

Grammar Rules

Fundamentals of Journalism - JR 102

Emerson College - Fall 2012

Value

- Impeccable grammar and clean copy along with an understanding and adherence to AP Style will make you tremendously valuable and set you apart throughout your career.

Exceptions

- There is always going to be exceptions to the rules.
- As a general rule for all of these following slides, don't do it.

Sentences

- Aim for tight sentences.
- If a sentence can be two, make it two.
- Make sure a sentence is actually a sentence.
(Subject and verb.)
 - Rare exceptions for emphasis.
 - Example: He called out. No reply.

Sentences

- As a general rule for all of these “exceptions,” don’t do it.
- Try to mix up sentence length and structure.
 - Don’t start every sentence with a clause.
 - Don’t have every sentence be short or long.
- Use active voice.
- Makes your writing stronger.

Concise

- Omit needless words.
 - Vigorous writing is concise.
- *Elements of Style*: “A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts.”

Concise

- Elements of Style says “[As] a rule, it is better to express a negative in positive form. ... not honest > dishonest; did not remember > forgot; did not pay any attention to > ignored.”
- In journalism, we are all about saying it as tightly – in as few words/characters – as possible. Use the shorter way to say it.

Concise

- Ask yourself, “Can I say this in fewer words (or even characters)?”
 - If the answer is yes, do it.
 - Almost always, you’ll find the shorter way is stronger.

Agreement

- Make sure your verb refers to your subject.
 - Each, None =singular
 - Group, family, team = singular
 - Pluralizing incorrectly is far more common.
- Make sure your pronoun refers to your subject.
 - The freshmen were talking about the books they had read. They were bored.
 - As written, “they” refers to the books.
 - As a general rule, try to limit use of pronouns such as it and they. Reference the subject specifically.

Agreement

- Make sure participial phrases refer to your correct subject.
 - Walking slowly down the road, he saw a woman accompanied by two children.(Here walking refers to him.)
 - He saw a woman, walking slowly down the road, accompanied by two children.(Here walking refers to her.)

Clauses

- Commas with clauses – before and in the middle of sentences.
 - Common words that start clauses: if, when, where, because, due to, since, whenever, wherever, in, as, although, for, while
- Often a sentence can be rewritten with the clause coming at the end. If so, the clause will not need a comma.
 - When it rains, people bring out their umbrellas.
 - People bring out their umbrellas when it rains.
 - Often the sentence will be stronger with the clause at the end.

Clauses

- Separate independent clauses using commas.
 - Better yet, make them two sentences.
 - The candidate stopped in 18 cities, and he made speeches in each one.
 - The candidate stopped in 18 cities. He made speeches in each one.
- One clause per sentence.
- Do not use clauses in compound sentences.

Clauses

- Restrictive relative clauses are not set off by commas. (The clause is necessary for definition.)
 - The girl who was injured in the crash later died.
 - The girl, who was 7, lost her mother in the accident.
- Don't start every sentence with a clause.
- Avoid starting ledes with a clause.

Parenthesis

- Try to avoid use of parenthesis.
 - Hard news does not contain asides.
- Parenthetical expressions can usually be set off by commas.
- Ask, “Can this be included as a clause within the sentence? Can this be its own sentence?”
 - Often the answer is yes.

More Punctuation

- Commas go before conjunctions (i.e. and, but)
- No comma before “and” or “or” in a list.
- Punctuation inside quotation marks.

More Punctuation

- Avoid semicolons. Only use should be in a list where necessary for clarification.
 - Example: The guest list included her mother; her father; the mayor, who is her cousin; his brother, who the mayor defeated in the primary; and numerous friends.
- Avoid overusing colons.
 - As a rule, colons are not that common.
- Do not use exclamation points!

Paragraphs

- Journalism paragraphs are a bit different.
- Look at an entire story as following the paragraph format you have likely been taught.
 - Topic sentence = lede
 - Supporting sentences = supporting graf
 - Final/concluding sentence = closing graf
- Also, hard news stories may or may not have traditional conclusions.
- Features should have conclusions.

Paragraphs

- One idea per graf.
- Grafes generally should be no more than four sentences.
- One sentence grafes are fine.
 - Of course, not every graf should be a single sentence.

Tense

- Make sure tense is consistent.
- Avoid using present tense.

Elements of Style

- Learn/memorize the “Words and Expressions Commonly Misused” and “Words Often Misspelled.”

Additional

- Learn the correct use of ironic/irony.
- Know the difference between critical, crucial and vital.
- Who vs. Whom vs. That
- U.S. = adjective. United States = noun

Additional

- Limit adverbs.
- One space after a period.
- Do not end sentences with prepositions.
- Contrary to what you may have been taught, it is OK to begin sentences with “And” or “But.”
 - However, do this sparingly.

Additional

- Two words = verb, one word = noun
 - shut out v. shutout
- Do not to split verbs.
 - Avoid: She opted **to just go** to the bank.
 - Use: She just opted **to go** to the bank.
- Limit use of contractions.
 - it is vs. it's; they are vs. they're

Know

- its vs. it's
- there vs. their vs. they're
- you're vs. your
- affect vs. effect