Grammar Slammer 1: Punctuation
Punctuation

• Don’t punctuate unless you know exactly why you’re doing it.
• Don’t rely on “feelings.”
• When in doubt, leave it out.
Commas—Rule 1

• Use a comma in a compound sentence when independent clauses are separated by a coordinating conjunction such as *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, or so*.

• FANBOYS
  – Tom Jacobs supported the war in Iraq, but his father was against it.
  – He wrote the manuscript, and she published it.
Commas—Rule 2

- When a dependent clause is located after an independent clause, DO NOT place a comma between the two.
  - I went on the roller coaster because my brother dared me.
  - I became very sick when the roller coaster zoomed upside down.
  - She left the building three hours before the fire alarm went off.
Commas—Rule 2 cont.

• Dependent clauses can often be identified by the use of dependent clause markers.
• These include *because, since, when, while, until, if, as, though, although, unless, after, before, once, whether.*
Commas—Rule 3

- Use commas to separate items in a series.
- Leave the comma out before a conjunction in a simple series unless the meaning would be unclear.
  - Give the money to Ann, Sue and Pat.
  - The flag is red, white and blue.
  - He went to town to buy a can of corn, a can of peas and carrots, and a can of beans.
Commas—Rule 4

• Use commas to set attribution off from a full quotation.
• Commas go inside the quotation marks.
• Don’t use a comma if a question mark or exclamation mark is appropriate.
  – “I need a 70 on this test,” he said.
  – She said, “I scored a 90 on the first try.”
  – “Why do I have to study grammar?” he asked.
Commas—Rule 5

• Use a comma after introductory material.

• After an introductory adverbial phrase or clause:
  
  – After six years of dating, they finally got married.
  – Because clouds covered the sky, it was difficult to see the comet last night.
Commas—Rule 5, cont.

• After two or more introductory prepositional phrases:
  – In the fall of 2007, the stock market dropped 12 percent.
  – In February it snowed 12 inches.

• When there are numbers involved, a comma may be needed for clarity:
  – In 1998, 79.2 percent of the adult population had a high school diploma.
Commas—Rule 5, cont.

• After a participial or infinitive phrase at the beginning of the sentence:
  – Running for the phone, she tripped and fell.
  – To win the South, John Kerry selected John Edwards as the vice presidential nominee.
Commas—Rule 6

• Use commas to set off participial phrases located at the end of the sentence that modify some part of the independent clause.
  – The committee adjourned the meeting, having conducted all the necessary business.
  – The bus crashed on Interstate 40, leaving two passengers with serious injuries.
Commas—Rule 7

• Use a comma between coordinate adjectives.
• Adjectives are coordinate if you can reverse the adjectives and put *and* between them.
  – The long, narrow passage was hard to navigate.
  – He was born on a cold, dreary Maine night.
Commas—Rule 8

• Commas follow all items in a full date or city/state combination.
  – June 25, 1940, was the date of my mother’s birth.
  – I was born on Sept. 10, 1973.
  – She has lived in Ajax, Tenn., for six years.
  – The young girl was born in Georgia in 1998.
  – We married in June 1995 in Mississippi.
Commas—Rule 9

• Commas set off nonessential modifying clauses and phrases.
• Do not use commas for essential modifying clauses and phrases.
  – Olan T. Farnall, who learned to drive when he was 10, spent 40 years as a bus driver.
  – The man who stole my car was arrested.
Commas—Rule 9, cont.

• Commas set off non-essential appositives, which are words that rename a noun.
  – Joy R. Gibson, my mother, was a police officer.
  – My oldest sister, Julie, is in the hospital.
  – My brother John went to the store.
Commas—Rule 10

• Commas surround words of direct address.
  – Samantha, quit talking so loudly.
  – It’s not your place, Bill, to make that decision.
Commas—Rule 11

• Use a comma before the adverbs *too*, *as well* or *also* at the end of a sentence.
  
  – Roberto Dumas came to the event, too.
Commas—Rule 12

• Use commas to set off conjunctive adverbs (such as however, likewise, at the same time, therefore) from the rest of the sentence.
  – James, however, was early.
  – The moral, therefore, is that you should not cheat.
Comma don’ts

• Do not use a comma between clauses that form part of a compound direct object.

  – He said none of the workers required medical attention and the leak did not pose a danger.
  – Jamie Worther argued that she deserved a raise and he did not.
More comma don’ts

• Don’t use a comma between adjectives when the second adjective is closely linked with the noun.
  – She built a new stone wall.

• Don’t use a comma between adjectives when one of them refers to color or age.
  – The story of the old yellow dog is a sad one.
  – The mean old woman scared the baby.
More comma don’ts

• Don’t use a comma before a partial or indirect quotation.
  – Feldman said “old-age blues” set in when he turned 30.
  – He said that he was innocent.
Semicolons—Rule 1

• Semicolons connect two complete sentences of related thought. Use of a semicolon often creates a sense of drama.

• A semicolon is used instead of a conjunction and comma or a period.
  – She won the $45 million lottery on July 5; five days later she was paralyzed by a fall.
  – I’m neat; he’s a slob.
Semicolons—Rule 2

• Semicolons are used in a list to separate items that require significant internal punctuation.
  – Survivors include his wife, Jean; a daughter, Jesse Wilkins, of Marietta, Ga.; and a son, Bill, of Midland, Texas.
  – I have lived in Dayton, Ohio; Nashville, Tenn.; Tuscaloosa, Ala.; and Lubbock, Texas.
Colons

• Colons precede formal lists.
• Do not put a colon after *including*.
  – The following students passed the exam: Mary Wilson, Ada Stone, Joseph Michaels and Bob Stoops.
  – I’m taking four classes this semester: French, journalism, history and English.
  – I love vegetables, including squash, peas and corn.
Hyphens—Rule 1

• Use a hyphen to join compound modifiers that precede a noun.
  – My left-handed son loves his blue-eyed dog.
  – I ate the chocolate-covered peanuts.
  – A man eating chicken is not the same as a man-eating chicken.

• Most compound modifiers are also hyphenated when they follow a form of the linking verb to be.
  – The student was well-read.
Hyphens—Rule 2

• Hyphens are used with compound numbers.
  – Forty-six women attended the event.
Hyphen “don’ts”

• Don’t hyphenate words with the adverb very.
  – She had a very good time.

• Don’t hyphenate ly words.
  – We all love a nicely dressed man.
Hyphens with ages

• Ages expressed as adjectives before a noun or as substitutes for a noun use hyphens.
  – She has a 5-year-old son.
  – The race is for 3-year-olds.
  – The boy is 6 years old.
Dashes

- Dashes are used to separate thoughts.
- Dashes are sometimes used to replace commas to ensure that a pause is audible and even dramatic.

— The presidential candidate was — if you can believe it — silent for more than 30 minutes.
Apostrophes—Rule 1

• Apostrophes are used to make possessives.
• If a singular noun does not end in s, add ‘s.
  – John’s coat is red.
• If a singular common noun ends in s, add ‘s unless the next word begins with s. Then add only the apostrophe.
  – The boss’s machine works well.
  – The witness’ story was false.
Apostrophes—Rule 1 cont.

• If a singular proper noun ends in s, add only the apostrophe.
  – Mary Dickens’ poetry is difficult to read.

• If there is joint possession, use the correct possessive form for only the possessive closest to the noun.
  – Joe and Sue’s house in San Diego was ruined by fire.
Apostrophes—Rule 2

• Use an apostrophe to create a contraction.
  – He wouldn’t come to class on time.
  – It’s cold in here.
  – Who’s going to dress up for Halloween?
Apostrophes—Rule 3

• Use an apostrophe to indicate that something is missing.
  – I love the music from the ’60s.
  – Rock ‘n’ roll is here to stay.
  – He was born in the 1970s.
Grammar Slammer 2: Grammar
Finding the subject

• Make sure you find the TRUE subject of a sentence before you determine if it takes a singular or plural verb.
  – Drinking Diet Mountain Dew is fun.
  – The man, along with his dog, was found unharmed.
Collective subjects

• The question is whether the subject is singular or plural.

• Many nouns that appear to be plural are treated as singular units.
  – The committee will present its report today.
  – Measles wears down parents as well as children.
  – The jury looks concerned.
  – Some members of the jury look concerned.
Singular pronouns

• When used as a subject, the pronouns *each, either, neither, anyone, everyone, much, no one, nothing* and *someone* are always singular, regardless of what follows them in a phrase.

  – Each of the boys has his own personality.
  – Everyone in the class has a computer.
  – Neither of the candidates has my vote.
  – Anyone is capable of learning grammar.
Either/or and neither/nor

• When subjects are structured with either/or or neither/nor, use the verb that corresponds to the subject closest to it.
  – Either the teacher or the children are lying.
  – Either the children or the teacher is lying.
  – Neither Jane nor her daughters are ill.
Amounts

• Subjects that stand for definable units of money, measurement, time or food always take singular verbs.
  – Five thousand dollars is the minimum bid.
  – Twenty-six miles, 385 yards is the traditional distance for the marathon.
Percent

• Percent takes a singular verb when standing alone or when a singular word follows an _of_ construction.

• It takes a plural verb when a plural word follows an _of_ construction.
  – The teacher said 60 percent is a failing grade.
  – Records show that 50 percent of the membership was there.
  – Records show that 50 percent of the members were there.
Compound subjects

• When two or more nouns function as the subject of a sentence, use a plural verb.
  – Joe and Bob are buying a house.
  – The opening number and the grand finale always thrill the audience.
  – Before you assign a final grade, please consider the time and effort that have gone into the assignment.
As well as, together with

• A singular subject followed by phrases such as together with, in addition to, and as well as always takes a singular verb.

  – The tax resolution, together with its amendments, has been sent to the president for her signature.
Prepositional phrases

• Don’t let a prepositional phrase after a subject confuse you as to which verb to use.
  – She will consider the committee’s recommended list of names, which includes two women and one man.
  – I want to focus on two areas of study that interest me.
  – Each of the students is doing fine.
Pronouns and antecedents

• A pronoun must agree with its antecedent, the noun to which it refers.
  – Atlanta became less congested after it expanded its subway system.

• Collective subjects that are treated as single units will take a singular pronoun.
  – The Boy Scouts will reconsider its bylaws.
  – The committee gave its report.
Who and whom

• We don’t often use *whom* in spoken English, so it may seem awkward in writing.

• Who is a substitute for subjects referring to *he, she, we* and *they*.
  – Who is going to be the next president?
  – She is going to be the next president.
Who and whom, cont.

• Whom is a substitute for the objective pronouns *him, her, us* and *them*.
  – Whom did he sing to over the phone?
  – He sang to her over the phone.
How to decide?

• Reword the sentence and substitute he or him to determine which one to use.

  – Who/whom did he call?
  – He called ______. (him)

  – Jean was the one who/whom he sang to for hours.
  – He sang to ______ (her) for hours.
That and which

• *That* is a restrictive pronoun, indicating that the information it precedes is essential for correct understanding of the sentence.
  – The version that had the error was discarded.
  – The dog that has the spots will be adopted by the young couple.
That and which, cont.

• *Which* precedes non-essential information and appears with commas.
  – My father’s 1994 Buick, which has 120,000 miles on it, has been very reliable.
  – The chancellor’s University Day speech, which lasted an hour, was extremely informative.
That vs. who

• That refers to things, and who refers to people.
  – The Californian who stole my car was arrested.
  – The car that was stolen has been recovered.
Faulty parallelism

- Series or lists of phrases in a sentence should be in parallel structure.
  - Yes: I love running and skating.
  - Yes: I love to run and to skate.
  - No: I love running and to skate.
  - Yes: The mayor submitted three budget requests: to widen Georgia Street, to close portions of Reading City Hall, and to double the number of night patrol officers.
Misplaced or dangling modifiers

• Modifying clauses and phrases should be closest to what they modify.
  – The car is in the garage, which he smashed just a block from his home.
  – Should be: The car, which he smashed just a block from his home, is in the garage.
  – Running from the law, we saw a criminal.
  – Should be: We saw a criminal running from the law.
Lay or lie?

• To lay is to place something somewhere, and it requires a direct object.
  – Lay, laid, have laid, laying
  – He laid the hat on the table.
  – I will lay my book on the desk.

• To lie is to recline.
  – Lie, lay, have lain, lying
  – She wanted to lie down after dinner.
  – He lay on the sofa for two weeks.
Grammar Slammer 3: Word Usage
Among or between?

• Between refers to two things.
• Among refers to more than two things.
  – The twins split the ice cream between them.
  – The triplets split the ice cream among them.
It’s or its?

- Usually we use an apostrophe to make something possessive, but not with its.
- Its is the possessive of it.
- It’s is a contraction for it is. If you see it’s, substitute it is and see if it makes sense.
  - The cow swished its tail.
  - It’s damp in here.
  - It’s time for General Motors to give its employees a raise.
Whose or who’s?

• Whose is the possessive of who.
  – I will vote for the candidate whose beliefs best match my own.

• Who’s is a contraction for who is. It is NOT possessive.

• If you see who’s, substitute who is and see if it makes sense.
  – I want to know who’s in charge here.
Hopefully

• Hopefully is an adverb that means full of hope.
  – Correct: The puppy looked hopefully at the waitress.
  – Incorrect: Hopefully she will be on time.
Accept or except?

• Accept means receive.
• Except means exclude.
  – I accept the promotion.
  – Everyone except Jason was present.
Lay or lie?

• To lay is to place something somewhere. It requires a direct object.
  – Lay, laid, have laid, laying
  – He laid the hat on the couch.
  – I will lay my coat on the chair.

• To lie is to recline.
  – Lie, lay, have lain, lying
  – She wanted to lie down after dinner.
  – He lay on the sofa for two weeks.
Set or sit?

• To set is to place something somewhere.
  – Set your paper on the desk.

• To sit is to take a seat.
  – Sit down, please.
Affect vs. effect

• Effect is a noun that means a result of.
  – The effect of the crash was devastating.

• Effect can be a verb that means to bring about.
  – The chancellor wants to effect change.

• Affect is a verb that means to have an effect on or to influence.
  – The grammar test will affect your grade in this course.
Bad vs. badly

• Bad is an adjective. It describes someone’s state of being.
  – Mayor Jim Smith feels bad about lying to his constituents.

• Badly is an adverb. It tells how someone does something.
  – He plays the guitar badly.
Fewer vs. less

• When you refer to a number of individual items, use *fewer*.

• When you refer to a bulk amount, sum, period of time or concept, use *less*.
  
  – At Data Corporation, fewer than 10 employees make less than $50,000 a year.
**Insure vs. ensure**

- Limit the meaning of *insure* to activities of insurance companies.
- *Ensure* means in a general sense “to guarantee” or “to provide something.”
  - Prudential refused to insure him because of his pre-existing condition.
  - She promised to do all she could to ensure our safety.
Very bad things:

• Alot — that’s wrong!
  – It should be a lot (two words).
  – I have a lot of work to do tonight.
  – Susie likes Jason a lot.

• Alright — that’s also wrong!
  – It should be all right (two words).
  – Things will be all right soon.