

# PROFESSOR KABAY'S LIST OF FREQUENTLY CORRECTED ERRORS

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*I've been editing technical writing since 1970 and notice that some errors keep popping up in many writers' and especially students' papers in undergraduate courses and in the MSIA Seminars. I've been collecting the comments I make about these errors over several years to help my students and hope that you will find some of these pointers helpful in your own writing. Please send me your own observations for possible inclusion. I'll be happy to acknowledge your contributions.*

## CONTENTS<sup>1</sup>

**\* marks new item in this version**

1	acronyms defined on first use.....	4
2	acronym plurals do not take an apostrophe .....	4
3	acronyms to be used later .....	4
4	affect or effect? .....	4
5	all of which .....	4
6	although or while? .....	4
7	and creates a compound subject .....	4
8	apostrophes don't create plurals .....	4
9	as and like .....	4
10	automatically updated data fields .....	4
11	by having . . . it .....	4
12	cannot .....	5
13	capitalization not for emphasis .....	5
14	capitalize names of specific organizations .....	5
15	chapter in book .....	5
16	cited or sited or sighted? .....	5
17	colon before lists .....	5
18	colon to show explanation .....	5
19	comma needed .....	5
20	complement / compliment.....	6
21	compound adjectives take hyphens .....	6
22	compose / comprise / consist of / constitute / include .....	6
23	cross-references .....	7
24	dangling participle .....	7
25	data – singular or plural?.....	7
26	due to vs because of .....	7
27	e.g. or i.e.?.....	7
28	elisions and interpolations .....	8
29	eminent / immanent / imminent.....	8
30	every word, every phrase .....	8
31	frankly, honestly, truthfully .....	8

<sup>1</sup> Use bookmarks in PDF to move to specific section by letter of alphabet.

## ***Frequently Corrected Errors***

---

32	full justification .....	8
33	general consensus .....	8
34	gerundial takes the possessive .....	8
35	grammar & style checker .....	9
36	ibid. ....	9
37	impact .....	9
38	imply vs infer .....	9
39	in fact .....	9
40	indefinite antecedents .....	9
41	indicative and subjunctive moods .....	9
42	intensifiers weaken your text .....	9
43	Internet and Web vs internet and web .....	9
44	italicize foreign words .....	9
45	its and it's .....	10
46	literally is not an intensifier .....	10
47	loath, loth, or loathe? .....	10
48	long quotations .....	10
49	majority as a singular or plural? .....	10
50	manual linefeeds .....	10
51	mealy-mouthed adverbs .....	10
52	metric prefixes .....	10
53	most anyone .....	11
54	none is or none are? .....	11
55	number of the verb must accord with number of the subject .....	11
56	number: singular or plural? .....	11
57	number of the verb must accord with number of the subject .....	11
58	numbers .....	11
59	orphans .....	11
60	page breaks .....	11
61	page formatting .....	12
62	paragraph break .....	12
63	paragraph spacing .....	12
64	parallel construction .....	12
65	premier / premiere .....	12
66	punctuation marks inside quotation .....	12
67	purposely or purposefully? .....	12
68	quotation marks are not for emphasis .....	12
69	quotation marks are not for slang .....	13
70	quotations: standards .....	13
71	reading aloud .....	13
72	real .....	13
73	real figure and table numbers .....	13
74	real footnotes or endnotes, not manually-entered superscripts or brackets .....	13
75	real headings .....	13
76	references .....	13
77	repeated errors .....	14
78	restrictive and non-restrictive clauses .....	14
79	run-on sentence .....	14
80	sentence fragment .....	14
81	short, simple words vs long, fancy words .....	14
82	sign in vs sign-in .....	15
83	single line breaks for paragraphs .....	15

## ***Frequently Corrected Errors***

---

84	so-called “cliché” .....	15
85	state (verb) & conjunctions .....	15
86	subjunctive vs conditional.....	15
87	such as vs like .....	15
88	symbol or numeral does not start a sentence.....	15
89	table of contents.....	16
90	their / there / they're .....	16
91	topical headings .....	16
92	transitive verbs require conjunction for a dependent clause.....	16
93	try and... .....	16
94	underlining .....	16
95	useless introductory padding.....	16
96	useless words.....	16
97	violating word-count limits .....	17
98	who versus that.....	17
99	whom vs who .....	17
100	widow .....	17
101	Wikipedia.....	17

# Frequently Corrected Errors

## 1 acronyms defined on first use

Define each acronym on first use in an essay even if you have defined it in previous essays. Use the acronym consistently throughout the rest of the paper.

## 2 acronym plurals do not take an apostrophe

The plural of *ACL* is *ACLs*, not *ACL's*; that of *MMPORPG* is *MMPORPGs*.

## 3 acronyms to be used later

If you define an acronym on its first use, you should generally use it consistently later in the paper or chapter.

## 4 affect or effect?

In general use, affect is only used as a verb, whereas effect is commonly used as a noun and only in formal contexts as a verb. What causes confusion is that they have very similar pronunciations and closely related meanings. If one thing affects [acts upon] another, it has an effect on it [causes it to change]. Notice also that you can affect [cause a change in] people as well as things, but you can only effect [bring about] things such as changes: *The election has affected our entire society, for it has effected major changes in the government. The bad weather has a bad effect [not affect] on him.*

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**MK adds:** There are technical meanings of the word *affect* that make the confusion worse. In psychology, *affect* refers to feelings or emotions. Thus, *The autistic child lacked affect.*

## 5 all of which

Don't start a sentence with "all of which." Usually you end up with a sentence fragment as a result. You can link the first and the second parts with a comma.

WRONG:

*I realized that I had no money in my wallet and my friend discovered that she had lost her purse sometime in the last two hours. All of which caused serious problems when we tried to get across the lake on the ferry.*

RIGHT:

*I realized that I had no money in my wallet and my friend discovered that she had lost her purse sometime in the last two hours, all of which caused serious problems when we tried to get across the lake on the ferry.*

## 6 although or while?

*While* is best used for duration. In contrast, *although* instantly makes it clear to the reader that you mean to provide a

clarification whereas *while* leaves a momentary confusion about your meaning.

## 7 and creates a compound subject

The moment you link two nouns with "and" you have created a compound plural subject. *Means, motive and opportunity are* [not is] *the basis for prosecution.*

## 8 apostrophes don't create plurals

*Shoe's for sale* is wrong. The apostrophe creates a possessive (except for it / its) or a contraction (does, doesn't). In particular, don't use apostrophes to create the plural of an acronym. *ACLs* and *RTFs*, not *ACL's* and *RTF's*.

## 9 as and like

*As* is usually a conjunction that introduces a clause:

E.g., *As I was saying, the red car sped through the intersection without stopping.*

*Like* is usually a preposition that takes an object:

E.g., *The red car sped through the intersection like a cannonball.*

WRONG: *Like I said...*

RIGHT: *As I said...*

## 10 automatically updated data fields

Don't use automatically updated date fields in essays – you'll have the current date substituted every time you save the file. Such usage is useful when you are trying to show when a file was last saved or edited but not if you are showing, say, a submission date that should be fixed.

## 11 by having . . . it

Never write "By having... it" if you intend "it" to refer to the fact indicated in the clause starting with "By having."

WRONG: *By having a large enough stock of products, it led to high profits.*

In your original sentence, the reader has to try to imagine exactly what you mean by "it" because that pronoun cannot point to the entire preceding clause. Using *it* to point mistakenly to the adverbial clause momentarily confuses the reader as (s)he looks for the precise antecedent of that pronoun – and cannot find one because "by having" isn't a noun (although "having" is a gerund).

You could write,

- *Having a large enough stock of products led to high profits* or
- *By having a large enough stock of products, we were able to make high profits* or

# Frequently Corrected Errors

- *Having a large enough stock of products allowed us to make a high profits.*

## 12 cannot

*contraction* – the usual way of writing “can not”

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## 13 capitalization not for emphasis

Stop capitalizing ordinary nouns! Do not use capitalization as a form of emphasis. Capitalize only proper nouns.

WRONG: The need for Information Assurance Certification is growing.

RIGHT: The Global Information Assurance Certification® (GIAC) granted by the Systems Administration and Network Security Institute (SANS) is growing in popularity.

WRONG: The evidence is that Computer Crime will be a major problem in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

RIGHT: The Computer Crime Task Force in Vermont is already a success.

## 14 capitalize names of specific organizations

If you are writing about a specific, named organization, you should capitalize its name.

“The full names of institutions and companies and of their departments, and sometimes their short forms, are capitalized. A *the* preceding a name, even when part of the official title, is lowercased in running text. Such generic terms as school and company are usually lowercased when used alone but are sometimes capitalized to avoid ambiguity or for promotional purposes.” [*Chicago Manual of Style*, 15<sup>th</sup> Edition, p338]

For example, one could write as follows if referring only to Norwich University:

*We find that University privacy policies are weak.*

But if one were discussing universities in general, one could write

*We find that university privacy policies are weak.*

More examples:

“A *university* graduate program expects students to apply the highest standards of writing” but “The *University* graduate program expects students to apply the highest standards of writing.”

In the first sentence, the word *university* is a generic noun; in the second, *University* refers to a specific university (to be understood by the reader) such as Norwich University. Here’s another example:

- The President of the University Faculty Council announced a new retirement plan on Tuesday.
- A president of a university faculty council is the spokesperson for the faculty.

## 15 chapter in book

Normally you should be referring to a specific article (and its author and title), not to an entire reference work. You include the overall work by putting “in “ and what you have here after the specific info about the chapter. Thus,

Somebody, F. (2009). “Impressive chapter title.” Chapter 345 in Widget, P & R. Wadgett (2009), eds. *Handbook of Widgetry*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition. New York: Wiley

## 16 cited or sited or sighted?

The castle is *sited* on the Isle of Wight.

The book is *cited* three times in the article.

The bird was *sighted* three times on the Isle of Wight.

## 17 colon before lists

Don’t put a colon immediately after a verb or a preposition that introduces a list; e.g., “My list of commonly misused words includes: *affect*, *complimentary* and *utilize*.”

That sentence can be written without a colon as “My list of commonly misused words includes *affect*, *complimentary* and *utilize*.”

One can also use *the following* or *as follows*, depending on context, with a colon, as in “My list of commonly misused words includes the following: *affect*, *complimentary* and *utilize*.”<sup>2</sup>

## 18 colon to show explanation

In these examples of one of the suitable uses of the colon, the clause following the colon is an explanation or expansion of the clause preceding the colon.

*He was a brilliant manager: his employees wanted to do well because they liked and respected him.*

*The conflict seemed insoluble: both sides were convinced that their view was the only possible valid perspective.*

## 19 comma needed

The conjunctions “however,” “therefore,” “moreover,” and “nevertheless” are normally followed by a comma.

*The opposing team consistently scored goals; however, we tried to defend our goalie.*

<sup>2</sup>With thanks to Prof Don Holden

## Frequently Corrected Errors

*The opposing team consistently scored goals; nevertheless, we tried to defend our goalie.*

BUT CONSIDER THESE EXAMPLES:

*The opposing team consistently scored goals however we tried to defend our goalie.*

*However we tried to defend our goalie, the opposing team consistently scored goals.*

In these examples, “however” means “no matter how” and is not preceded by a semicolon or followed by a comma.

AND ANOTHER EXAMPLE:

*The opposing team consistently scored goals; we tried to defend our goalie nevertheless.*

Notice that the terminal “nevertheless” also has no semicolon or comma when it is used as an afterthought instead of as a critical conjunction.

### 20 complement | compliment

The two words are close in spelling but their meanings are quite different. A *complement* is something added to perfect a thing and make it complete, whereas a *compliment* is an expression of praise: *A fine wine is the perfect complement to good cooking. The cook received many compliments from the guests that evening.* Both words are also used as verbs, and both have adjectival forms: *complementary* and *complimentary*. *Complimentary* has the special meaning “given free”; and so a *complimentary* copy of a book is one given without charge, whereas a *complementary* copy is one that completes a set of books.

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### 21 compound adjectives take hyphens<sup>3</sup>

The *Chicago Manual of Style* admits that hyphenating words is complicated: “There are, quite literally, scores if not hundreds of . . . rules for the spelling of compound words. Many of them are nearly useless because of the great number of exceptions.”<sup>4</sup> The authors of the *Chicago Manual* provide a table several pages long showing details of various types of hyphenation. The specific issue in this case is whether to hyphenate compound modifiers. The fundamental principle is that the hyphen helps to avoid even momentary doubt or confusion about the writer’s precise meaning.

For example, what is meant by *The large grained wood chest weighed a ton*? Does the writer mean that

(a) The chest was large and it was “grained?”

(b) The wood had large grain?

Using a hyphen in *The large-grained wood chest* eliminates all hesitation for the reader and immediately points to meaning (b).

So here are a very few key rules about hyphenating (or not) compound adjectives:

- If the first word in a compound modifier is an adverb, don’t hyphenate the words. *His weakly uttered words were nonetheless effective. She found the poorly concealed treasure behind the sink. Professor Kabay’s Frequently Corrected Errors.*
- If the first word in a compound modifier is an adjective, hyphenate the words. *His weak-kneed reaction was shameful. The pink-toed aardvark was astounding.*
- If the first word is a noun and the second is a present participle (verb form ending in *-ing*) then hyphenate the compound adjective. *The advertising copywriter’s writing was irritation-producing twaddle.* (Note the radically different meaning of *irritation producing twaddle*.) *She is building an awe-inspiring log cabin. They had an eye-watering meal at the Indian restaurant.*
- Phrases used as modifiers should be hyphenated: *The first-in-line effect . . .* but *He was first in line.* *A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. . .* but *This opportunity comes only once in a lifetime.*
- Compounds using a number and *-odd* use a hyphen. *There were a hundred-odd participants.* Contrast the meaning of *There were a hundred odd participants* which means something quite different (indeed, potentially insulting).
- Numbers with a unit need a hyphen. *We were in a twenty-mile race. It is a sixteen-ton squasher used by Monty Python. That’s the eight-year-old girl who is first in her math class.*
- However, *percent* does *not* take a hyphen: *We’ve seen an eight percent decline in rhinoceros dung in the classrooms this year.*
- *Quasi-*, *half-*, *all-* and *cross-* take hyphens in compound adjectives. *That’s a quasi-legal solution. It’s a half-hearted approach. He’s a high school all-star [team member].* Note that compound adjectives with *all-* keep the hyphen even if they follow the noun or are free-standing. *She is a cross-country skier* (but watch out for words with *cross* that have been joined together; e.g., *crossword puzzle*, *crosscut saw*).

### 22 compose | comprise | consist of | constitute | include

*Comprise* and *consist of* are concerned with a whole having a number of parts. **They are used in the active voice**, with the whole as their subject and the parts as their object: *The*

<sup>3</sup> With thanks to Prof Elizabeth Black

<sup>4</sup> *Chicago Manual of Style*, 12<sup>th</sup> Edition, Revised (1969). University of Chicago Press (ISBN 0-226-77008-7). §6.18, p 132.

## Frequently Corrected Errors

house comprises three bedrooms, a bathroom, a kitchen, and a living room. The meal consisted of several small dishes that everybody dipped into and shared. Use of comprise in the sense “to constitute” is controversial.

**Avoid constructions like this if you wish to steer clear of criticism:**

*WRONG: The house **is comprised** of three bedrooms, a bathroom, a kitchen, and a living room.*

*WRONG: Three bedrooms, a bathroom, a kitchen, and a living room **comprise** the house.*

If some rather than all the parts are mentioned, *include* may be used instead: *The house includes a kitchen and a living room on the first floor.*

**Compose and constitute** are concerned with parts making up a whole. **Compose** is normally used in the **passive**, and **constitute** in the **active**: *The team **is composed** of several experts in the field.*

*The following commodities **constitute** the average household diet.*

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### 23 cross-references

In a published book, sometimes authors make reference to a previous source by either copying the reference outright (thus generating two identical footnotes or endnotes). Sometimes authors will refer to exactly the same point in a reference as in the immediately preceding reference; they use *ibid.* (stands for Latin *ibidem*, “the same”). If they are referring to the same work as in the immediately preceding reference but a different location, they use *op. cit.* (stands for Latin *opus citatum*, “the work cited”). However, I strongly recommend that you *not* use these forms. In an essay or manuscript where you may decide to change the order of materials or to introduce new references, you may find the backward references to be incorrect. Instead, use the INSERT CROSS-REFERENCE function of your word processor. In MS-Word, the function shows you a list of types of references (e.g., section headings, footnotes, tables) from which you can select a subset and then point to the specific cross-reference. You can then format the cross-reference to match other references according to your chosen style. All these cross-references will then automatically be adjusted if there are changes in the order or content of your text.

### 24 dangling participle

This error is known as a “dangling participle.” E.g., *After biting me on the ankle, the dog-catcher put Fido in a cage.* “Biting” modifies the proximate (nearest) noun suitable as a subject, which in this case is “dog-catcher!” Try *After Fido bit me on the ankle, the dog-catcher put him in a cage.*

### 25 data – singular or plural?

Because the meaning *data* is much like that of the singular noun *information*, and because its Latin *-a* plural announces the word’s plural status less plainly than a final *s* would, it is often treated as if it were singular. This use is extremely common, and few perceive it as wrong these days, especially given the word’s connotation of a collection or single unit made up of many informational subunits. All the same, in formal English, *Our data have been assembled over a number of years* would be regarded as correct, and commonly used constructions such as *very little data*, *the data shows...*, and *a great deal of data* would be regarded as incorrect.

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[MK adds: I don’t fight lost battles, but this one is worth continuing. The distinction between *information* and *data* is that the former implies a mass of knowledge whereas *data* implies a collection of specific, individual facts or observations. Thus *I have information about government corruption* implies non-quantitative knowledge (e.g., a source or indications) whereas *I have data about government corruption* implies specific, quantitative information (e.g., exactly how much money a specific official received in bribes).]

### 26 due to vs because of

Some people object to the use of the phrase *due to* in sentences like these: *The concert has been canceled due to circumstances beyond our control* and *The flight was delayed due to bad weather*. Their objection is based on the fact that *due* is an adjective and should be used with a noun, as in *The delay was due to bad weather*, where *due* modifies *delay*. You can avoid using *due to* with a verb by replacing it with *owing to* or *because of*: *The concert has been canceled owing to circumstances beyond our control. The game was postponed because of bad weather.*

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### 27 e.g. or i.e.?

Do not confuse these two abbreviations, which mean different things and have different origins. The abbreviation *e.g.*, meaning “for or as an example,” comes from the Latin expression *exempli gratia* (“for example”). Use it when you want to list a few typical examples of the thing mentioned: *I have the laboratory equipment, e.g., [not i.e.] beakers, thermometers, and test tubes, that we need. Do not end a list that starts with e.g. with etc.*

[MK adds: *etc.* stands for *et cetera* and means *and the rest*. Do not spell it *ect.*]

The abbreviation *i.e.*, meaning “that is, that is to say,” comes from the Latin expression *id est* (“that is”). Use it when you want to give a more precise description of the thing mentioned: *The hearing, i.e., [not e.g.] the preliminary hearing, is set for noon Friday.*

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Two periods punctuate e.g. and i.e. in U.S. English, whereas they may be unpunctuated in British English. [Follow] these abbreviations with commas.

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**MK adds:** If you begin a *clause* with “e.g.” or “i.e.,” use a semicolon before the abbreviation; e.g., this sentence itself illustrates the point in question; i.e., the sentence is self-referential.

### 28 elisions and interpolations

If you are quoting material and leave out words within a sentence, replace the missing text with a three-dot ellipsis. Thus, “*If you ... leave out words within a sentence, replace the missing text with a three-dot ellipsis.*” If you leave out material that crosses a sentence boundary, you must use a four-dot ellipsis. If you insert clarifying text of your own, surround the insertion with square brackets [ ]. These distinctions help the reader evaluate the trustworthiness of your quotation. Thus, “*If you leave out material [in a quotation] that crosses a sentence boundary, you must use a four-dot ellipsis....[to] help the reader evaluate the trustworthiness of your quotation.*”

### 29 eminent | immanent | imminent

**em•i•nent** [émminənt], adjective

1. of high standing: superior in position, fame, or achievement
2. noticeable: easy to see or notice
3. high: in a high or raised position

[15th century. < Latin eminent-, present participle of eminere “stand out, project” < minere “stand, project”]

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**im•ma•nent** [immənant], adjective

1. within something: existing within or inherent in something (formal)
2. existing in all parts of universe: describes God as existing in and extending into all parts of the created universe

[Mid-16th century. < late Latin immanent-, present participle of immanere, literally “dwell within” < Latin manere “remain, dwell”]

\*\*\*

**im•ma•nence**, noun & **im•ma•nent•ly**, adverb

Do not confuse the spelling of immanent and imminent (“about to occur”), which sound similar.

\*\*\*

**im•mi•nent** [imminənt], adjective

about to occur: about to happen, or threatening to happen

[Early 16th century. < Latin imminere-, present participle of imminere “hang over” < minere “to project”]

\*\*\*

**im•mi•nence**, noun / **im•mi•nent•ly**, adverb /

**im•mi•nent•ness**, noun

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### 30 every word, every phrase

Every word, every phrase, every sentence and every paragraph must add operational meaning to your technical writing.

### 31 frankly, honestly, truthfully

*Frankly, honestly, really, sincerely, truthfully* – all these expressions raise legitimate doubt about the frankness, honesty, reality, sincerity and truth of everything else in the writing that is not prefaced by these adverbs. Avoid using these words in reference to yourself. They can be used effectively when describing someone else.

WRONG: *Frankly, I can't see why you would marry him.*

RIGHT: She told him **frankly** that she would never marry him.

### 32 full justification

Don't use full justification; it makes it difficult to spot extra spaces in the text. I convert student text to left-justified as a matter of course when editing or grading papers.

### 33 general consensus

Redundant: *consensus* means *general opinion* or *general agreement*. Writing *general consensus* is redundant. This error is similar to *ATM machine* (automatic teller machine machine), *PIN number* (personal identification number number), and *VIN number* (vehicle identification number number).

### 34 gerundial takes the possessive

In my experience, the following is grammatical rule little known in the USA: *the gerundial always takes the possessive*.

For example, the following sentence is wrong: *It having three legs made it very odd indeed.*

The subject is the noun version of the verb *to have* (*having*), so “it” should be possessive (its), as follows: *Its having three legs made it very odd indeed.*

A simpler example: *My going to the store delayed the whole family by half an hour.*

[When I was a graduate student starting my PhD in 1972, my research professor popped out of his office to ask all of us in the lab “Is it ‘My going to the store’ or ‘Me going to the store?’” Without thinking, I said, “The gerundial always takes the possessive” and kept washing glassware. I noticed a sudden silence in the lab: everyone was staring at me in disbelief. I understood then that US schools did not have quite the same educational details as my own experience had led me to accept as normal.]

## Frequently Corrected Errors

### 35 grammar & style checker

Didn't you enable grammar/style checking? On my system, this word is underlined with a green wavy line; floating the cursor over it shows a suggestion for improvement (correct, in this case, although it's not always on the mark). In Word, use **Word Options | Proofing | When correcting spelling and grammar in Word** options to select **Grammar & Style** as well as spelling.

### 36 *ibid.*

If a second passage from the same source is quoted close to the first and there is no intervening quotation from a different source, "ibid." (set in roman) may be used in the second parenthetical reference (e.g., "ibid., 114"). If a quotation from another source has intervened, a shortened reference may be given (e.g., "Hawking, Brief History of Time, 114").

*Chicago Manual of Style*, 15<sup>th</sup> edition, §11.74

### 37 *impact*

Many careful writers strongly dislike the verb *impact* in any figurative sense whatsoever, as in *The revised budget impacts the university unfavorably* and *The revised budget impacts on the athletic program*. Though the verb in senses extending beyond the infliction of physical force is undeniably common in business, legal, journalistic, and political discourse, anyone who hopes to achieve an effect even faintly literary [or scholarly, adds MK] should avoid it in favor of *affect*, *change*. Use of the verb is uncontroversial only in physical senses: *The car impacted the railing*. By the same token, the noun *impact* should not be used as a catchall alternative for words like *effect* or *impression*; rather, it should be used to convey the idea of powerful, dramatic consequence: *The sudden rise in prices had a calamitous impact on many economies*.

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### 38 *imply vs infer*

To *imply* something is to *suggest* or *bring to mind* an idea without making it explicit. For example, the question *When did you stop taking bribes?* implies that the person addressed must have been taking bribes. In contrast, to *infer* something is to deduce it or to reason towards a conclusion. *I inferred that he had been taking bribes from observing him to accept many money-filled, unmarked envelopes from building contractors without recording these sums in his taxable income*. Unfortunately, a recent dictionary accepts the use of *infer* as equivalent to *imply* – an unnecessary and regrettable loss of precision in our language.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> With thanks to Prof John MacMichael for noting this distinction in grading one of his MSIA students' essays.

### 39 *in fact*

Putting "In fact" in front of an opinion doesn't magically convert opinion into fact. And in cases where the statement *is* factual, the phrase "in fact" casts doubt on the veracity of everything that is not preceded by those words. DON'T USE IT.

### 40 *indefinite antecedents*

Avoid indefinite antecedents for pronominal adjectives "*this*" and "*that*." Provide a specific object so that the reader does not have to guess to know exactly to what you are referring. Thus WRONG: *The countries went to war in 1914. This led to serious death tolls across Europe in the next four years*. RIGHT: *The countries went to war in 1914. This **conflict** led to serious death tolls across Europe in the next four years*.

### 41 *indicative and subjunctive moods*

Compare the meanings of these sentences:

RIGHT: It is also important that the staff *understands* the technical field in which they work.

RIGHT BUT DIFFERENT: It is also important that the staff *understand* the technical field in which they work.

Sentence (1) illustrates the normal *indicative* mood of the verb *to understand*. The sentence means that *the fact that the staff already understands the field* is viewed as important.

Sentence (2) illustrates the *subjunctive* mood of *to understand*. The sentence means that the staff *ought* to understand the field.

[Subtle but useful.]

### 42 *intensifiers weaken your text*

Don't use intensifiers such as *highly*, *extremely* and *very* in your professional writing. Such adjectives and adverbs *weaken* your text instead of strengthening it. They give the impression that you have to defend your position because the reader won't agree with your appraisal. Compare *This attack was effective and destructive* with *This attack was very effective and extremely destructive*.

### 43 *Internet and Web vs internet and web*

An *internet* is a collection of networks that are linked together; the *Internet* is the global TCP/IP-based internet that people often call *the Net* or *the Internet*. A *web* is made by spiders; the *Web* refers to the World Wide Web, a system based on HTTP for linking Web pages written in HTML.

### 44 *italicize foreign words*

For example, "The French mechanic referred to the clutch as the *embrayage*." However, commonly-used Latin expressions such as *ad hoc*, *ex post facto*, *ibid.*, *op.cit*, *loc. cit.*, e.g., i.e., and *viz.* are not typically italicized.

## Frequently Corrected Errors

### 45 *its and it's*

Alas for anyone learning English as a foreign language, the possessive of *it* is *its*, not *it's*. *It's* is the contraction of *it is*. Get over, ah, it.

### 46 *literally is not an intensifier*

Don't use *literally* as if it a generic intensifier. Think about the following ridiculous sentence:

WRONG: *He was literally falling apart in shock when he saw the number of errors in his draft essay.*

No, he wasn't. He was upset but he did not in fact fall into pieces.

RIGHT: *He was literally cut in two when he fell into the sawmill.*

### 47 *loath, loth, or loathe?*

Do not confuse the spelling of *loath* (or its variant *loth*) and *loathe*.

Loath (or loth) is an adjective meaning "unwilling or reluctant" and is usually followed by *to*, as in *I was loath [or loth] to admit it.*

It is also occasionally encountered in the fixed phrase *nothing loath* (or *nothing loth*).

Loathe is a verb meaning "dislike intensely": *I loathe this kind of music.*

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### 48 *long quotations*

If you have a long quotation, you may indent it; you do not have to use quotation marks for such indented material – particularly useful if there are double-quotation marks (") in the block. Those would otherwise have to be converted to single quotation marks (') in the quotation itself.

### 49 *majority as a singular or plural?*

When you use majority to refer to a group of people or things as a unit or whole, use a singular verb: *A majority of the Senate intends to vote "Nay."*

When you use majority to refer to people within a group, use a plural verb: *The majority of our students live on campus, with a minority living in the surrounding neighborhoods.*

In the second sentence, each student is under consideration; hence, the plural verb.

Ensure that any pronouns referring to majority are in the same number denoted by majority. Thus, it is incorrect to say *A majority of the Senate has cast their votes*. Say instead *A majority of the Senate has cast its vote*, or, if you are speaking of the senators as individuals, say *A majority of the senators have cast their votes*.

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### 50 *manual linefeeds*

Never use manual linefeeds (ENTER) to start a new page; use a hard page break (CTL-ENTER) so that you don't find your text slipping up the previous page or starting in the middle of a page when you reformat your text.

### 51 *mealy-mouthed adverbs*

*Often, quite, rather, somewhat, usually, very* – these adverbs weaken your writing. Think hard before using any of them: are they necessary? Are they helpful? *Usually* you will *tend* to find that they are *rather* useless and *somewhat* pointless as well as *very often* being *quite* irritating!

### 52 *metric prefixes*

Metric units (nanometer, kilogram) are not capitalized. Thus *The enormous housecat weighed 10 kilograms.*

n = nano = 10<sup>-9</sup>

μ = micro = 10<sup>-6</sup>

m = milli = 10<sup>-3</sup>

K = kilo = 10<sup>3</sup>

M = mega = 10<sup>6</sup>

G = giga = 10<sup>9</sup>

T = tera = 10<sup>12</sup>

P = peta = 10<sup>15</sup>

E = exa = 10<sup>18</sup>

There is a difference in application of these prefixes when used for measuring amounts of storage in bytes or bits. Uppercase "B" as in KB, MB etc. signifies bytes (characters); lowercase "b" indicates bits instead of bytes (8 bits per byte). The uppercase symbol corresponds roughly to the official metric prefixes – KB, MB, GB, TB, PB – but is modified to correspond to powers of 2. The full names of the units are not capitalized. Thus We have three terabytes of storage for System 1; System 2 has 12 TB. The units are as follows:

KB = kilobyte = 2<sup>10</sup> bytes = 1024 bytes

MB = megabyte = 2<sup>20</sup> bytes = 1,048,576 bytes

GB = gigabyte = 2<sup>30</sup> bytes ≅ 1.073 x 10<sup>9</sup> bytes

TB = terabyte = 2<sup>40</sup> bytes ≅ 1.099 x 10<sup>12</sup> bytes

PB = petabyte = 2<sup>50</sup> bytes ≅ 1.125 x 10<sup>15</sup> bytes

EB = exabyte = 2<sup>60</sup> bytes ≅ 1.152 x 10<sup>18</sup> bytes

## Frequently Corrected Errors

### 53 most anyone

“Most anyone” is a colloquialism inappropriate for formal writing. Use “Almost anyone” or “Almost everyone” depending on your specific meaning.

### 54 none is or none are?

This correction is very much a matter of taste. Technically, *none* (a contraction of *not one*) is singular. *I checked all the bottles; none is empty.*

However, many good writers now use the word in the plural: *I checked all the bottles; none are empty.*

At this point in the evolution of our language, it’s a matter of personal preference which one you use; just keep your usage internally consistent within your document.

### 55 number of the verb must accord with number of the subject

You have incorrectly made the number of the verb accord with the proximate noun (the nearest to the verb) instead of with the actual subject of the verb. This common error often occurs with compound subjects (e.g.,

WRONG: *The color and shape of the object is important* instead of

RIGHT: *The color and shape of the object are important*).

A frequent source of confusion is a singular **subject** that is modified with a **plural in a prepositional phrase**; e.g.,

WRONG: *The cause of the numerous errors were traced to poor training*

which should use *was* because the subject of the verb is *cause* and not *errors*. The proximate (near) noun *errors* tricks the writer into making the verb accord with that word instead of with the subject.

RIGHT: *The cause of the numerous errors was traced to poor training.*

Another issue is illustrated in this sequence:

WRONG: *The attacker can do [such and such]. Furthermore, they can do [whatever].*

If “they” refers to “attacker” then either (a) make it “attackers” or (b) use “the attacker” again or (c) use “he.” Some authors alternate the use of “he” and “she” throughout the text for variety and to avoid gender bias. You can also use the clumsy “he or she” (but not “he/she”).

### 56 number: singular or plural?

*Number* is a collective noun that can take a singular or plural verb depending on how you use it. If you put the definite article *the* in front of number, you are stipulating one particular number, even if *of* and a series of things comes next. Therefore, you must use a singular verb with number preceded by “*the*”: *The number of lab coats available is limited.* On the other hand, if you put the indefinite article *a* before number, you must use a plural verb: *A number of lab coats are available.*

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### 57 number of the verb must accord with number of the subject

Look at this sequence: *The attacker can do [such and such]. Furthermore, they can do [whatever].* If “they” refers to “attacker” then either (a) make it “attackers” or (b) use “the attacker” again or (c) use “he.” Sometimes I alternate the use of “he” and “she” in such cases just for variety. You can also use “he or she” (but not “he/she”).

### 58 numbers

Spell out numbers from one to ten and use numerals for 11 and up.

### 59 orphans

The last line of a paragraph may appear all by itself at the top of a page. That line is known by editors and typesetters as an *orphan*. In Word, you can prevent orphans automatically by highlighting text (usually all of your text) and using the **Paragraph | Line and Page Breaks** settings: check **Widow/Orphan control**.

### 60 page breaks

Sometimes you need to force an entire block of text to stay together on one page. If all of that block doesn’t fit at the bottom of the current page, it should move to the next page. Instead of using a manual page break (in Word, CTL-ENTER) in the middle of your text, you can highlight the section of text in one paragraph that has to stay together and, in Word, use the **Paragraph | Line and Page Breaks** function to check **Keep lines together**. If you have headings or multiple paragraphs in the block, also check **Keep with next**. You can also force page breaks before certain types of headings automatically by checking **Page break before**.

# Frequently Corrected Errors

## 61 page formatting

Never use manual page formatting; always allow or force your word processor to create page breaks, page headers, and page footers. Manual formatting (e.g., writing out a page footer at the bottom of each page) immediately becomes incorrect if anyone changes the page margins, the typeface, point sizes, or leading (inter-line and inter-character spacing) of your text. Such manual formatting then becomes stranded in odd places in the resulting text. In particular, avoid forcing a manual page break in the middle of your text; insertions, deletions and other changes can push the page break into a place where it causes an unexpected new page.

## 62 paragraph break

Good place for a paragraph break. When you change the focus of your writing to a significantly new topic, break your paragraph to help the reader implicitly grasp the change.

## 63 paragraph spacing

I removed all double-carriage-returns and switched your formatting to 6 pt before and 6 pt after every paragraph. Automatic formatting options allow you to skip having to insert an extra space after each paragraph and therefore helps you maintain a consistent style throughout your document.

## 64 parallel construction

Think about the meaning of components that follow conjunctions such as *and* or *or*. The normal pattern is that these conjunctions apply to the proximate (nearest preceding) verb. For example, the sentence, *Medical information can be hacked by civilians using computers to obtain patient records or change different medications* results in momentary confusion as the reader tries to parse "...to obtain records or change..." by interpreting *change* as a noun in parallelism with *records*. To ensure seamless communication, write, "...to obtain patient records or to change..." Another example of a non-parallel construction is *Medical information can be hacked by civilians or professionals can access the data directly*. In this case, the first impression is that medical information can be hacked by civilians or by professionals – not the intended meaning. The sentence could be correctly written as *Medical information can be hacked by civilians; professionals can access the data directly*.

Lack of parallel construction often shows up in lists; for example,

The key factors in preventing data leakage are as follows:

Encrypt all sensitive data

Assigning access privileges with care

....

The list should use the same verb form in all entries; thus either *encrypt* and *assign* or *encrypting* and *assigning* or *encryption of*

and *assignment of*. Similar parallelism should apply to lists that include *they* in some items but *he or she* or *one* in others.

## 65 premier / premiere

**Premier** (adjective) is *the best* or *most important* or (noun) *a prime minister*; **premiere** (noun) is *a first public performance* and, unfortunately, also an adjective meaning – wait for it – *the best or most important*. Sigh.<sup>6</sup>

Thus: *The Premier of Saskatchewan, along with three other provincial premiers, attended the premiere of Swan Lake on Tuesday, starring the premiere ballerina of the Saskatchewan Provincial Ballet corps – a premier example of near-homophonic word usage.*

## 66 punctuation marks inside quotation

Punctuation marks go inside quotations in US usage. Thus

WRONG: "He went inside the house".

RIGHT: "He went inside the house."

You can set your preference for the spell checker to catch and correct these errors in Word using the sequence **Office Button | Word Options | Proofing | Writing Style – Settings | Require – Punctuation required with quotes – inside**.

## 67 purposely or purposefully?

These two adverbs are sometimes confused. Although both imply that somebody has a specific purpose in mind, they are used in different contexts and are not interchangeable.

Purposely means "deliberately or with an express purpose in mind": *I purposely left the door unlocked.*

Purposefully means "in a determined way" or "with a definite goal": *She strode purposefully across the yard.*

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## 68 quotation marks are not for emphasis

Don't use quotation marks as a form of emphasis – they're for quoted materials. I don't see how *this* text is a quotation. I just wrote, "I don't see how *this* text is a quotation." You *can* use italics if there is some reason to emphasize a *specific* word or phrase; e.g., when introducing a technical term. BTW, my favorite example of this kind of error is from a highway restaurant whose sign read *Good "Food"*. Another one of this type was *"Good" Food*.

<sup>6</sup> With thanks to my cousin Guy Letourneau.

## Frequently Corrected Errors

### 69 quotation marks are not for slang

Do not put colloquial expressions or slang in quotation marks in a misguided attempt to distance yourself from using such language.

WRONG: *He is a real "jerk."*

RIGHT: *He is a real jerk.*

"RIGHT" here assumes that using the word "jerk" is OK in a specific context. But make up your mind: if it's OK to use the expression, don't put quotation marks around it. If it's not OK, don't use the word at all.

### 70 quotations: standards

You may NOT alter the text of a quotation without using the scholarly standards for indicating such changes:

- You must use [ ] for inserted or changed words.
- You must use ellipses (... for piece missing from middle of a sentence and .... for missing piece spanning more than one sentence).
- You must put [sic] (which means *thus* in Latin) following a misspelling in the original quotation.

### 71 reading aloud

I urge you to read your text aloud as one of your editing stages. You can catch many errors that slip by simple scanning. Exaggerate the effects of punctuation so that you can spot errors more easily.

### 72 real

"Real" is a tricky word because it is, ironically, highly subjective. Sometimes you can be more specific; e.g., you can use "effective," "operational," "efficient," "documented," "formal," or "official" to show what you mean. Another problem is called *redefinition* in logic. For example, someone may write "There are no real doctors in New York City" – only to admit that to be a real doctor by their definition, someone must be able to cure all known diseases by the laying on of hands. That error is known as *begging the question by high redefinition*. Similarly, claiming that there are a million doctors in New York City may reveal that the speaker defines a doctor as anyone who can administer a pill. That error is *begging the question by low redefinition*. But anyway, avoid "real." Really!

[For an example of a challengeable use of *real*, see the next entries in this document!]

### 73 real figure and table numbers

Use real (word-processor-defined) figure and table numbers, not manual numbers. If you change the order of your figures or tables, your manual numbers may have to be repaired one

by one, whereas word-processor labels readjust themselves automatically.

### 74 real footnotes or endnotes, not manually-entered superscripts or brackets

If you don't use automatically-numbered notes, adding one in the middle will force you to renumber all the references following – by hand! Using automated endnotes creates an automatic list at the end of the document so you don't have to do it by hand. You can also get a complete list of footnotes by converting them to endnotes, copying that list, then reversing the conversion. Paste your copy into the document as text only to get your workable, editable list. If you have Word 2007, enter your references into the *Manage Sources* tool under *References*, which allows you to create footnotes or endnotes and also to create a bibliography automatically in various standard formats. And use INSERT CROSS-INDEX if you have to refer to the same source, not a new footnote with *ibid* or *op. cit.*

### 75 real headings

Use your word-processor's headings feature to create headings, not manually-formatted headings. The automatic heading style can be modified to suit your preferences – and all the headings of that level can then instantly change to meet your requirements (saves a lot of time and avoids inconsistencies of formatting). In Word, real headings also let you create a table of contents instantly (in a variety of styles) as well as showing up in the document map, a nifty feature that sits to the left of your screen and lets you not only see the structure of your work but also click on any heading to move to it.

### 76 references

Here are some notes on how to provide detailed information about every document you reference.

- Word 2007 offers an excellent bibliographic function in the Citations & Bibliography section of the toolbar. Use Manage Sources to create your list of sources. You can then format your references according to a ten different styles including APA, Chicago, and MLA.
- One popular method is to use a footnote for the first occurrence of the reference. The note includes author (date) Title (*italicized* for a book, "enquoted" for a chapter or an article) and page. E.g., Whosit (2003). "Whatsit mean?" p. 34.
- You can use endnotes of the same style if you like instead of footnotes.
- If you have a quotation or a pointer to the same place in the same article you have just cited in the previous reference, you can avoid another footnote by making

## Frequently Corrected Errors

it clear in the text that you are using the same reference; e.g., “Whosit (2003) continues with. . . .” If necessary, insert a cross-reference.

- A riskier alternative is to use a note with “*Ibid.*” which stands for “*Ibidem*” or “in the same place.” However, if you change your text to introduce a different reference, the “*Ibid.*” will be wrong. Use cross-references (*insert cross-reference*) using your word processing capabilities instead of *Ibid.*
- If the immediately following reference is to the same work but to a different place, you can note “*Op. cit.* p. 433” – (“*Opus citatum*,” – the work cited). Again, you run the risk of making this reference wrong if you insert another reference in between the first and second reference to the work in question. I do **not** recommend this method – use cross-references.
- All of these methods require a *Bibliography* or *List of Works Cited* (or Referenced) at the end of the paper. Typically, you will alphabetize by author and by date within author if necessary. Use lowercase letters for multiple works in a year: thus
  - Whatsit (2007a)...
  - Whatsit (2007b)...
  - Whosit (1997)...

### 77 repeated errors

When you find yourself making repeated typing errors, use the FIND/REPLACE function to locate all the bad spellings at once, even if they are not recognized by the spell-checker, and change them one by one using the confirmation dialog. Don’t change them all automatically – you might discover a place where the different spelling happens to be correct. The other tool you can use when you *know* that you consistently misspell a word is to add it to the automatic correction list of your word processor. In Word, that feature is known as the *AutoCorrect* function.

### 78 restrictive and non-restrictive clauses

A restrictive clause (a clause that defines which type of object it is modifying) does not take commas; a non-restrictive clause (a clause that adds supplementary information) does take commas.

Consider the meaning of *The dog which was brown bit me*. The **restrictive** clause (*which was brown* written without commas) cannot be removed without altering the meaning – specifically, that of all the possible dogs the writer could be pointing to, it was specifically the brown one which bit the writer. There is presumably only one brown dog in the group of potential biters.

In contrast, *The dog, which was brown, bit me* uses a **non-restrictive** clause (note the commas) and simply adds

information that could be removed without losing the main meaning of the sentence. In other words, the main point of the sentence is that the dog bit the writer. Other dogs, may also have bitten the writer and the fact that this particular dog was brown is incidental to the purpose of the sentence. It is even possible that there were several brown dogs that might have bitten the writer.

### 79 run-on sentence

“A semicolon is used to mark a more important break in sentence flow than that marked by a comma. Use a semicolon between the two parts of a compound sentence (two independent clauses) when they are not connected by a conjunction: The controversial portrait was removed from the entrance hall; in its place was hung a realistic landscape.”

¶5.61 (p. 5.64) from *A Manual of Style*, Twelfth Edition, Revised (1969). University of Chicago Press (ISBN 0-226-77009-7). Later editions easily available, including the 15th on CD-ROM.

Additional comments from MK: Don’t use a comma to join independent sentences. For example, you would not write, “This is a run-on sentence, don’t use a comma to join independent sentences.” You can separate independent clauses by a period, a semicolon or a colon. You can also use conjunctions such as *and*, *or*, *but*, *however*, *nevertheless* to link independent clauses. Note that *however* and *nevertheless* normally take a semicolon or a period; e.g., “I went to the store; however, I forgot my wallet. Nevertheless, the clerk gave me the food on account.”

### 80 sentence fragment

Every sentence must have at least a subject and a verb. For example the second “sentence” in this pair is a fragment:

WRONG: *This habit would have cost him \$1,470 per account he owned. A substantial fee simply to play a computer game.*

The error could be corrected by using a subject and a noun:

RIGHT: *This habit would have cost him \$1,470 per account he owned. That level of expense is a substantial fee simply to play a computer game.*

Another solution would be to combine the two components using a dash, as in the following:

RIGHT: *This habit would have cost him \$1,470 per account he owned—a substantial fee simply to play a computer game.*

### 81 short, simple words vs long, fancy words

I always wince when I see *utilize*. What’s wrong with *use*? It’s shorter and it means the same!

Aim for simple, clear language. Many editors criticize other fancy words such as *assist* instead of *help*, *effectuate* instead of *make*, *efficacious* instead of *effective* and *objective* instead of *goal*.

## Frequently Corrected Errors

Long words used only for effect don't impress anyone except pompous fools. I remember an incident in 1976 when an attractive young woman on a project changed one of the sentences in my *curriculum vitae* from "He **helped** his colleagues with statistical analysis" to "He **assisted** his colleagues with statistical analysis." I asked her why she was changing the word and she answered, "It sounds better." I retorted, "No it doesn't: *help* is shorter and it means the same thing." She sneered, "So what?" I answered, "AHA! I have been fighting people like you all my life and now I have finally met the enemy!" I didn't ask for a date (and presumably wouldn't have gotten one).

### 82 sign in vs sign-in

Verb: sign in (He will sign in this evening.)

Noun: sign-in (His sign-in was at 19:30.)

Adjective: sign-in (The sign-in log is on the desk.)

### 83 single line breaks for paragraphs

Many beginners use double line breaks to separate paragraphs. Unless there is specific reason for so doing (e.g., preparing text for HTML formatting), you can simplify your task by setting the style to put extra space at the top and bottom of every paragraph (usually 6pt above and below) and then using only one line break for each paragraph. That process avoids the occasional glitch where one forgets to hit ENTER twice; it's a simpler approach to paragraph formatting that has become popular with writers and standard in many publishing houses. You can also define whether to indent the first line of your paragraph automatically or not instead of hitting the TAB key every time (and occasionally forgetting to do so).

### 84 so-called "cliché"

If you are going to use a cliché, use it without embarrassment or don't use it at all. Don't use quotation marks around it and don't use *so-called* unless you mean precisely that: that some people refer to the object of your phrase in a particular way.

WRONG: He seemed "mad as a hatter."

RIGHT BUT UNIMAGINATIVE AND BORING: He seemed mad as a hatter.

WRONG: That solution was his so-called "ace in the hole."

RIGHT BUT etc.: That solution was his ace in the hole.

Be wary of combining clichés: you can cause much unwanted amusement by mixing metaphors; e.g., "We ran it up the flagpole and it sprouted wings, so we kicked it around some more and then plunged in with both feet."

### 85 state (verb) & conjunctions

When the verb *to state* means the equivalent of to say (e.g., to articulate, to announce, to explain), it is properly followed by a conjunction such as *that* or *why*.

WRONG: He stated the heater had turned off at 19:00.

RIGHT: He stated that the heater had turned off at 19:00.

RIGHT: He stated why the heater had turned off at 19:00: the boiler exploded.

However, if *state* is followed by an *object* of the verb, there is no conjunction:

RIGHT: He stated the rules clearly.

[The conjunction *that* avoids a momentary ambiguity in the reader's mind about whether the noun following *state* is an object or the subject of a verb to follow.]

### 86 subjunctive vs conditional

The conditional *would* implies that you are focusing on a contingency:

RIGHT: "I *would* go if I had a ride."

*Had* in this sentence is subjunctive – it refers to something that is not true (or not true yet).

The subjunctive *were* implies a hypothetical:

RIGHT: "If I *were* to go, I am sure I would have a good time."

*Would* in this sentence is still conditional.

A typical error is to write

WRONG: "If I *would have* gone..." which should be

RIGHT: "Had I gone" or

RIGHT: "If I had gone..."

In general, one must not write "If... would..." in a single clause.

### 87 such as vs like

Don't use *like* to introduce a list of specific examples. Thus *Respected members of society like doctors, priests and teachers...* should be rewritten as *Respected members of society such as doctors, priests and teachers...* The word *like* in this context implies similarity; it can also be momentarily misinterpreted as a verb.

### 88 symbol or numeral does not start a sentence

Don't start a sentence with a symbol (e.g., §, °, %), a numeral (½, 2, 3<sup>rd</sup>) or a year (2003); spell out the word instead. The *Chicago Manual of Style* suggests that if the result seems clumsy, you can use a different construction for your sentence to avoid the problem. Thus *Two thousand seven was a bad year for penguins* could be rewritten as *The year 2007 was bad for penguins*.

## Frequently Corrected Errors

### 89 table of contents

To generate a complete ToC, use “real” headings for all of your headings. Once you have headings at level 1 (and any other levels you wish) you can use the Insert Table of Contents function to create a formatted, automatically-updatable ToC. In Word, to delete a single line within the ToC, place your cursor at the end of the line, use BACKSPACE to highlight only that line, and press DELETE. You can right-click anywhere in the ToC to update page numbers or recreate the entire table.

### 90 their / there / they're

I'm sure it's enough to list these homophones for you to get the point.

### 91 topical headings

Break your text up by inserting descriptive headings. You may use one or more levels of heading. Be sure to use the Styles feature of your word processor so that you can identify and reformat all level x headings in a single operation. Don't manually format each instance of a heading – you risk forgetting some and ending up with inconsistent formatting. In addition, repeated manual formatting is a waste of your time.

### 92 transitive verbs require conjunction for a dependent clause.

A transitive verb (e.g., *ensure*) takes an object; the noun that follows it is usually assumed to be the object. Thus

RIGHT: *The lock ensures security of the jewels.*

RIGHT: *The doctor ensures the health of the patient.*

However, if one writes a *dependent clause* following a transitive verb, one normally has to start with a conjunction such as *that*.

*These measures demonstrate that all information is safe.*

*The doctor ascertained why his patients were successfully avoiding fried foods: his prescription made them throw up when they ate fatty materials.*

The conjunction (e.g., *that*, *why*) ensures that the reader doesn't get confused for a moment about the object of the transitive verb preceding it.

### 93 try and...

Do not write *try and* do something: *try* must be followed by an infinitive starting with *to* unless you are referring to judicial processes.

WRONG: I will *try and* avoid clumsy phrases.

RIGHT: I will *try to* avoid clumsy phrases.

But note:

RIGHT: The prosecutor will try to convict the defendant of the felony.

RIGHT: The prosecutor tried and convicted the defendant of a felony.

### 94 underlining

Underlining is an archaic holdover from the days, decades ago now, when typewriters could not print italics. Underlining was a signal to typesetters that the underlined words were to be set in italic. Today, we just put them in *italic* ourselves.

### 95 useless introductory padding

Don't start your paragraphs with useless introductions such as “First and foremost” or “What is...?” or “There are many important aspects of this subject” or “You may wonder why....” Just get to the point directly.

### 96 useless words

*Of course*, *naturally*, *obviously* – these words are often thrown in at the start of a sentence without concern for their precise meaning in that particular sentence? Ask yourself how the proposed sentence would lose meaning by leaving out these trash words? Compare:

WRONG: *Obviously, the problem requires additional thought.*

RIGHT: *The problem requires additional thought.*

WRONG: *Of course, I dislike C++.*

RIGHT: *I dislike C++*

WRONG: *Naturally, I chose tensor calculus as my next course.*

RIGHT: *I chose tensor calculus as my next course.*

But note that these adverbial expressions or words may be perfectly legitimate in a description of a person or of a situation:

RIGHT: He spoke naturally and fluently about his experiences during the war.

RIGHT: The inclusion of preparations for handicapped access were a matter of course by that time.

RIGHT: She was obviously embarrassed by her husband's drunken behavior.

## Frequently Corrected Errors

### 97 violating word-count limits

Be careful about word counts. The limits on [MSIA] weekly essays are 900 to 1100 (not counting cover page, standard introduction about yourself (if any), table of contents, footnotes or endnotes, and bibliography) and I penalize undercounts and overcounts. You have <xxxx> words starting here and ending just before the Bibliography.

So don't do this again. Not one word below 900; not one word above 1100.

[Yeah, yeah yeah – I know – “rigid and dogmatic obsessive compulsive nerd imposing his neurosis on everyone else” – but following details of instructions – such as those from a CEO – can make a tremendous difference in how your professionalism is rated. Think of it as an exercise or a game.]

### 98 who versus that

Use the pronoun *who*, not *that*, when referring to people.

WRONG: *I preferred to see the doctor that cured my father.*

RIGHT: *I preferred to see the doctor who cured my father.*

RIGHT: *It was the doctor's help that cured by father.*

### 99 whom vs who

When you need to use *who* as the **object** of a verb, use *whom*. Thus

*Who gave you the ball?*

but

*To whom did you give the ball?*

The distinction is particular important when you start the sentence with *Who* or *Whom* (as may occur if you finish a question with a preposition -- some older editors still frown on that practice), as in *Whom did you give the ball to?* The objective case of the pronoun avoids any ambiguity, even for a moment, about whether the pronoun is the subject of the verb that follows it (*Who did....*).

Be careful about the pronoun *whomever*, though.

WRONG: *Give the ball to whomever asks for it.*

RIGHT: *Give the ball to whoever asks for it.*

The entire clause (*whoever asks for it*), not the pronoun alone, is the object of the preposition *to*.

### 100 widow

The first line of a paragraph may appear all by itself at the bottom of a page. That line is known by editors and typesetters as a *widow*. In Word, you can prevent widows automatically by highlighting text (usually all of your text) and using the **Paragraph | Line and Page Breaks** settings: check **Widow/Orphan control**.

### 101 Wikipedia

Don't use *Wikipedia* as a primary reference. You can use it as a source for further research, but it is not trustworthy as a primary source. See the following article:

Farkas, M. (2006). "Wikipedia: What is it Good For?"

*MSLA Director's Corner archives*

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