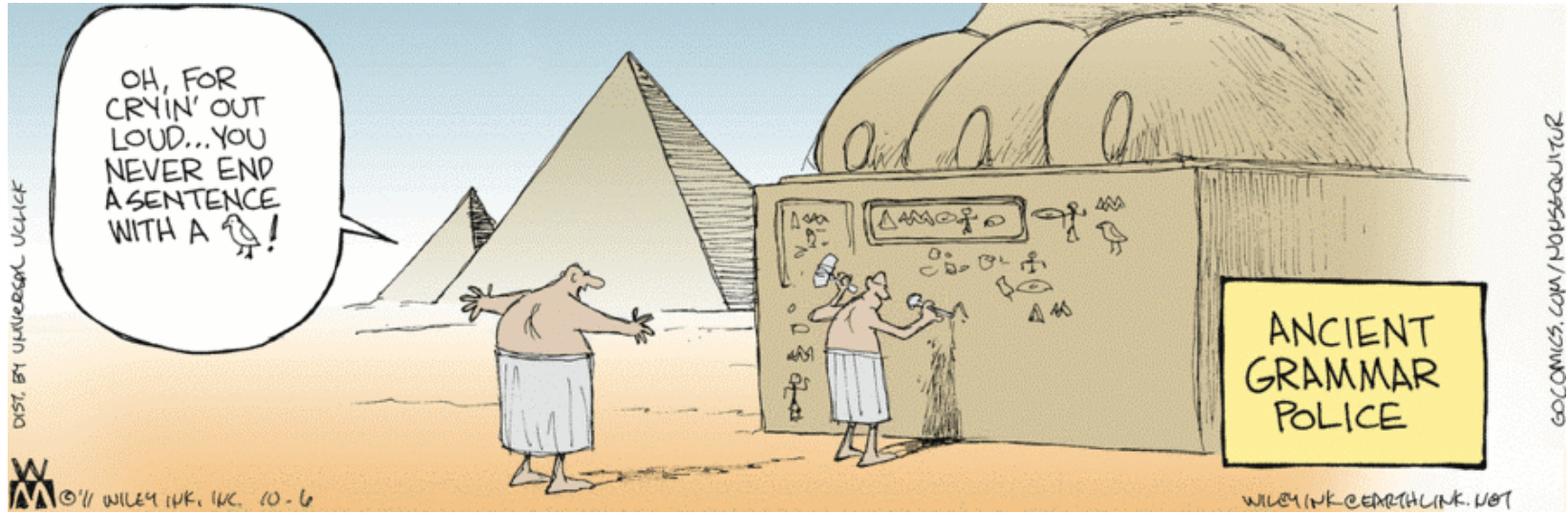


# Grammar Rules

Foundations of Journalism

Emerson College

Spring 2013



OH, FOR  
CRYIN' OUT  
LOUD... YOU  
NEVER END  
A SENTENCE  
WITH A [bird icon]!

ANCIENT  
GRAMMAR  
POLICE

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# 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

- 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.
  - At the same time, be mindful of weight vs. neutral language.



# 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 students 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.

# Clarity

- Don't using standalone demonstrative and/or indefinite pronouns -- i.e. this, that, these, many, some.
  - Include a noun that refers to object to which you are referring.
    - Some did not like the food.
    - Some people did not like the food.
    - This was not clear.
    - This idea was not clear.

# 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.
  - You may also use em dashes ( -- or —)
    - If you use em dashes, use them sparingly.
- Ask, “Can this be included as a clause within the sentence? Can this be its own sentence?”
  - Often the answer is yes.



# Semicolons



**Kim Boekbinder**

@KimBoekbinder



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"The semi-colon is the appendix of punctuation. It's kind of useless and mostly just sticks around to cause trouble" - Anonymous

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# Semicolons

- Most incorrectly used form of punctuation.
- If you're using one to separate two sentences, make it two sentences.
- 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.

# 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 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 grafes
  - Final/concluding sentence = closing grafes
- 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; do not vs. don't

# Know

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

# Jargon

- Avoid using jargon.
  - Jargon = language/vocabulary specific to a trade, profession, or group
- When jargon is necessary (and sometimes it is), explain as simply and concisely as possible what the term means.
  - Don't define jargon with more jargon.
  - Make sure you're re-writing (not plagiarizing) your definition.

# From Readings

- Elements of Style
  - Memorize/learn
    - V. Words and Expressions Commonly Misused
    - VI. Words Often Misspelled
- Writing and Reporting the News
  - Memorize/learn words under
    - Precision
    - Conciseness
    - Clarity