: The caller was unfamiliar with the area, he was unable to give us the exact location of the accident.

Right: The caller was unfamiliar with the area, so he was unable to give us the exact location of the accident.

A word that often gets writers into trouble is *however*. *However* is *not* a coordinating conjunction that allows you to join two sentences. It's a transitional expression. Using it as if it were a coordinating conjunction, as in the first example below, creates another comma splice. If you want to join the two sentences of *equal importance*—although nothing says you must—do so with a semicolon. The only time it is appropriate to put commas before and after *however* is when it's used as a *parenthetical element*—a nonessential word that interrupts the flow in the middle of a sentence, as in the third example below.

Wrong: The accident occurred because the driver fell asleep at the wheel, *however*, a median barrier may have prevented him from crossing into oncoming traffic.

Right: The accident occurred because the driver fell asleep at the wheel; *however*, a median barrier may have prevented him from crossing into oncoming traffic.

Right: The accident occurred because the driver fell asleep at the wheel; a median barrier, *however*, may have prevented him from crossing into oncoming traffic.

The comma may be omitted when one or both sentences are short and closely related.

The bomb exploded *but* no one was injured.

Let's see how bad the damage is *and* then we'll decide.



The Case of the Two-Clause Comma (continued)

However, a comma is often needed to prevent misreading. A sentence must be clear *as the reader is reading it*—from left to right—without having to back up and reread something that created confusion the first time. Without commas, the following sentences may be misread to imply that *we never searched the house for the owner* and that *I want to cut either the seat belt or the victim*. The comma provides the pause that would be heard if the sentence were read aloud.

Confusing: We never searched the house *for the owner* told us everyone was out.
Clear: We never searched the house, *for the owner* told us everyone was out.

Confusing: Let's cut the seat belt *or the victim* will have trouble breathing.
Clear: Let's cut the seat belt, *or the victim* will have trouble breathing.

Do not use a comma if there is no complete sentence (subject and predicate) after the conjunction. The following examples contain a *compound predicate*—two predicates sharing the same subject. The text that follows the conjunction *and* cannot stand alone as a complete sentence.

Wrong: Paramedics placed her on the gurney, and loaded her into the ambulance.
Right: Paramedics placed her on the gurney and loaded her into the ambulance.

Some experts say it's permissible to use a comma if the compound predicate expresses contrast, such as when joined with the word *but*. Others disagree. The bottom line is clarity. If the sentence is clear without a comma, you can safely omit it (as in the example below). If it isn't clear or if you're unsure, use a comma. You have a greater obligation to your readers than to the punctuation police.

Paramedics treated her for minor injuries but didn't transport her to the hospital.

The comma almost always goes *before the* coordinating conjunction, not after.

Wrong: We finally subdued the suspect *but*, it took all four of us to do it.
Right: We finally subdued the suspect, *but* it took all four of us to do it.

The comma goes *after* the coordinating conjunction only when it is part of an interrupting expression in a compound sentence. What differentiates the two sentences below is the inclusion or omission of the subject *we* after the second comma.

Comma Before: We won't have time to visit the fire station this week, *but* if it's all right with you, *we* can reschedule for next week.
Comma After: We won't have time to visit the fire station this week *but*, if it's all right with you, can reschedule for next week.

For years it was considered unacceptable to start a sentence with a coordinating conjunction. This is no longer the case. You can occasionally use a coordinating conjunction at the beginning of a sentence either for special emphasis or to provide a smoother transition in a series of sentences. However, make sure there is a logical connection between the sentences, and use this technique in moderation so that it doesn't become a distraction to your readers.

Is there a chance they are still alive under all that rubble? *Or* is this just going to be a body recovery operation?

You Be the Detective: The Case of the Two-Clause Comma



Instructions: Correct the following sentences by inserting missing commas, crossing out inappropriate commas, and providing any other punctuation that may be needed. If a sentence is correct as is, write OK next to it. (Check your answers on page 159.)

Example: We never searched the house for the homeowner told us everyone was out.



1. The fire raged out of control and dozens of homes were damaged or destroyed.
2. Morgan grabbed the nozzle, and proceeded up the stairs.
3. I rescued the wife and the husband carried their children to safety.
4. Ken's friends tried to stop him from driving away but, he wouldn't listen.
5. Leslie completed paramedic training, and is now applying for a job with AMR.
6. Ed insisted he never fired the gun but gunshot residue on his hands told a different story.
7. I finished cataloging the evidence collected and am now finalizing my report.
8. Placards identify the primary hazard, they do not reflect secondary hazards that can also present a significant danger.
9. I'll review the common types of cargo tanks, the hazardous materials they generally transport and how they behave in an emergency and since you have more expertise with rail cars, I'll let you cover rail transportation of hazardous materials.
10. The injuries Cassandra sustained are not serious but the doctor wants to keep her in the hospital overnight for observation.
11. The patient couldn't wiggle his fingers nor could he squeeze my fingers when I asked him to.
12. My recommendation is to let the fire burn for without sufficient foam, we're more likely to spread the burning gasoline.

The Case of the Introductory Comma

Common Violations

Most introductory words, phrases, and clauses should be set off by commas. The comma signals readers that the introductory part is over and the main part of the sentence is about to begin. It also provides a natural pause, as there would be if the sentence were read aloud. Common violations in this section are:

- Failing to use commas after introductory matter where it is standard to use them.
- Failing to use commas where the comma is essential to ensure clarity.
- Using commas after phrases that look like introductory matter but which serve as subject of the sentence instead.

Crime Prevention

Use a comma after the words *yes* or *no* and mild interjections at the beginning of a sentence.

Yes, I checked for a pulse before starting CPR.

Well, what did you expect?

Use a comma after independent comments (e.g., *fortunately*, *obviously*, and *if necessary*) added to provide insight as to the writer's attitude. Likewise, use a comma after transitional expressions (e.g., *however*, *generally*, and *for example*) used to help move a reader from one idea to the next.

Fortunately, their injuries were minor.

However, the car was totaled.

Use a comma after most introductory phrases and clauses. It's not necessary for you to know the proper grammatical terms for the different types of phrases or clauses. It is necessary, however, to recognize when readers need that signal—that pause—to indicate a break between the introductory matter and the main part of the sentence.

After the fire, all I want is a hot shower and a warm bed.

Considering what the car looked like, it's amazing that anyone survived the crash.

Although I can't prove it, I firmly believe that Victor is the arsonist.

While commas are used to set off most introductory words, phrases, and clauses, there are exceptions and special circumstances. If you don't understand these concepts, you may find yourself either putting commas where they don't belong or omitting them where they're needed.

Watch out for phrases that look like introductory material but which actually serve as the subject of the sentence. Do not use a comma in these situations.

Comma: *Having been arrested twice before*, you should be familiar with the process.

No Comma: *Having been arrested twice before* is nothing to be proud of.

The Case of the Introductory Comma (continued)

- Comma:** *Knowing that the woman had been shot by her husband, we staged a block away until police secured the scene.*
- No Comma:** *Knowing that the woman had been shot by her husband made us wary.*



Commas are unnecessary after ordinary introductory adverbs that tell when or how often.

Sometimes we have difficulty determining the origin of the fire.

Last week one of my neighbors was arrested.

You can often omit the comma after a short prepositional phrase. A prepositional phrase is one that starts with a word used to indicate place (e.g., *above*, *below*, and *inside*), direction (e.g., *up*, *down*, and *across*), time (e.g., *before*, *during*, and *after*) or other relationships (e.g., *by* and *with*).

In July we start our new budget year.

By nine o'clock we had already run three EMS calls.

Sometimes, however, the comma is needed to ensure clarity. A sentence must be easily understood *as a person is reading it*. In the following examples, a comma provides just enough of a pause to keep readers from running the words together, creating confusion that requires reading the sentence a second time. An alternate solution is to rewrite the sentence.

- Unclear:** *After eating the firefighters felt better. (Who ate the firefighters?)*
- Clear:** *After eating, the firefighters felt better.*
- Clear:** *The firefighters felt better after eating.*

- Unclear:** *Inside the smoke was thick. (What was inside the smoke?)*
- Clear:** *Inside, the smoke was thick.*
- Clear:** *The smoke was thick inside.*

Do not omit the comma if the prepositional phrase contains any form of a verb.

By backing out now, we have a better chance of reaching the safety zone without having to deploy our fire shelters.

Before we do anything else, I want to photograph the scene.

Omit the comma if the normal word order is inverted.

- Inverted Word Order:** *From deep within the wreckage came a faint cry for help.*
- Normal Word Order:** *A faint cry for help came from deep within the wreckage.*

You Be the Detective: The Case of the Introductory Comma

Instructions: Insert commas where appropriate in the sentences below. If the sentence is correct as is, write OK next to it. (Check your answers on page 159.)

Example: Before we do anything else, I want to photograph the scene.

1. Knowing that my mother was afraid of hospitals I was reluctant to suggest calling for an ambulance.
2. Nevertheless we need to treat this as a crime scene.
3. In the afternoon I want to go to the gun range.
4. If direct pressure and elevation aren't sufficient to stop the bleeding apply a pressure point.
5. When the wind shifts the homes in this neighborhood will be in danger from the fire.
6. Scattered throughout the apartment were illegal drugs and drug paraphernalia.
7. Separated from the rest of his crew Ryan began to panic.
8. If you can be there a half hour early.
9. Because the caller provided specific details we considered the bomb threat to be real rather than a hoax.
10. If possible I'd like to get a copy of the coroner's report before noon.
11. Until the rapist is caught we recommend that women take extra precautions to protect themselves.
12. Before we leave the captain wants to take one more look at the roof.

The Case of the Nonessential Elements

Common Violations

One of the things writers struggle with most is understanding the relation between commas and essential or nonessential elements. Common violations include:

- Using commas with essential elements.
- Failing to use commas with nonessential elements.
- Inadvertently changing the meaning of the sentence by using or omitting commas.

Crime Prevention

Being able to identify whether an element is essential or nonessential is the key to determining whether you need to use commas.

- A *nonessential element* is one that can be deleted without changing the meaning of the sentence or leaving the sentence structurally incomplete. A nonessential element is set off by commas.
- An *essential element*, on the other hand, cannot be deleted from the sentence. An essential element is *not* set off by commas.

This sounds simple enough, but even the best writers periodically agonize over whether or not commas are needed. So we'll look at several examples and work through two "You Be the Detective" exercises. But when in doubt, you may want to remember this very appropriate quotation by author Claire Kehrwald Cook: "*When you have trouble getting the commas right, chances are you're trying to patch up a poorly structured sentence.*" In other words, sometimes it's easier to rewrite the sentence than it is to determine if or where to use commas.

The two sentences below are almost identical. However, in the first one, the italicized text provides helpful information, but it isn't essential to the sentence. It's sufficient to write that Kim has a history of arson. But in the second example, where Kim isn't named, the italicized text is essential to identifying who has a history of arson and essential to providing a structurally complete sentence.

Nonessential: I learned that Kim, *the girl who started the fire*, has a history of arson.

Essential: I learned that *the girl who started the fire* has a history of arson.

To better illustrate the point, let's look at the same sentences punctuated incorrectly. Violations like these are fairly common.

Wrong: I learned that Kim *the girl who started the fire* has a history of arson.

Wrong: I learned that, *the girl who started the fire*, has a history of arson.

Wrong: I learned that *the girl, who started the fire*, has a history of arson.

The Case of the Nonessential Elements (continued)

Another way to determine if text is essential or nonessential is to try separating the sentence into two independent clauses. A sentence containing an essential phrase or clause can't be split, whereas one with a nonessential phrase or clause can.

Essential: The man *who was accused of theft last week* has been released on bail.
Nonessential: Slade, *who was accused of theft last week*, has been released on bail.
Test Version: Slade was accused of theft last week. He has been released on bail.

Here are examples with the text in question positioned at the end of the sentence instead of in the middle. The text is nonessential in the second example because the word *irrationally* identifies how Erica is behaving.

Essential: Erica is behaving *as if she is under the influence of drugs*.
Nonessential: Erica is behaving irrationally, *as if she is under the influence of drugs*.

This next set is similar but perhaps not as obvious. The phrase *after the accident* is essential in the first example because it tells when. But in the second sentence, *last year* tells when, and *after the accident* provides additional but nonessential information.

Essential: Adam began wearing seat belts *after the accident*.
Nonessential: Adam began wearing seat belts last year, *after the accident*.

The examples below contain something called an *appositive*—a noun or noun phrase that defines, explains, or renames another noun before it. An appositive must be set off with commas. An appositive is often introduced by the word *or* or the phrase *that is*. (Note the extra comma after *that is*.)

Wrong: Psychogenic shock *or fainting* is usually not serious.
Right: Psychogenic shock, *or fainting*, is usually not serious.
Wrong: Hypoglycemia *that is low blood sugar* can sometimes be life-threatening.
Right: Hypoglycemia, *that is, low blood sugar*, can sometimes be life-threatening.

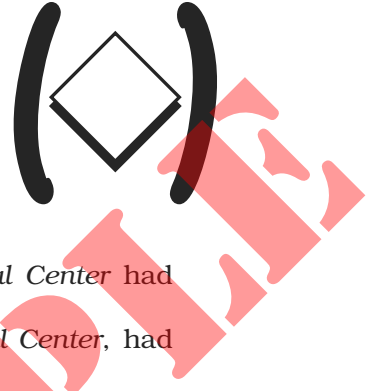
Names and titles used as appositives are normally set off by commas. However, the third example below shows an exception with the phrase *my sister Lori* because if it were read aloud, it would be read like one unit, without any intervening pause.

The fire chief, *Benjamin F. Lopes III*, will present the award.
 Eric Pearson, *community services officer*, spotted the stolen vehicle.
My sister Lori is teaching CPR next week.

Sometimes other punctuation marks are less confusing than commas. In the following example, does *my captain* refer to Kyle, or were there three people on the line? Parentheses work better than commas if Kyle and my captain are one and the same.

Confusing: Kyle, my captain, and I took the first line through the front door.
Clear: Kyle (my captain) and I took the first line through the front door.

The Case of the Nonessential Elements (continued)



Usually the meaning of the sentence determines whether or not commas are needed. However, sometimes it is the use of commas that determines the meaning of the sentence. See if you can tell the difference between the two sentences below.

- Essential:* The second patient *who was transported to Valley Medical Center* had extensive third-degree burns.
- Nonessential:* The second patient, *who was transported to Valley Medical Center*, had extensive third-degree burns.

The first sentence clearly refers to the second of two or more patients transported to Valley Medical Center. The next sentence also refers to the second of two or more patients, but it's not clear where the first one was transported. It may or may not have been to the same facility. In essence, *who was transported to Valley Medical Center* is a parenthetical element—useful but nonessential information that either interrupts the flow of the sentence or has been added as an afterthought. Such elements are called *parenthetical* because they can (and sometimes do) appear in parentheses.

Parenthetical elements can sometimes be positioned in different locations within a sentence. When different options are possible, look at what flows smoothly, what is the clearest, and what provides the emphasis you want.

- Beginning:* Particularly during peak traffic hours, driving Code 3 can be dangerous.
- Middle:* Driving Code 3, particularly during peak traffic hours, can be dangerous.
- End:* Driving Code 3 can be dangerous, particularly during peak traffic hours.

The following sentence contains something called an *absolute phrase*. It's not important that you know the name, but it is important to recognize that it modifies the sentence as a whole and must be set off by a comma.

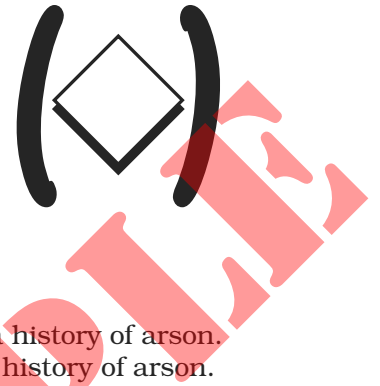
The critical patients transported, we turned our attention to the walking wounded.

If you are unsure whether an expression is essential or nonessential, read the sentence aloud and listen to your vocal inflection. It will often give away the answer. Pay particular attention to the words *no doubt* as you read the sentences below.

- Essential:* This fire is *no doubt* the work of an arsonist.
- Nonessential:* This fire, *no doubt*, is the work of an arsonist.

If an expression is essential, your voice will tend to *rise*, but if it is nonessential, your voice will tend to *drop*. Realistically, the words *no doubt* can be omitted from both sentences above without changing the meaning, so one might consider them nonessential in either case. Yet when they come before the verb *is*, they interrupt the flow of the sentence in a way that doesn't happen when they come after. Herein lies part of the distinction between nonessential and essential.

You Be the Detective: The Case of the Nonessential Elements Part 1: Essential or Nonessential?

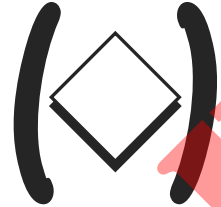


Instructions: In each set of sentences below, put a check mark next to the one that is punctuated properly. (Check your answers on page 159.)

Example: ☒ I learned that Kim, the girl who started the fire, has a history of arson.
 ☐ I learned that Kim the girl who started the fire has a history of arson.

1. a. ☐ A woman who was pregnant with twins was killed in the accident.
 b. ☐ A woman, who was pregnant with twins, was killed in the accident.
2. a. ☐ Any students caught carrying weapons will be suspended from school.
 b. ☐ Any students, caught carrying weapons, will be suspended from school.
3. a. ☐ All candidates male and female were given the same consideration.
 b. ☐ All candidates, male and female, were given the same consideration.
4. a. ☐ We have special public education programs aimed at older adults who are more vulnerable to fire than younger adults are.
 b. ☐ We have special public education programs aimed at older adults, who are more vulnerable to fire than younger adults are.
5. a. ☐ The grass fire that we had yesterday was directly behind my house.
 b. ☐ The grass fire, that we had yesterday, was directly behind my house.
6. a. ☐ Triage or victim sorting helps us prioritize patients based on the severity of their injuries and the likelihood of survival.
 b. ☐ Triage, or victim sorting, helps us prioritize patients based on the severity of their injuries and the likelihood of survival.
7. a. ☐ The pin that prevents accidental discharge of a fire extinguisher is held in place by a thin plastic strap that will break easily when the pin is twisted or pulled.
 b. ☐ The pin that prevents accidental discharge of a fire extinguisher is held in place by a thin plastic strap, that will break easily when the pin is twisted or pulled.
8. a. ☐ The body that they found in the desert was a victim of foul play.
 b. ☐ The body, that they found in the desert, was a victim of foul play.
9. a. ☐ This patient who has only minor injuries can be transported to the hospital by her family.
 b. ☐ This patient, who has only minor injuries, can be transported to the hospital by her family.
10. a. ☐ I'm feeling queasy as if I'm about to faint.
 b. ☐ I'm feeling queasy, as if I'm about to faint.

You Be the Detective: The Case of the Nonessential Elements Part 2: Commas or Not?

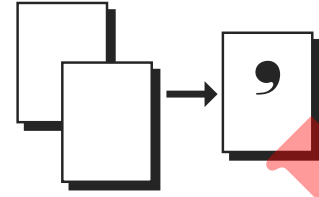


Instructions: Insert commas where appropriate in the sentences below. If the sentence is correct as is, write OK next to it. (Check your answers on page 159.)

Example: Psychogenic shock or fainting is usually not serious.

1. The explosion occurred at 0810 hours minutes after shift change.
2. The explosion was reported by the firefighters at Loyola Station who were close enough to hear and feel the blast.
3. The explosion that leveled their house was caused by a natural gas leak.
4. The three people who were home at the time miraculously escaped with only minor injuries.
5. The post-incident analysis is scheduled for next Tuesday the first shift of the tour.
6. The July 7, 2005, bombings in London were particularly disturbing to my cousin Sue who lived in London until recently.
7. The four bombs that shook London were detonated by suicide bombers.
8. Prime Minister Tony Blair who was in Scotland for the G8 Summit when the bombings occurred hurried home to London.
9. The gun that was used in the murder was never found.
10. Blister agents also known as mustard agents or vesicants are extremely toxic chemicals that produce characteristic blisters on exposed skin.

The Case of the Confusing Contractions



Common Violations

One of the most common mistakes writers make is to confuse *its* and *it's* because most of the time adding 's indicates the possessive form of a word. The opposite is true with the word *it*. Even people who know the difference between *its* and *it's* periodically use the wrong word because they're in a hurry and fail to catch the error when proofreading. Other common mistakes include confusing *they're* and *their*, *who's* and *whose*, and *you're* and *your*. Some writers also have trouble distinguishing between *there*, *they're*, and *their*.

Crime Prevention

The confusion that writers sometimes experience is due to the similarity between some of the possessive pronouns and a handful of contractions. So let's start by defining the terms.

Most *contractions* are formed by condensing two words into one. One or more letters are removed from the original words, and an apostrophe is added to take their place. Contractions may be used for ease of reading, for effect, or to squeeze more information into a limited space. The following are examples of some contractions and how they're formed.

I	+	am	=	I'm	let	+	us	=	let's
you	+	have	=	you've	he	+	is	=	he's
we	+	are	=	we're	she	+	would	=	she'd
is	+	not	=	isn't	they	+	will	=	they'll

Pronouns (e.g., *me*, *he*, *she*, and *it*) are words that can be used in place of nouns. *Possessive pronouns* (e.g., *my*, *his*, *her*, and *its*) are those that show possession or ownership.

Possessive Noun: I was surprised by the *fire's* intensity.

Possessive Pronoun: I was surprised by *its* intensity.

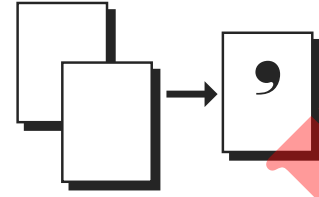
The chart below contains important clues to distinguishing between contractions and possessive pronouns. A simple substitution test reveals the correct choice. If you're unsure which word to use, try substituting the two words from which the contraction is formed (shown in parentheses below). If you can substitute *it is*, for example, you can use *it's* in your sentence. If not, use *its*. The same test applies to the other word choices.

<u>Contraction</u>	<u>Possessive Pronoun</u>
it's (it is)	its
they're (they are)	their
who's (who is)	whose
you're (you are)	your

The word *there* is neither a contraction (*they're*) nor a possessive pronoun (*their*). *There* is used to identify location (e.g., *over there*) or introduce a sentence (e.g., *there is ...*).

Computer spell checkers won't identify a correctly spelled word used out of context. So a good habit when proofing documents on computer, especially if you're inclined to confuse specific words, is to perform a Find or Search for those troublemakers. For example, you can search for each occurrence of *its* and *it's*, then check that you've used the correct spelling.

You Be the Detective: The Case of the Confusing Contractions

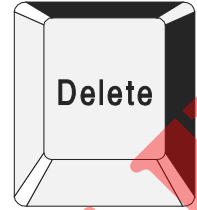


Instructions: Circle the correct word in each of the sentences below. (Check your answers on page 161.)

Example: I was surprised by its / it's intensity.

1. The car landed on its / it's roof.
2. Their / there / they're home was destroyed by fire.
3. Your / you're never going to believe what caused the fire.
4. Whose / who's in command?
5. Its / It's a good idea to call for mutual aid.
6. Do you know how their / there / they're going to evacuate the hospital?
7. Have you finished your / you're investigation?
8. Whose / who's radio is this?
9. The material is above its / it's flash point.
10. Their / there / they're were no witnesses to the accident.
11. Its / it's going to be difficult to extricate the victims.
12. Let me know when your / you're ready.
13. Cliff said they wasted their / there / they're time on the stakeout.
14. Chlorine is a gas in its / it's natural state.
15. Dennis said their / there / they're are no signs of forced entry.
16. I don't care whose / who's fault it is.
17. The incident commander said its / it's not safe to enter.
18. I'll be your / you're backup.
19. Its / it's not appropriate to release this information to the media.
20. My friend Eric, whose / who's a police officer, ran a background check on him for me.

The Case of the Wasted Words



Common Violations

Most writers, this author included, sometimes allow empty words and phrases to creep into their documents without realizing it. Common violations include:

- Wordy phrases.
- Careless repetition.
- Lengthy modifiers.
- Negative sentences.

Crime Prevention

Replace wordy phrases. Avoid using wordy phrases when one or two words can accomplish the same thing. The following are common examples.

Wordy
because of the fact that
in the event that
during the course of
it would appear that
at a later date

Concise
because
if
during
it seems
later

Eliminate unnecessary repetition. The key to eliminating unnecessary repetition is identifying words that don't add value to the sentence.

Repetitious: The placard ~~was orange in color.~~
Revised: The placard ~~was orange.~~

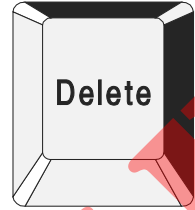
Repetitious: Her ~~fractured clavicle was broken~~ in two places.
Revised: Her ~~clavicle was broken~~ in two places.

Rewording a sentence is sometimes an alternative to simply eliminating words. In the example below, it would be sufficient to say "firefighting is dangerous." However, if such a short sentence seems stilted and choppy, the suggested revision might be preferable.

Repetitious: Firefighting is ~~dangerous by nature.~~
Revised: Firefighting is ~~a dangerous activity.~~

Sometimes we encounter idiomatic expressions where repetition is acceptable. For example, we often refer to patients as being *alert and oriented*. *Alert* and *oriented* mean the same thing, yet emergency responders are so accustomed to using the words together that it would seem incomplete to use either one alone. However, this should be the exception rather than the rule. Instead of referring to patients as *awake and conscious*, for example, use either *awake* or *conscious*. There's no value in using both.

The Case of the Wasted Words (continued)



Condense your modifiers. Sentences can often be made more concise by reducing the modifiers—the descriptive phrases or clauses—to one or two words and repositioning them within the sentence.

Wordy: I found the knife, *which was covered with blood*, in a trash can behind the house.

Revised: I found the *bloody* knife in a trash can behind the house.

Wordy: The earthquake, *which was terrifying and occurred without warning*, left hundreds of people displaced from their homes.

Revised: The *sudden, terrifying* earthquake left hundreds *homeless*.

Use positive expressions if possible. Negative sentences are generally wordier and less direct than positive ones.

Wordy: The driver *did not obey* the speed limit.

Concise: The driver *exceeded* the speed limit.

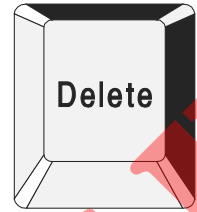
The word *not* is often a signal that there may be a clearer and more economical way to phrase the sentence. *Not guilty* means *innocent*. *Did not die* means *survived*.

Not all negative sentences are bad, however. Of the two sentences below, the second one (the negative expression) is clearer and preferable to the first.

Acceptable: We have transported *no one* to the hospital yet.

Clearer: We have *not transported anyone* to the hospital yet.

You Be the Detective: The Case of the Wasted Words



Instructions: Rewrite the sentences to make them clearer and more concise. If the only correction necessary is to delete the wasted words, draw a line through them. (Check your answers on page 166.)

Example: I found the knife, which was covered with blood, in the trash can.

I found the bloody knife in the trash can.

1. We will need additional resources in the event that it becomes necessary to evacuate residents from the neighborhood.
2. I momentarily lost sight of the suspect for an instant.
3. The protective clothing that has been contaminated needs to be replaced.
4. We shut down the highway because of the fact that there was an accident involving an overturned gasoline tanker.
5. We don't have enough money in the budget at the present time.
6. The jury has reached a consensus of opinion.
7. Several individuals who have been convicted of child molestation are known to live in the area.
8. We chose to have residents shelter in place rather than evacuate for the reason that we expected the vapor cloud to dissipate within 30 minutes.
9. My feeling about that candidate is that he's not old enough and does not yet have the maturity to be a police officer.
10. The blow to her head, which is what we know killed her, was inflicted by a blunt object.

The Case of the Missing Details



Common Violations

Just as failure to be concise can interfere with the clarity of the message, so can failure to provide sufficient details. Common violations include:

- Using general words when specific words would be more appropriate.
- Not providing sufficient details to paint a complete picture.
- Omitting critical details—things that readers won't necessarily know.
- Failing to cite a source when doing so would add credibility.

Crime Prevention

Be specific, if possible. Words can be described as either general or specific. *General words* are broader in scope; *specific words* are more focused and precise. General words are not inherently bad or wrong, but they are more open to interpretation by the reader. They lack details that may be important. Notice how the sentences below become clearer with more specific words. Particularly with documents that may end up in court someday, it's essential to be specific.

General: The suspect threatened officers with a *weapon*.
Specific: The suspect threatened officers with a *butcher knife*.

General: We searched the *residence* at 37 Montclair Drive.
Specific: We searched the *mobile home* at 37 Montclair Drive.

Of course, general words are appropriate in the right context. For example, if writing about the importance of searching a suspect for concealed weapons, don't narrow your focus to only one type of weapon. However, when documenting that a specific suspect was carrying a concealed weapon, identify what type of weapon it was.

Paint a clear picture with details. The first sentence below leaves unanswered questions. Which direction of the highway was shut down? Where was it shut down? What did the writer mean by "bad accident"? The second sentence neatly answers those questions without any wasted words. The writing is complete but concise.

General: The highway patrol shut down Interstate 280 because of a bad accident.
Detailed: The California Highway Patrol shut down southbound Interstate 280 at the Highway 85 interchange due to a five-car pileup in which three people were killed and nine others were injured.

As you're writing, ask yourself if the sentence (or paragraph or document) paints a complete picture for someone who wasn't there. Then ask yourself if it contains enough details to withstand scrutiny in court years later when your memory of the incident is no longer fresh. It should not only paint a clear picture for you but also save you the discomfort and embarrassment of having to defend an incomplete report when a zealous defense attorney tries to attack your credibility.

The Case of the Missing Details (continued)



Ensure that critical details are included. It's particularly important when writing instructions or training materials to ensure that nothing is taken for granted. The mental picture that writers have in their heads often is not the same mental picture that readers are working with. And a reader's subconscious mind won't necessarily fill in missing details the way a content expert's subconscious mind will. So sometimes we have to assume the reader knows very little. See if you can identify the critical detail missing from the following sentence.

Sometimes the best option when dealing with an acid or alkali spill is to neutralize the material with a corrosive of the opposite pH.

All that's missing is one word, the word *weak*. Neutralize the material with a *weak* corrosive of the opposite pH. Using strong acids or bases (alkalis) to neutralize a corrosive spill can cause a very dangerous chemical reaction.

It's easy for people with some knowledge and experience in a field to forget what it's like to be brand new and not know the little details that others now take for granted. Unfortunately, you almost have to write defensively, as if you can expect the one reader who doesn't know this material to make a mistake in the field, get hurt, and attempt to sue you for negligence.

Cite sources if appropriate. The following example also lacks critical information:

Never attempt to fight a fire involving explosives. Evacuate to a safe distance and let the fire burn.

What constitutes a safe distance? And what if the reader's best guess turns out not to be enough? When you provide a specific distance and cite your source(s), as in the example below, the reader doesn't have to guess. It also gives some credibility to the information and takes the monkey off your back. If there's ever a problem in which someone is hurt, you've cited sources considered the standard of care in the emergency response industry.

Never attempt to fight a fire involving explosives. Evacuate to a safe distance and let the fire burn. The *NFPA Fire Protection Handbook* suggests evacuating to a distance of at least 2000 feet. The *Emergency Response Guidebook* recommends distances up to one mile.

You Be the Detective: The Case of the Missing Details Part 1: Interpreting the Brief Narrative



Instructions: The following paragraph represents a brief narrative from an incident report. Read the narrative, then identify the statements that follow as being true (T), false (F), or unclear (U) without more information. Some of the information might be covered elsewhere in a report, but that is beyond the scope of this exercise. (Check your answers on page 167.)

The Narrative: Responded to a reported vehicle versus bicyclist accident. Treated patient for possible fractures and assisted paramedics, who transported patient to hospital.

Example: T F ☒ U The vehicle was a pickup truck.

The Statements:

1. T F U The injured party was a bicyclist who had been hit by a car.
2. T F U Only one person was injured.
3. T F U The patient was alert and oriented.
4. T F U Firefighters and/or paramedics did a secondary survey on the patient.
5. T F U The patient appeared to have a possible fractured leg.
6. T F U Firefighters and/or paramedics took cervical spine precautions.
7. T F U Circulation, sensation, and motor function were normal distal to the injury.
8. T F U The patient was transported to Valley Medical Center.
9. T F U Firefighters and/or paramedics examined the driver of the vehicle.
10. T F U The driver of the vehicle refused service and signed an AMA form.

You Be the Detective: The Case of the Missing Details Part 2: Filling in the Gaps



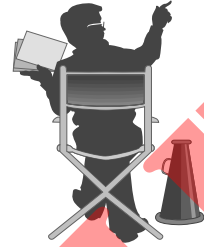
Instructions: Rewrite the sentences below to provide specific details. Use your imagination as needed to draw a more complete picture. Many solutions are possible. (Check your answers on page 167.)

Example: The highway patrol shut down Interstate 280 because of a bad accident.

The California Highway Patrol shut down southbound Interstate 280 at the Highway 85 interchange due to a five-car pileup in which three people were killed and nine others were injured.

1. Upon arrival, I observed heavy smoke coming from windows on the top floor of the chemical warehouse.
2. Although the fire was confined to one room, there was heavy damage throughout the building.
3. Engine 3 assisted paramedics, and the patient was transported to the hospital.
4. Please maintain adequate clearance around the safety equipment.
5. Mr. Harrison was arrested after a brief altercation with police.
6. We estimate the victim had been dead approximately 36 hours.

The Case of the Vibrant Voice



Common Violations

Some writers use the passive voice far more often than they should, perhaps out of a reluctance to name “who done it.” However, the passive voice is generally less powerful, less interesting, and less concise than the active voice. The passive voice is also often less clear than the active voice, compromising the reader’s ability to comprehend the message.

Crime Prevention

There are two voices in sentence structure: *active* and *passive*. The active voice emphasizes the one doing the action. The passive voice emphasizes the one being acted upon. The one doing the action may or may not be mentioned in the passive voice. The passive voice requires a form of the verb *be* plus the past participle of the main verb (*was dislodged*, *was treated*).

Active: Linda dislodged the object using the Heimlich maneuver.
Passive: The object was dislodged (by Linda) using the Heimlich maneuver.

Active: Ed treated the homeowner for smoke inhalation.
Passive: The homeowner was treated for smoke inhalation (by Ed).

Your writing will generally be more effective if you write in the active voice rather than the passive voice. Therefore, use the active voice as much as possible, unless you have good reason to do otherwise. What are some good reasons? Let’s look at a few.

The passive voice is useful when the one doing the action is either unknown or less important than the one being acted upon. Notice how the passive voice in second sentence below puts greater emphasis on Susan and what happened to her.

Active: A man attacked Susan in the parking lot of her apartment complex.
Passive: Susan was attacked in the parking lot of her apartment complex.

Sometimes it is desirable not to disclose the identity of the one doing the action—even when the identity is known. For example, it might be important to protect the identity of a witness. The examples below show two ways to reword the original sentence. One retains the active voice, substituting the words *a witness* for the person’s identity. The second switches to the passive voice. Using the active voice is preferable, but the passive voice is certainly acceptable.

Active: The bartender reported seeing the suspect with the victim before the shooting.
Active: A witness reported seeing the suspect with the victim before the shooting.
Passive: The suspect was seen with the victim before the shooting.

The passive voice is often used to sound more diplomatic, to soften the impact of a strong statement, or to avoid sounding bossy.

Active: You must bring the building up to code within 60 days.
Passive: The building must be brought up to code within 60 days.

The Case of the Vibrant Voice (continued)

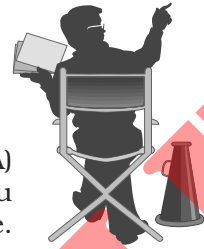
The passive voice is often used in scientific and technical writing where the emphasis is once again on the action being taken rather than the one doing the action.

Active: Several scientists across the country are conducting studies to identify a suitable replacement for Halon extinguishing agents.

Passive: Several studies are being conducted across the country to identify a suitable replacement for Halon extinguishing agents.



You Be the Detective: The Case of the Vibrant Voice



Instructions: Identify each of the following sentences as either active (A) or passive (P), then rewrite each in the opposite voice. You may need to invent some details when rewriting the sentence. (Check your answers on page 167.)

Example: P The object was dislodged using the Heimlich maneuver.

Linda dislodged the object using the Heimlich maneuver.

1. ____ OSHA had previously cited the building owner for safety violations.

2. ____ The child was discovered under the wreckage by firefighters.

3. ____ Search and rescue efforts were begun immediately.

4. ____ We did CPR on the victim for more than 20 minutes.

5. ____ A candle was left burning unattended by the homeowner.

6. ____ The incident was captured by a hidden surveillance camera.

7. ____ A black SUV struck the pedestrian as he entered the intersection.

8. ____ The suspect was read his Miranda rights.

9. ____ She was arrested for child abuse.

10. ____ I dusted the desk for prints.

The Case of the Misplaced Modifier

Common Violations

Readers generally associate modifiers with the *nearest* words they might logically modify. So when writers put these modifiers where they don't belong, it can change the meaning of the sentence or result in confusing, amusing, or embarrassing sentences. (A *modifier* is basically an adjective or adverb—whether a single word, a phrase, or a clause—that qualifies or limits the meaning of another word or group of words.)

Crime Prevention

Let's look at two sentences that surely don't reflect what the writer intended.

Misplaced: The fire was extinguished before any significant damage was done by the fire department.

Revised: The fire was extinguished by the fire department before any significant damage was done.

Misplaced: The following are some tips for protecting your home from the police department.

Revised: The police department offers the following tips for protecting your home.

Did you catch the problems? The first sentence implies that the fire was extinguished before the fire department could do any significant damage. The second implies we need to protect our homes from the police department. Avoid misplaced modifiers by proofing your sentences carefully to ensure they convey the intended meaning. If they don't, move the modifier or rewrite the sentence.

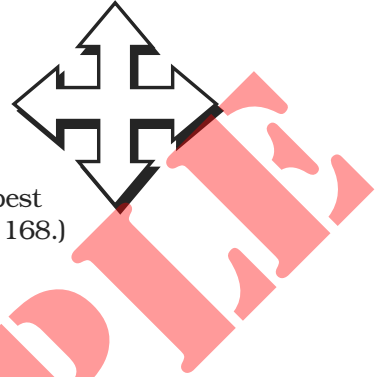
A spring 2005 newspaper headline regarding the exploits of a serial killer provides another poignant example of how embarrassing misplaced modifiers can be. The headline displayed on every major television network in the United States read "21st Body of Child Found." Unless the corpse was the twenty-first clone of the same murdered child, the headline should have read "Body of 21st Child Found." There's a difference.

Pay careful attention to limiting modifiers because they're subtle and the potential confusion associated with them often escapes notice. Limiting modifiers (such as *almost*, *even*, *exactly*, *hardly*, *just*, *merely*, *nearly*, *only*, *scarcely*, and *simply*) modify the word or words that immediately follow them. Notice how changing the position of the modifier changes the meaning of the following sentences.

Version 1: We just found one victim. (We found a victim just now.)

Version 2: We found just one victim. (We found only one victim.)

You Be the Detective:
The Case of the Misplaced Modifier
Part 1: Limiting Modifiers



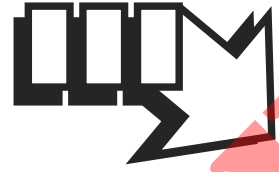
Instructions: For each of the sentences below, identify the option that best matches the intended meaning. (Check your answers on page 168.)

Example: Which sentence indicates that we found only one victim?

- a. We just found one victim.
- ☒ b. We found just one victim.

1. Which sentence indicates that very little of the victim's body ~~was not burned~~?
 - a. He was almost burned over his entire body.
 - b. He was burned over almost his entire body.
2. Which sentence implies that the man may have ~~escaped injury~~?
 - a. He was almost burned over his entire body.
 - b. He was burned over almost his entire body.
3. Which sentence indicates that the thief stole ~~almost all~~ their money?
 - a. The thief nearly escaped ~~with all~~ their money.
 - b. The thief escaped with nearly ~~all their~~ money.
4. Which sentence implies that ~~the thief was~~ caught attempting to steal all their money?
 - a. The thief nearly escaped with all their money.
 - b. The thief escaped with nearly all their money.
5. Which sentence indicates that I searched only the upstairs bedrooms and nowhere else?
 - a. I only searched the upstairs bedrooms.
 - b. I searched only the upstairs bedrooms.
6. Which sentence implies that I did nothing more than search the upstairs bedrooms?
 - a. I only searched the upstairs bedrooms.
 - b. I searched only the upstairs bedrooms.
7. Which sentence implies that we ruled out our primary suspect moments only ago?
 - a. We just ruled out our primary suspect.
 - b. We ruled out just our primary suspect.
8. Which sentence indicates that we ruled out only our primary suspect and no one else?
 - a. We just ruled out our primary suspect.
 - b. We ruled out just our primary suspect.

The Case of the Dangling Modifier



Common Violations

The *dangling modifier* is another common violation associated with phrases and clauses used as adjectives and adverbs. A dangling modifier is one that does not *clearly* describe anything in the sentence. Although the connection may be clear to the writer, it is not necessarily clear to the reader. It's a bit like presenting evidence in court without illustrating how the evidence relates to the case. Dangling modifiers often result in very awkward sentences. Even though readers may eventually figure out the intended message, it's a disservice to the readers if they must stop and reread a sentence several times to understand it.

Crime Prevention

Notice how easily the sentences with dangling modifiers can be *misread*. What these examples have in common is that readers will expect the introductory phrase (the stuff in front of the comma) to pertain to the first noun they encounter, which is not what the writer intended. The key to preventing dangling modifiers is to make sure the modifier clearly relates to the subject of the sentence.

Dangling: Engulfed in flames, the chief decided to let the building burn and protect exposures instead.

(Was the chief engulfed in flames when he made his decision?)

Revised: Because the building was engulfed in flames, the chief decided to let it burn and protect exposures instead.

Dangling: When a baby, my mother died in a plane crash.

(If my mother died when she was a baby, who gave birth to me?)

Revised: When I was a baby, my mother died in a plane crash.

Although dangling modifiers occur most often at the beginning of a sentence, they can occur in other places. In the following example, the modifier at the end of the sentence does not clearly relate to the subject introduced in the beginning of the sentence.

Dangling: The damage was visible entering the building.

(Can damage enter a building as if it's an entity capable of walking?)

Revised: The damage was visible to us as we entered the building.

Dangling modifiers are more likely to happen when sentences are written in the passive voice rather than in the active voice. So to prevent dangling modifiers—and to write more powerful and more interesting sentences—use the active voice instead. (Refer to “The Case of the Vibrant Voice” for more information on active and passive voice.)

Dangling: After searching for hours, the victim trapped beneath the rubble was found.

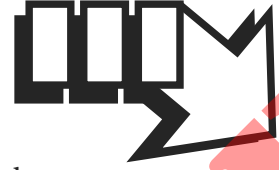
(Who did the searching? The victim?)

Revised: After searching for hours, rescue workers found the victim trapped beneath the rubble.

Dangling: The damage was visible entering the building.

Revised: We observed the damage as we entered the building.

The Case of the Dangling Modifier

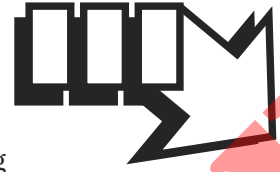


Something that might look like a dangling modifier, but isn't, is an *absolute phrase*. Absolute phrases modify the sentence as a whole, rather than a specific word or group of words in the sentence. Readers don't have to make any connections because the meaning is clear as written.

Considering how badly the building was damaged, it's a miracle that no one was killed.

That mystery solved, maybe we can get some real work done.

You Be the Detective: The Case of the Dangling Modifier



Instructions: Edit the sentences below to eliminate the dangling modifiers. Several options may be possible. (Check your answers on page 169.)

Example: After searching for hours, the victim trapped beneath the rubble was found.

After searching for hours, rescue workers found the victim trapped beneath the rubble.

1. If still impaled in the patient, you should stabilize the knife in place.
2. To be ruled admissible in court, you must ensure the chain of custody is unbroken.
3. Kidnapped during the night, Diane's parents were distraught.
4. As a known sex offender, the police department will be watching him closely.
5. While inspecting the building, several safety violations were noticed.
6. As women, some men think we are not strong enough to do the job.
7. To stop the bleeding, direct pressure is applied.
8. Three minutes after rescuing the last victim, the structure collapsed.
9. Not finding evidence to support arson, the cause of the fire was ruled accidental.
10. Being old and not up to current standards, I took the helmets out of service.
11. The high-pressure hose burst and splashed hydraulic fluid in my face while working with the Hurst tool.
12. Assessing the patient, he suddenly became combative and struck me in the face.

The Case of the Faulty Construction



Common Violations

The notion of “faulty construction” encompasses many problems identified in this book. However, here we’ll focus on three common violations:

- Mixed construction (trying to make groups of words function as the subject of the sentence when they cannot serve that purpose).
- Faulty predication (using a subject and a predicate that don’t make sense together).
- Faulty definitions (using *is where* or *is when* to define something).

Crime Prevention

Avoid mixed constructions. The first sentence below is one in which the writer has changed gears midway through. What readers are expecting is something like the second example. Instead, they find a prepositional phrase trying to function as the subject of sentence when it’s not capable of doing so. Make sure your sentences have a subject.

Mixed: By doubling your distance from a radioactive source reduces your risk of exposure by 75%.

Revised: By doubling your distance from a radioactive source, you reduce your risk of exposure by 75%.

Revised: Doubling your distance from a radioactive source reduces your risk of exposure by 75%.

Make logical connections. When a subject and predicate do not make sense together, it results in something called *faulty predication*. In the first example below, it is *Shelly*, not her *welfare*, who is possibly being abused.

Faulty: It was a math teacher who first suspected that *Shelly’s welfare* was being abused by her stepfather.

Revised: It was a math teacher who first suspected that *Shelly* was being abused by her stepfather.

Revised: A math teacher first suspected that *Shelly* was being abused by her stepfather.

Some faulty predications are more subtle. In the example below, we can say that *deciding* to close the highway caused problems for commuters. However, it is really the *act* of closing the highway, not the *decision* to close it, that caused the problems. You can *decide* all you want, but nothing happens until you *act*.

Faulty: *Deciding to close* the highway caused problems for commuters all evening.

Revised: *Closing* the highway caused problems for commuters all evening.

Avoid faulty definitions. When you define something, put nouns on both sides of the verb *is* or *are*. Avoid using *is where* or *is when* to complete your definitions. The first sentence below is faulty because *lividity* is an observable sign, not a place.

Faulty: Lividity *is where* there is a bluish red discoloration caused by blood pooling in the dependent parts of the body after death.

Revised: Lividity is a bluish red discoloration caused by blood pooling in the dependent parts of the body after death.

You Be the Detective: The Case of the Faulty Construction



Instructions: Edit the sentences below to eliminate the faulty construction. Several options may be possible. (Check your answers on page 170.)

Example: By doubling your distance from a radioactive source reduces your risk of exposure by 75%.

Doubling your distance from a radioactive source reduces your risk of exposure by 75%.

1. In response to our community's concern about the increase in gang violence is the reason that we are implementing several programs aimed at getting teenagers involved in after-school activities.
2. The use of smoke detectors is designed to provide early warning of smoke and other products of combustion.
3. Incorporating proper safety precautions and a contingency plan for unexpected emergencies into your action plan.
4. Hypothermia is when the body core temperature cools.
5. My investigation determined that the victim died from smoke inhalation.
6. To check capillary refill by pressing on the fingernail, then watch for return of color once you release pressure.
7. A stoma is where there is a surgical opening into the neck and trachea.
8. By evaluating your progress throughout the incident to make sure your efforts are successful and that everyone is operating safely.
9. Assigning personnel to observe for possible criminal activities and secondary devices will help ensure responder safety at a suspicious event.
10. Do you have some form of emergency decon in place, which must be set up prior to performing any rescue for your protection as well as for the patients' protection?

Solutions to the Cases

The Case of the Fragmented Sentence

(Page 8)

1. ... her eye is irritated.
2. ... from the wreckage five days after ...
(A comma is appropriate between *wreckage* and *five* if writing about something that just happened. Otherwise, omit the comma.)
3. OK as is
Alternatively, the questions can be expanded.
What time did it occur? How strong was it?
4. I'll testify against him if you give me ...
5. ... searching the house because we ...
6. OK as is
7. The sentence requires a subject (e.g., *I, the officer, or John*).
8. ... fifteen minutes, after paramedics ...
(Note the comma between *minutes* and *after*. Nonessential elements are set off with commas. The text after the comma is considered nonessential because *about fifteen minutes* tells when. The rest merely provides additional clarification.)
9. OK as is
10. Is it true that the residents ... in their basement?

The Case of the Sentence Splices

(Page 10)

The following are suggested revisions. Other options may be appropriate.

1. RO (run-on sentence)
Correct by putting a period after *cycles* and capitalizing *this*.
2. OK as is
3. CS (comma splice)
Correct by replacing the comma with a period and capitalizing *she*, or correct by writing *and she was complaining ...*
4. OK as is
5. RO (run-on sentence)
Correct by putting a period after *just in time* and capitalizing *the*. The comma after *ruptured* is correct.
6. CS (comma splice)
Correct by putting a period after *safely* and capitalizing *however*. The comma after *however* is correct.
7. OK as is
Note: Unlike in the previous sentence, the word *however* serves as a nonessential element that merely interrupts the flow of one complete sentence. Item 6 was a comma splice because the word *however* cannot be used like the word *but* to join two sentences.

8. RO (run-on sentence)
Correct by putting a period after *scuffle* and capitalizing *his*.
9. CS (comma splice)
Correct by replacing the comma with a period and capitalizing *it*.
10. RO (run-on sentence)
Correct by putting a period after *house* and capitalizing *we*. The comma after *inhalation* is correct.

The Case of the Questioning Mark

(Page 12)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. a | 7. a |
| 2. a | 8. b |
| 3. b | 9. b |
| 4. a | 10. b |
| 5. a | 11. a |
| 6. b | 12. b |

The Case of the Careless Colon

(Page 14)

- | | |
|------------------------|-------|
| 1. C (a one-item list) | 9. I |
| 2. I | 10. I |
| 3. C | 11. C |
| 4. I | 12. I |
| 5. C | 13. C |
| 6. I | 14. I |
| 7. C | 15. C |
| 8. I | |

The Case of the Saucy Semicolon

(Page 17)

1. Replace comma with a semicolon, or create two separate sentences.
2. OK as is.
3. Replace comma after *grenades* with a semicolon, or create two separate sentences.
4. OK as is.
5. Use semicolons instead of commas after *California* and *Colorado*.
6. OK as is, but can be written as two sentences.
7. Replace comma with a semicolon, or create two separate sentences.
8. Delete the semicolon.
9. OK as is, but can be written as two sentences.
10. Keep commas after *eyes* and *nose*, but replace all others with semicolons. Doing so will clearly communicate that *irritation* applies to *eyes*, *nose*, and *throat*, but not to the text that follows it.

Solutions to the Cases (continued)

The Case of the Direct Quotations

(Page 20)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. a | 6. a |
| 2. b | 7. b |
| 3. a | 8. a |
| 4. b | 9. d |
| 5. b | 10. a |

The Case of the Misplaced Quotes

(Page 23)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. b | 6. a |
| 2. a | 7. b |
| 3. a | 8. a |
| 4. b | 9. a |
| 5. b | 10. b |

The Case of the Two-Clause Comma

(Page 26)

- comma between *control* and *and*
- no comma between *nozzle* and *and*
- comma between *wife* and *and*
- comma between *away* and *but*
no comma between *but* and *he*
- no comma between *training* and *and*
- comma between *gun* and *but*
- no commas — OK as is
- This sentence can be fixed either by replacing the comma with a period (and capitalizing *they*) or by inserting the word *but* between the comma and *they*.
- comma between *transport* and *and*
comma between *emergency* and *and*
(Or make two sentences. Put a period after *emergency*, omit *and*, and capitalize *since*.)
- comma between *serious* and *but*
- This sentence could be fixed either by putting a comma between *fingers* and *nor* or by making these separate sentences.
- comma between *burn* and *for*

The Case of the Introductory Comma

(Page 29)

- comma between *hospitals* and *I*
- comma after *nevertheless*
- optional comma after *in the afternoon*
- comma between *bleeding* and *apply*
- comma after *when the wind shifts*
- OK as is
- comma between *crew* and *Ryan*
- comma after *if you can*

- comma between *details* and *we*
- comma after *if possible*
- comma between *caught* and *we*
- comma after *before we leave*

The Case of the Nonessential Elements (Part 1: Essential or Nonessential?)

(Page 33)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. a | 6. b |
| 2. a | 7. a |
| 3. b | 8. a |
| 4. b | 9. b |
| 5. a | 10. b |

The Case of the Nonessential Elements (Part 2: Commas or Not?)

(Page 34)

- comma between *hours* and *minutes*
- comma between *Station* and *who*
- OK as is
- OK as is
- comma between *Tuesday* and *the*
- comma between *Sue* and *who*
- OK as is
- comma between *Blair* and *who*
comma between *occurred* and *hurried*
- OK as is
- comma between *agents* and *also*
comma between *vesicants* and *are*

The Case of the Cited Examples

(Page 37)

- comma between *behavior* and *such as*
(examples are nonessential)
- comma after *for example*
- comma between *liquids* and *like*
comma between *toluene* and *in*
(examples are nonessential because the point is to expect *any* flammable liquids, not just those that are similar to the ones named)
- OK as is
(*like the ones sold for home use* is essential to the meaning of the sentence)
- commas before and after *for instance*
comma between *spray* and *cause*
- comma after *e.g.*
- comma between *conditions* and *particularly*
- comma between *entry* and *including*
- OK as is
- commas before and after *that is*
comma between *reaction* and *is*

Solutions to the Cases (continued)

The Case of the Uninvited Comma (Page 51)

- delete comma after *personnel*
insert comma between *incident* and *generally*
- delete comma after *bedroom*
delete comma after *family*
- delete comma after *self*
- delete comma after *people*
insert comma between *are* and *and*
delete comma after *911*
- insert comma between *emergency* and *employees*
delete comma after *process*
- delete comma after *note*
delete comma after *cause*
- delete comma after *fingertips*
delete comma after *criminals*
- delete comma after *bruises*
delete comma after *progressed*
insert comma between *murder* and *blood*
delete comma after *sites*
delete comma after *counts*
- delete comma after *material*
delete comma after *level*
- insert comma between *safe* and *and*
delete comma after *water**

* The clause *except that which has been stored ahead of time* is essential to the meaning of the sentence because it clarifies that *not all* drinking water must be purified. As such, it would not be set off with commas. However, the rules do include some flexibility where the desired effect is to make readers pause and take notice (e.g., to say that stored water doesn't have to be purified like tap water does). Therefore, you could set off the expression with commas *both before and after*. Putting it in parentheses is another valid option.

The Case of the Abused Abbreviations (Page 54)

- doctor
- Captain, department, Christmas
- 141°F
- 24-foot, second-floor
- Carbon dioxide may be spelled out or abbreviated as CO₂, depending on how formal the document is.
- OK as is
- Drive in Los Angeles, California
- Carbon-14 (¹⁴C)
- patient, shortness of breath

- Charles, department's
Hazardous materials can be spelled out or shortened to *hazmat*, depending on how formal the document is.

The Case of the Punctuated Abbreviation (Page 57)

- MSDS (no periods)
- St. James (period)
- OK as is
- 1500-gpm (hyphen, no periods)
- OK as is
- 141°F (60.5°F) (no spaces)
- OSHA (no periods)
- mm Hg or mmHg (space is optional)
- CEO or C.E.O. (periods are optional)
- 35-mph (hyphen)

The Case of the Latin Abbreviations (Page 60)

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| 1. i.e., | 6. e.g., |
| 2. contraband, i.e., | 7. i.e., |
| 3. e.g., | 8. e.g., |
| 4. agents, e.g., | 9. hazards, e.g., |
| 5. i.e., | 10. edema, i.e., |

The Case of the Indefinite Article (Page 62)

- | | |
|----------|--------|
| 1. an, a | 11. a |
| 2. an | 12. a |
| 3. an | 13. a |
| 4. a | 14. an |
| 5. an | 15. a |
| 6. an | 16. an |
| 7. a | 17. an |
| 8. an | 18. a |
| 9. an | 19. a |
| 10. an | 20. a |

The Case of the Confusing Contractions (Page 64)

- | | |
|------------|------------|
| 1. its | 11. it's |
| 2. their | 12. you're |
| 3. you're | 13. their |
| 4. who's | 14. its |
| 5. it's | 15. there |
| 6. they're | 16. whose |
| 7. your | 17. it's |
| 8. whose | 18. your |
| 9. its | 19. it's |
| 10. there | 20. who's |

Solutions to the Cases (continued)

The Case of the Wasted Words

(Page 122)

The following are suggested revisions. Other options may be appropriate.

1. We'll need additional resources if it's necessary to evacuate residents from the neighborhood.
2. I momentarily lost sight of the suspect.
3. The contaminated clothing needs to be replaced.
4. We shut down the highway because of an accident involving an overturned tanker.
5. We don't have enough money in the budget.
6. The jury has reached a consensus.
7. Several convicted child molesters live in the area.
8. We had residents shelter in place rather than evacuate because we expected the vapor cloud to dissipate within 30 minutes.
9. I feel that candidate is too young and lacks the maturity to be a police officer.
10. The fatal blow to her head was inflicted by a blunt object.

The Case of the Weak and Wimpy

(Page 125)

The following are suggested revisions. Other options may be appropriate.

1. The chief decided to cut it from the budget. *or ... The chief cut it from the budget.*
2. The minister's daughter was struck by a hit-and-run driver.
3. I investigated the factory explosion and determined it resulted from careless handling of an organic peroxide.
4. The investigation is complete.
(If you need to call attention to something significant that hasn't been completed, don't allude to it with *for all intents and purposes*. Instead, *spell it out*. *The investigation is complete, pending the insurance company's confirmation of the dollar loss.*)
5. Volunteers thoroughly searched the camp grounds, hoping to find the boy before nightfall.
6. I intended only to cite him, but when he became violent, I arrested him.

7. I don't think the recruits are ready to be tested.
(*To be honest* isn't necessary unless you *have* a history of lying. However, if the expression was used in place of something else [e.g., *I didn't want to say this in front of the chief, but ...*], that alternate text might be important to include.)
8. Four of us will attend the forensic science conference next week.
9. I concluded that the patient was not a danger to himself or others.
10. I spoke with the reporting party and assured her that she *did the right thing by* calling 911. *or ... I reassured the reporting party that it was right to call 911.*

The Case of the Superfluous Text

(Page 127)

The following are suggested revisions. Many other options are possible.

1. This plan contains guidelines for responding to a variety of emergencies that could occur at the site. (17 words)
2. Drinking and driving can be a deadly combination. (8 words)
3. Use proper evidence collection containers. Evidence can dry out, spoil, or otherwise be destroyed if not packaged properly. (18 words)
4. Generally, the only times the media may be denied access is at a legitimate crime scene, at an incident on private property, or when they are interfering with operations and creating a life safety hazard. (35 words)

The Case of the Needed Words

(Page 129)

1. Our officers feared *that* the suspect ...
2. ... than we are about their parents. *or ... than their parents are.*
3. ... believes *in* and uses ...
4. I read *that* another ...
5. ... last *year's*.
or ... last year's statistics.
6. I think *that* whenever possible ...
7. ... stronger knot *than the bowline*.
(or some other knot)
8. Captain Innis heard *that* the ...
9. We have *required* and still are requiring ...
10. ... than combustible liquids *do*.
or ... than do combustible liquids.

Solutions to the Cases (continued)

The Case of the Missing Details (Part 1: Interpreting the Brief Narrative) (Page 132)

All ten statements are unclear based on the limited information in the narrative. Some of the information may be contained elsewhere in the report, but that was beyond the scope of this exercise.

The Case of the Missing Details (Part 2: Filling in the Gaps) (Page 133)

Instead of suggesting revisions for this exercise, I've listed details that might be appropriate to incorporate into the sentences. You might think of others. Some of this information might appear elsewhere in your document, but the point of this exercise is to get you thinking about details that may be important.

- color of the smoke
 - how many windows and on what side(s) of the building
 - height of the building (how many floors)
- which room the fire was confined to
 - type of damage (smoke, heat, water)
 - type of building (e.g., house, apartment, office complex)
- how Engine 3's crew assisted paramedics
 - which paramedic unit
 - hospital the patient was transported to
 - code of transport (code 2, code 3)
- definition of adequate clearance (e.g., 36 inches)
 - what safety equipment (fire extinguishers, alarm boxes, etc.)
 - applicable code section
- details about the altercation
 - detention facility he was taken to
 - whether suspect or police were injured
 - which police agency
- identity of person(s) making the estimate
 - what the estimate is based on

The Case of the Vibrant Voice (Page 136)

- Active
Passive: The building owner had previously been cited for safety violations by OSHA.
- Passive
Active: Firefighters discovered the child under the wreckage.

- Passive
Active: We began search and rescue efforts immediately.
- Active
Passive: CPR was performed on the victim for more than 20 minutes.
- Passive
Active: The homeowner left a candle burning unattended.
- Passive
Active: A hidden surveillance camera captured the incident.
- Active
Passive: The pedestrian was struck by a black SUV as he entered the intersection.
- Passive
Active: I read the suspect his Miranda rights.
- Passive
Active: Police arrested her for child abuse.
- Active
Passive: The desk was dusted (by me) for prints.

The Case of the Needless Shifts (Page 140)

The following are suggested revisions. Other options may be appropriate.

- A person who inhales chlorine gas can develop pulmonary edema.
- Employees started decontamination right away, but the patient felt no relief prior to our arrival.
- We followed the suspect by helicopter and radioed his position to officers on the ground.
- When homeowners ... (plural)
- Steve said that we needed to shock the patient and asked me to get the defibrillator ready.
- Hazmat technicians ... (plural)
- Catherine examined the crime scene and found no sign of struggle.
- The chief's secretary said, "He's in a meeting. Can I take a message?"
or ... The chief's secretary said that he was in a meeting and offered to take a message.
- I ordered an evacuation knowing that an unexpected wind shift could drive the fire toward these homes.
- As Engine 3 (or *we*) left the station, we could see a heavy column of black smoke against the predawn sky.

Solutions to the Cases (continued)

The Case of the Nonparallel Structure (Page 142)

The following are suggested revisions. Other options may be appropriate.

1. ... fires and burn injuries.
2. ... and ~~they need to~~ identify ...
3. ... rather than a firefighter.
or ... Stacey decided on a career in law enforcement rather than in the fire service.
4. ... eyes and stopped breathing.
5. ... and ~~he was~~ evasive ...
6. ... identify the hazardous material
7. A. Check in and obtain ...
B. Participate in preparing ...
C. Advise the hazardous ...
D. Alter, suspend, or terminate ...
(Delete *has full authority to*)
8. Use all questions ...
 - What provokes the pain? Does anything make it better or worse?
 - What does the pain feel like?
 - Where is the pain, and does it radiate anywhere?
 - On a scale of 1 to 10, how severe is the pain?
 - How long has the pain lasted? Is it ~~steady~~, or does it come and go?Or use all statements ...
 - What provokes the pain and ~~whether~~ anything makes it better or worse.
 - What the pain feels like.
 - Where the pain is ~~located~~ and whether it radiates elsewhere.
 - The severity of the pain, ~~on a scale of 1 to 10~~.
 - How long ~~the patient~~ has had the pain and whether it comes and goes.

The Case of the Misplaced Modifiers (Part 1: Limiting Modifiers) (Page 144)

- | | |
|-------|------|
| 1. b | 5. b |
| 2. a | 6. a |
| 3. b. | 7. a |
| 4. a | 8. b |

The Case of the Misplaced Modifiers (Part 2: Misplaced Modifiers) (Page 145)

The following are suggested revisions. Other options may be appropriate.

1. The ~~patient~~ with third-degree burns is being evaluated by a paramedic.
2. Some of the ~~people~~ who did not seek shelter were killed by the passing tornado.
3. The children bravely testified in court against ~~the man who had molested them.~~
(or *testified bravely*)
4. Engine 11 responded for a report of a man ~~who had suffered a seizure on the trail.~~
5. I put the evidence found at the crime scene into the storage locker.
6. On orders from the chief, we can't disclose the name of the woman who was shot.
7. The tenth annual reunion was disrupted by a bomb threat.
8. Over time, the recruits became more proficient at raising ladders.
9. Many of the patients who were badly injured were in the front of the bus.
10. The teens set off the illegal (or illegally purchased) fireworks in Kyle's backyard. (Because moving the modifier would not create a clearer sentence, rewriting the sentence slightly was a better solution.)

Solutions to the Cases (continued)

The Case of the Squinting Modifier

(Page 147)

Correct placement of the modifier depends on the intended meaning.

1. irritated my throat briefly
or ... The small amount of smoke I inhaled irritated my throat.
2. accused them wrongly
3. deeply penetrated
or ... concerns me deeply
4. covertly tailed
5. rapidly deteriorating
or ... need rapid transport
(change *rapidly* to *rapid* for the second option)
6. often drives Code 3
or ... may often become impatient
7. arrest him tonight
or ... Tonight we decided
8. Immediately evacuating
9. routinely drove or complained routinely
10. first said
or ... What you said made sense to me finally ... (change *first* to *finally* for this option)

The Case of the Split Infinitive

(Page 149)

1. b
2. a is best, b is acceptable
3. b is best, a is acceptable
4. b
5. c is best—emphasis is *stopped briefly*
a and b are acceptable—but the emphasis is *reassess briefly*
6. b
7. a
8. b
9. a
10. a—this wording shows that *quickly and quietly* applies to both exiting the building and reporting to the assembly areas

The Case of the Dangling Modifier

(Page 152)

Provided below are one or two possible revisions for each of the sentences. You may have come up with other alternatives that are also acceptable.

1. If the knife is still impaled in the patient, you should stabilize it in place.
2. For evidence to be ruled admissible in court, you must ensure the chain of custody is unbroken.
or ... You must ensure the chain of custody is unbroken for evidence to be ruled admissible in court.
3. Because Diane had been kidnapped during the night, her parents were distraught.
or ... Diane's parents were distraught because she had been kidnapped during the night.
4. Because he is a known sex offender, the police department will be watching him closely.
or ... As a known sex offender, he will be watched closely by the police department.
5. While inspecting the building, I noticed several safety violations.
or ... I noticed several safety violations while inspecting the building.
6. Because we are women, some men think we are not strong enough to do the job.
or ... Some men think we are not strong enough to do the job because we are women.
7. To stop the bleeding, apply direct pressure.
or ... Apply direct pressure to stop the bleeding.
8. Three minutes after we rescued the last victim, the structure collapsed.
or ... The structure collapsed three minutes after we rescued the last victim.
9. Not finding evidence to support arson, I determined the cause of the fire to be accidental.
or ... Because I found no evidence to suggest arson, I determined the fire to be of accidental origin.
10. Because the helmets were old and not up to current standards, I took them out of service.
or ... I took the helmets out of service because they were old and not up to current standards.
11. While I was working with the Hurst tool, the high-pressure hose burst and splashed hydraulic fluid in my face.
12. While I was assessing the patient, he suddenly became combative and struck me in the face.

Solutions to the Cases (continued)

The Case of the Faulty Construction

(Page 154)

The following are suggested revisions. Other options may be appropriate.

1. In response to our community's concern about the increase in gang violence, we are ...
(delete *is the reason that*)
2. Smoke detectors are ...
(not *the use of* smoke detectors)
3. Incorporate ...
(not *incorporating*)
4. Hypothermia is the cooling of the body core temperature.
(delete *is when*)
5. I determined ...
(not *my investigation determined*)
6. To check capillary refill, press ...
(not *by pressing*)
7. A stoma is a surgical opening ...
(delete *is where there is*)
8. Evaluate your progress ...
(not *by evaluating*)
9. Having personnel observe ...
(*Assigning* personnel to observe for safety hazards is not the same as knowing the assignment is being carried out. Thus *having* is a better choice for this sentence.)
10. Do you have some form of emergency decon in place? Emergency decon must be set up prior to performing a rescue.
(Breaking this into two sentences is less awkward than the original version. The suggested solution was also made more concise by eliminating text that's obvious and doesn't add meaning to the sentence.)

The Case of the Capital Titles

(Page 157)

The following are my recommendations based on usage. However, there is enough flexibility in the rules to allow for different options in some of these sentences.

1. chief, Lieutenant
2. Doctor
3. president, Governor *or* governor
4. late, Captain
5. Medical Unit Leader, Operations
6. Secretary of Homeland Security, Pope's
(These titles *would likely be* capitalized out of respect in a press release. However, it would not be wrong to lowercase them instead.)
7. Senior Crime Scene Analyst
8. former, Presidents *or* presidents
9. incident safety officer, incident commander's
(Lowercasing these titles in a magazine article puts the emphasis on the rest of the text rather than on the positions. However, it would not be wrong to capitalize them instead.)
10. amateur sleuth

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Contraction	Possessive Pronoun
it's (it is)	its
they're (they are)	their
who's (who is)	whose
you're (you are)	your

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