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5 Grammar and Usage

BRYAN A. GARNER

Grammar

Introduction

5.1 ***Grammar defined.*** Grammar consists of the rules governing how words are put together into sentences. These rules, which native speakers of a language learn largely by osmosis, govern most constructions in a given language. The small minority of constructions that lie outside these rules fall mostly into the category of idiom and usage.

5.2 ***Schools of grammatical thought.*** There are many schools of grammatical thought—and differing vocabularies for describing grammar. Grammatical theories have been in great flux in recent years. And the more we learn the less we seem to know: "An entirely adequate description of English grammar is still a distant target and at present seemingly an unreachable one, the complications being what they are."[1] In fact, the more detailed the grammar (it can run to many large volumes), the less likely it is to be of any use to most writers and speakers.

5.3 ***Parts of speech.*** As traditionally understood, grammar is both a science and an art. Often it has focused—as it does here—on parts of speech and their syntax. Each part of speech performs a particular function in a sentence or phrase. Traditional grammar has held that there are eight parts of speech: nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections.[2] Somewhat surprisingly, modern grammarians cannot agree on precisely how many parts of speech there are in English. At least one grammarian says there are as few as three.[3] Another insists that there are "about fifteen," noting that "the precise number is still being debated."[4] This section deals with the traditional eight; each part of speech is treated below. The purpose here is to sketch some of the main lines of English grammar using traditional grammatical terms.

1. Robert W. Burchfield, *Unlocking the English Language* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1991), 22.
2. See Robert L. Allen, *English Grammars and English Grammar* (New York: Scribner, 1972), 7.
3. Ernest W. Gray, *A Brief Grammar of Modern Written English* (Cleveland: World, 1967), 70.
4. R. L. Trask, *Language: The Basics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 37.

Nouns

DEFINITIONS

5.4 *Nouns generally.* A noun is a word that names something, whether abstract (intangible) or concrete (tangible). It may be a common noun (the name of a generic class or type of person, place, thing, process, activity, or condition) or a proper noun (the formal name of a specific person, place, or thing).

5.5 *Common nouns.* A common noun is the generic name of one item in a class or group {a chemical} {a river} {a pineapple}.[5] It is not capitalized unless it begins a sentence or appears in a title. Common nouns are often broken down into three subcategories: concrete nouns, abstract nouns, and collective nouns. A concrete noun denotes something solid or real, something perceptible to the physical senses {a building} {the wind} {honey}. An abstract noun denotes something you cannot see, feel, taste, hear, or smell {joy} {expectation} {neurosis}. A collective noun—which can be viewed as a concrete noun but is often separately categorized—refers to a group or collection of people or things {a crowd of people} {a flock of birds} {a committee}.

5.6 *Proper nouns.* A proper noun is the specific name of a person, place, or thing {John Doe} {Moscow} {the Hope Diamond}, or the title of a work {*Citizen Kane*}. A proper noun is always capitalized, regardless of how it is used. A common noun may become a proper noun {Old Hickory} {the Big Easy}, and sometimes a proper noun may be used figuratively and informally, as if it were a common noun {like Moriarty, he is a Napoleon of crime} (*Napoleon* here connoting an ingenious mastermind who is ambitious beyond limits). Proper nouns may be compounded when used as a unit to name something {the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel} {*Saturday Evening Post*}. Over time, some proper nouns (called eponyms) have developed common-noun counterparts, such as *sandwich* (from the Earl of Sandwich) and *china* (from China, where fine porcelain was produced).

5.7 *Count nouns.* A count noun has singular and plural forms and expresses enumerable things {dictionary-dictionaries} {hoof-hooves} {newspaper-newspapers}. As the subject of a sentence, a singular count noun takes a singular verb {the jar is full}; a plural count noun takes a plural verb {the jars are full}.

5. The examples in this chapter are presented in curly brackets to save space.

5.8 *Mass nouns.* A mass noun (sometimes called a noncount noun) is one that denotes something uncountable, either because it is abstract {cowardice} {evidence} or because it refers to an indeterminate aggregation of people or things {the faculty} {the bourgeoisie}; the latter type is also called a collective noun. As the subject of a sentence, a mass noun usually takes a singular verb {the litigation is varied}. But in a collective sense, it may take either a singular or a plural verb form {the ruling majority is unlikely to share power} {the majority are nonmembers}. A singular verb emphasizes the group; a plural verb emphasizes the individual members.

5.9 *Mass noun followed by a prepositional phrase.* Mass nouns are sometimes followed by a prepositional phrase, such as *number of* plus a plural noun. The article that precedes the mass noun signals whether the mass noun or the number of the noun in the prepositional phrase controls the number of the verb. If a definite article (*the*) precedes, the mass noun controls, and typically a singular verb is used {the quantity of pizzas ordered this year has increased}. If an indefinite article (*a* or *an*) precedes, then the number of the noun in the prepositional phrase controls {a small percentage of the test takers have failed the exam}.

5.10 *Noun-equivalents and substantives.* A noun-equivalent is a phrase or clause that serves the function of a noun in a sentence {*To serve your country* is honorable} {Bring *whomever you like*}. Nouns and noun-equivalents collectively are called substantives.

PROPERTIES OF NOUNS

5.11 *Noun properties.* Nouns have properties of case and number. Some grammarians also consider gender and person properties of nouns.

5.12 *Noun case.* In English, only nouns and pronouns have case. Case denotes the relationship between a noun (or pronoun) and other words in a sentence. Grammarians disagree about the number of cases English nouns possess. Those who consider inflection (word form) the defining characteristic tend to say that there are two: common, which is the uninflected form, and genitive (or possessive), which is formed by adding *'s* or just an apostrophe. But others argue that it's useful to distinguish how the common-case noun is being used in the sentence, whether it is playing a nominative role {the doctor is in} or an objective role {go see the doctor}. Except with personal pronouns (*who/whom, she/her*, etc.), this distinction makes no practical difference in word use. See also 5.16–20.

5.41 ***Pronoun and gender.*** Only the third-person singular pronouns directly express gender. In the nominative and objective cases, the pronoun takes the antecedent noun's gender {the president is not in her office today; she's at a seminar}. In the genitive case, the pronoun always takes the gender of the possessor, not of the person or thing possessed {the woman loves her husband} {Thomas is visiting his sister} {the kitten disobeyed its mother}. Some nouns may acquire gender through personification, a figure of speech that refers to a nonliving thing as if it were a person. Pronouns enhance personification when a feminine or masculine pronoun is used as if the antecedent represented a female or male person (as was traditionally done, for example, when a ship or other vessel was referred to with the pronoun *she* or *her*).

5.42 ***Personal pronoun case.*** Some special rules apply to personal pronouns. (1) If a pronoun is the subject of a clause, it must be in the nominative case {she owns a tan briefcase} {Delia would like to travel, but she can't afford to}. (2) If a pronoun is the object of a verb or of a preposition, it must be in the objective case {the rustic setting soothed him} {that's a matter between him and her}. (3) If a prepositional phrase contains more than one personal-pronoun object, then all the objects must be in the objective case {Will you send an invitation to him and me?}. (4) If a pronoun is the subject of an infinitive, it must be in the objective case {Does Tina want me to leave?}.

5.43 ***Pronoun case after linking verb.*** Strictly speaking, a pronoun serving as the complement of a *be*-verb or other linking verb should be in the nominative case {it was she who asked for a meeting}. In formal writing, some fastidious readers will consider the objective case to be incorrect in every instance. But in many sentences, the nominative pronoun sounds pedantic or eccentric to the modern ear {Was that he on the phone?}.

5.44 ***Pronoun case after "than" or "as . . . as."*** The case of a pronoun following this kind of comparative structure, typically at the end of a sentence, depends on who or what is being compared. In *my sister looks more like our father than I* [or *me*], for example, if the point is whether the sister or the speaker looks more like their father, the pronoun should be nominative because it is the subject of an understood verb: *my sister looks more like our father than I do*. But if the point is whether the sister looks more like the father or the speaker, the pronoun should be objective because it is the object of a preposition in an understood sentence: *my sister looks more like our father than she looks like me*. Whatever the writer's intent, the reader can't be certain about the meaning. It would be better to reword the sentence and avoid the elliptical construction.

5.45 ***Special uses of personal pronouns.*** Some personal pronouns have special uses. (1) *He*, *him*, and *his* have traditionally been used as pronouns of indeterminate gender equally applicable to a male or female person {if the finder returns my watch, he will receive a reward}. Because these pronouns are also masculine-specific, they have long been regarded as sexist when used generically, and their indeterminate-gender use is declining. (See 5.34, 5.221–30.) (2) *It* eliminates gender even if the noun's sex could be identified. Using *it* does not mean that the noun has no sex—only that the sex is unknown or unimportant {the baby is smiling at its mother} {the mockingbird is building its nest}. (3) *We*, *you*, and *they* can be used indefinitely—that is, without antecedents—in the sense of "persons," "one," or "people in general." *We* is sometimes used by an individual who is speaking for a group {the magazine's editor wrote, "In our last issue, we covered the archaeological survey of Peru"}. This latter use is called the editorial *we*. *You* can apply indefinitely to any person or all persons {if you read this book, you will learn how to influence people} (*you* is indefinite—anyone who reads the book will learn). The same is true of *they* {they say that Stonehenge may have been a primitive calendar} (*they* are unidentified and, perhaps, unimportant). This use of *they*, however, is objectionable in scholarly writing: it unjustifiably avoids specificity. (4) *It* also has several uses as an indefinite pronoun: (a) *it* may refer to a phrase, clause, sentence, or implied thought {he said that the website is down, but I don't believe it} (without the pronoun *it*, the clause might be rewritten *I don't believe what he said*); (b) *it* can be the subject of a verb (usually a *be*-verb) without an antecedent noun {it was too far}, or an introductory word or expletive for a phrase or clause that follows the verb {it is possible that Dody is on vacation}; (c) *it* can be the grammatical subject in an expression about time, weather, or distance and the like {it is almost midnight} {it is beginning to snow}; and (d) *it* may be an expletive that anticipates the true grammatical subject or object {I find it hard to accept this situation}.

5.46 ***The singular "they."*** A singular antecedent requires a singular referent pronoun. Because *he* is no longer accepted as a generic pronoun referring to a person of either sex, it has become common in speech and in informal writing to substitute the third-person plural pronouns *they*, *them*, *their*, and *themselves*, and the nonstandard singular *themself*. While this usage is accepted in casual contexts, it is still considered ungrammatical in formal writing. Avoiding the plural form by alternating masculine and feminine pronouns is awkward and only emphasizes the inherent problem of not having a generic third-person pronoun. Employing an artificial form such as *s/he* is distracting at best, and most readers find it ridiculous. There are several better ways to avoid the problem. For ex-

ample, use the traditional, formal *he or she, him or her, his or her, himself or herself*. Stylistically, this device is usually awkward or even stilted, but if used sparingly it can be functional. For other techniques, see 5.225.

POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS

5.47 ***Possessive pronouns.*** The possessive pronouns, *my, our, your, his, her, its,* and *their,* are used as limiting adjectives to qualify nouns {my dictionary} {your cabin} {his diploma}. Each has a corresponding absolute (also called independent) form that can stand alone without a noun: *mine, ours, yours, his, hers, its,* and *theirs*. The independent form does not require an explicit object: the thing possessed may be either an antecedent or something understood {this dictionary is mine} {this cabin of yours} {Where is hers?}. An independent possessive pronoun can also stand alone and be treated as a noun: it can be the subject or object of a verb {hers is on the table} {pass me yours} or the object of a preposition {put your coat with theirs}. When it is used with the preposition *of,* a double possessive is produced: *that letter of Sheila's* becomes *that letter of hers*. Such a construction is unobjectionable. Note that none of the possessive personal pronouns are spelled with an apostrophe.

5.48 ***Compound personal pronouns; -self forms.*** Several personal pronouns form compounds by taking the suffix *-self* or *-selves*. These are *my–myself; our–ourselves; your–yourself; your–yourselves; him–himself; her–herself; it–itself;* and *them–themselves*. The indefinite pronoun *one* forms the compound pronoun *oneself*. All these compound personal pronouns are the same in both the nominative and the objective case. They have no possessive forms. They are used for two purposes: (1) for emphasis (in which case they are termed intensive pronouns) {I saw Queen Beatrice herself} {I'll do it myself} and (2) to refer to the subject of the verb (in which case they are termed reflexive pronouns) {he saved himself the trouble of asking} {we support ourselves}.

5.49 ***Reflexive and intensive pronouns.*** Both reflexive and intensive personal pronouns are *-self* forms, but the distinction between them is useful and important. A reflexive pronoun reflects the action described by the verb by renaming the subject as either an object or an indirect object {she gave herself a pat on the back}. It is similar in appearance to an intensive pronoun but differs in function. An intensive pronoun is used in apposition to its referent to add emphasis {I myself have won several writing awards}. Intensive pronouns lend force to a sentence. And unlike reflexive pronouns, they are in the nominative case. Compare the intensive pronoun

in *I burned the papers myself* (in which the object of *burned* is *papers*) with the reflexive pronoun in *I burned myself* (in which the object of *burned* is *myself*). Constructions in which the *-self* form does not serve either of those functions are common but nonstandard, whether it is serving as subject or as object:

WRONG: The staff and myself thank you for your contribution.
RIGHT: The staff and I thank you for your contribution.
WRONG: Deliver the equipment to my partner or myself.
RIGHT: Deliver the equipment to my partner or me.

5.50 ***Possessive pronouns versus contractions.*** The possessive forms of personal pronouns are *my, mine, our, ours, your, yours, his, her, hers, its, their, theirs*. None of them takes an apostrophe. Nor does the possessive form of *who* (*whose*). These exceptions aside, the apostrophe is a universal signal of the possessive in English, so it is a natural tendency (and a common error) to insert an apostrophe in the forms that end in *-s* (or the sibilant *-se*). Aggravating that tendency is the fact that some possessive personal pronouns have homophones that are contractions—forms that are also signaled by apostrophes. The pronouns that don't sound like legitimate contractions seldom present problems, even if they do end in *-s* (*hers, yours, ours*). But several do require special attention, specifically *its* (the possessive of *it*) and *it's* ("it is"); *your* (the possessive of *you*) and *you're* ("you are"); *whose* (the possessive of *who*) and *who's* ("who is"); and the three homophones *their* (the possessive of *they*), *there* ("in that place" or "in that way"), and *they're* ("they are").

DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUNS

5.51 ***Demonstrative pronouns defined.*** A demonstrative pronoun (or, as it is sometimes called, a deictic pronoun) is one that points directly to its antecedent: *this* and *that* for singular antecedents {this is your desk} {that is my office}, and *these* and *those* for plural antecedents {these have just arrived} {those need to be answered}. *This* and *these* point to objects that are close by in space, time, or thought, while *that* and *those* point to objects that are comparatively remote in space, time, or thought. The antecedent of a demonstrative pronoun can be a noun, phrase, clause, sentence, or implied thought, as long as the antecedent is clear. *Kind* and *sort*, each referring to "one class," are often used with an adjectival *this* or *that* {this kind of magazine} {that sort of school}. The plural forms *kinds* and *sorts* should be used with the plural demonstratives {these kinds of magazines} {those sorts of schools}.

WRONG: The candidate is a former county judge, state senator, and served two terms as attorney general.
RIGHT: The candidate is a former county judge, state senator, and two-term attorney general.

The examples illustrate how the syntax breaks down when a series is not parallel. In the second one, for example, the subject, verb, and modifier (*The candidate is a former*) fit with the noun phrases *county judge* and *state senator*, but the third item in the series renders nonsense: "The candidate is a former served two terms as attorney general." The first two elements in the series are nouns, while the third is a separate predicate. The corrected version makes each item in the series a noun phrase.

13 ***Prepositions and parallel structure.*** In a parallel series of prepositional phrases, repeat the preposition with every element unless they all use the same preposition. A common error occurs when a writer lets two or more of the phrases share a single preposition but inserts a different one with another element:

WRONG: I looked for my lost keys in the sock drawer, the laundry hamper, the restroom, and under the bed.
RIGHT: I looked for my lost keys in the sock drawer, in the laundry hamper, in the restroom, and under the bed.

If the series had not included *under the bed*, the preposition could have been used once to apply to all the objects:

RIGHT: I looked for my lost keys in the sock drawer, the laundry hamper, and the restroom.

14 ***Paired joining terms and parallel structure.*** Correlative conjunctions such as *either–or*, *neither–nor*, *both–and*, and *not only–but also* and some adverb pairs such as *where–there*, *as–so*, and *if–then* must join grammatically parallel sentence elements. It is a common error to put the first correlative term in the wrong position.

WRONG: I'd like to either go into business for myself or else to write freelance travel articles.
RIGHT: I'd like either to go into business for myself or else to write freelance travel articles.
WRONG: Our guests not only ate all the turkey and dressing but both pumpkin pies, too.

RIGHT: Our guests ate not only all the turkey and dressing but both pumpkin pies, too.

The verb *ate*, when placed after the first correlative, grammatically attaches to *all the turkey* but not to *both pies, too*. When moved outside the two phrases containing its direct objects, it attaches to both.

5.215 ***Auxiliary verbs and parallel structure.*** If an auxiliary verb appears before a series of verb phrases, it must apply to all of them. A common error is to include one phrase that takes a different auxiliary verb:

WRONG: The proposed procedure would streamline the application process, speed up admission decisions, and has proved to save money when implemented by other schools.
RIGHT: The proposed procedure would streamline the application process, speed up admission decisions, and save money.
RIGHT: The proposed procedure would streamline the application process and speed up admission decisions. It has proved to save money when implemented by other schools.

The auxiliary verb *would* in that example renders the nonsensical *would has proved* when parsed with the third element of the predicate series. The first solution resolves that grammatical conflict, while the second breaks out the third element into a separate sentence—which also avoids shifting from future tense to past tense in midsentence.

Word Usage

Introduction

5.216 ***Grammar versus usage.*** The great mass of linguistic issues that writers and editors wrestle with don't really concern grammar at all—they concern usage: the collective habits of a language's native speakers. It is an arbitrary fact, but ultimately an important one, that *corollary* means one thing and *correlation* something else. And it seems to be an irresistible law of language that two words so similar in sound will inevitably be confounded by otherwise literate users of language. Some confusions, such as the one just cited, are relatively new. Others, such as *lay* versus *lie* and *infer* versus *imply*, are much older.

5.217 ***Standard Written English.*** In any age, careful users of language will make distinctions; careless users of language will blur them. The words someone uses and the way they go together tell us something about the education and background of that person. We know whether people speak educated English and write what is commonly referred to as Standard Written English.

5.218 ***Dialect.*** Of course, some writers and speakers prefer to use dialect, and use it to good effect. Will Rogers is a good example. He had power as a speaker of dialect, as when he said: "Liberty don't work near as good in practice as it does in speeches." And fiction writers often use dialect in dialogue. They may even decide to put the narrator's voice in dialect. Such decisions fall outside the scope of this manual.

5.219 ***Focus on tradition.*** In the short space of this section, only the basics of Standard Written English can be covered. Because no language stands still—because the standards of good usage change, however slowly—no guide could ever be written to the satisfaction of all professional editors. What is intended here is a guide that steers writers and editors toward the unimpeachable uses of language—hence it takes a fairly traditional view of usage. For the writer or editor of most prose intended for a general audience, the goal is to stay within the mainstream of literate language as it stands today.

Glossary of Problematic Words and Phrases

5.220 ***Good usage versus common usage.*** Although Chicago recommends *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, there are several other first-rate American desktop dictionaries on the market. The best dictionary makers are signaled by the imprints Merriam-Webster, Webster's New World, American Heritage, Oxford University Press, and Random House. But one must use care and judgment in consulting *any* dictionary. The mere presence of a word in the dictionary's pages does not mean that the word is in all respects fit for print. The dictionary merely describes how speakers of English use the language; despite occasional usage notes, lexicographers generally disclaim any intent to guide writers and editors on the thorny points of English usage—apart from collecting evidence of what others do. So *infer* is recorded as meaning, in one of its senses, *imply*; *irregardless* may mean *regardless*; *restauranteur* may mean *restaurateur*; and on and on. That is why, in the publishing world, it is generally necessary to consult a style or usage guide in addition to a dictionary. While common usage can excuse many slipshod expressions, the standards of good usage make demands on writers and editors. Even so, good usage should make only *reasonable* demands without setting outlandishly high standards. The purpose of the following glossary is to set out the reasonable demands of good usage as it stands today.

a; an. Use the indefinite article *a* before any word beginning with a consonant sound {a utopian dream}. Use *an* before any word beginning with a vowel sound {an officer} {an honorary degree}. The word *historical* and its variations cause missteps, but since the *h* in these words is pronounced, it takes an *a* {an hour-long talk at a historical society}. Likewise, an initialism (whose letters are sounded out) may be paired with one article while an acronym (which is pronounced as a word) beginning with the same letter is paired with the other {an HTML website for a HUD program}. See 5.72.

ability; capability; capacity. *Ability* refers to a person's physical or mental skill or power to achieve something {the ability to ride a bicycle}. *Capability* refers more generally to power or ability {she has the capability to play soccer professionally} or to the quality of being able to use or be used in a certain way {a jet with long-distance-flight capability}. *Capacity* refers especially to a vessel's ability to hold or contain something {a high-capacity fuel tank}. Used figuratively, *capacity* refers to a person's physical or mental power to learn {an astounding capacity for mathematics}.

abjure; adjure. To *abjure* is to deny or renounce under oath {the defendant abjured the charge of murder} or to declare one's permanent abandonment of a place {abjure the realm}. To *adjure* is to require someone to do something as if under oath {I adjure you to keep this secret} or to urge earnestly {the executive committee adjured all the members to approve the plan}.

about; approximately. When idiomatically possible, use the adverb *about* instead of *approximately*. In the sciences, however, *approximately* is preferred {approximately thirty coding-sequence differences were identified}. Avoid coupling either word with other words of approximation, such as *guess* or *estimate*.

abstruse. See ***obtuse***.

access, vb. The use of nouns as verbs has long been one of the most common ways that word-usage changes happen in English. Today, few people quibble with using *contact*, *debut*, and *host*, for example, as verbs. *Access* can be safely used as a verb when referring to computing {access a computer} {access the Internet} {access a database}. Outside the digital world, though, it is still best avoided.

accord; accordance. The first word means "agreement" {we are in accord on the treaty's meaning}; the second word means "conformity" {the book was printed in accordance with modern industry standards}.

accuse; charge. A person is *accused of* or *charged with* a misdeed. *Accused* is less formal than *charged* (which suggests official action). Compare *Jill accused Jack of eating her chocolate bar* with *Maynard was charged with theft*.

actual fact, in. Redundant. Try *actually* instead, or simply omit.

Next page will jump to end of glossary →

tone is desired {while many readers may disagree, the scientific community has overwhelmingly adopted the conclusions here presented}. Yet because *while* can denote either time or contrast, the word is occasionally ambiguous; when a real ambiguity exists, *although* or *whereas* is the better choice.

who; whom. Here are the traditional rules. *Who* is a nominative pronoun used as (1) the subject of a finite verb {it was Jim who bought the coffee today} or (2) a predicate nominative when it follows a linking verb {that's who}. *Whom* is an objective pronoun that may appear as (1) the object of a verb {I learned nothing about the man whom I saw} or (2) the object of a preposition {the woman to whom I owe my life}. Today there are two countervailing trends: first, there's a decided tendency to use *who* colloquially in most contexts; second, among those insecure about their grammar, there's a tendency to overcorrect oneself and use *whom* when *who* would be correct. Writers and editors of formal prose often resist the first of these; everyone should resist the second. See also 5.63.

whoever; whomever. Avoid the second unless you are certain of your grammar {give this book to whoever wants it} {I cook for whomever I love}. If you are uncertain why these examples are correct, use *anyone who* or (as in the second example) *anyone*.

who's; whose. The first is a contraction {Who's on first?}, the second a possessive {Whose life is it, anyway?}. Unlike *who* and *whom*, *whose* may refer to things as well as people {the Commerce Department, whose bailiwick includes intellectual property}. See 5.61.

whosever; whoever's. The first is correct (though increasingly rare) in formal writing {whosever bag that is, it needs to be moved out of the way}; the second is acceptable in casual usage {whoever's dog got into our garbage can, he or she should clean up the mess}.

wrack; rack. To *wrack* is to severely or completely destroy {a storm-wracked ship}. (*Wrack* is also a noun denoting wreckage {the storm's wrack}.) To *rack* is to torture by means of stretching with an instrument {rack the prisoner until he confesses} or to stretch beyond capacity {to rack one's brain}.

wreak; reek. *Wreak* means "to force (something) on" in the sense of causing damage or revenge; the past tense is *wreaked*, not *wrought*. (The latter is an archaic form of the past tense and past participle of *work*.) *Reek* can be a verb meaning "to stink" or a noun meaning "stench."

wrong; wrongful. These terms are not interchangeable. *Wrong* has two senses: (1) "immoral, unlawful" {it's wrong to bully smaller children} and (2) "improper, incorrect, unsatisfactory" {the math answers are wrong}. *Wrongful* likewise has two senses: (1) "unjust, unfair" {wrongful conduct} and (2) "unsanctioned by law; having no legal right" {it was a wrongful demand on the estate}.

yes. See ***affirmative, in the***.

your; you're. *Your* is the possessive form of *you*. *You're* is the contraction for *you are*.

Bias-Free Language

5.221 ***Maintaining credibility.*** Discussions of bias-free language—language that is neither sexist nor suggestive of other conscious or subconscious prejudices—have a way of descending quickly into politics. But there is a way to avoid the political quagmire: if we focus solely on maintaining credibility with a wide readership, the argument for eliminating bias from published works becomes much simpler. Biased language that is not central to the meaning of a work distracts readers, and in their eyes the work is less credible. Few texts warrant the deliberate display of linguistic biases. Nor is it ideal, however, to call attention to the supposed absence of linguistic biases, since this will also distract readers and weaken credibility.

5.222 ***Gender bias.*** Consider the issue of gender-neutral language. On the one hand, it is unacceptable to a great many reasonable readers to use the generic masculine pronoun (*he* in reference to no one in particular). On the other hand, it is unacceptable to a great many readers (often different readers) either to resort to nontraditional gimmicks to avoid the generic masculine (by using *he/she* or *s/he*, for example) or to use *they* as a kind of singular pronoun. Either way, credibility is lost with some readers.

5.223 ***Other biases.*** The same is true of other types of biases, such as slighting allusions or stereotypes based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or birth or family status. Careful writers avoid language that reasonable readers might find offensive or distracting—unless the biased language is central to the meaning of the writing.

5.224 ***Bias and the editor's responsibility.*** A careful editor points out to authors any biased terms or approaches in the work (knowing, of course, that the bias may have been unintentional), suggests alternatives, and ensures that any biased language that is retained is retained by choice. Although some publishers prefer to avoid certain terms or specific usages in all cases, Chicago's editors do not maintain a list of words or usages considered unacceptable. Rather, they adhere to the reasoning presented here and apply it to individual cases. They consult guides to avoiding bias in writing (see bibliography) and work with authors to use the most appropriate language. What you should strive for—if you want readers to focus on your ideas and not on the political subtext—is a style that doesn't even hint at the issue. So unless you're involved in a debate about, for example, sexism, you'll probably want a style, on the one hand, that no

reasonable person could call sexist and, on the other hand, that never suggests you're contorting your language to be nonsexist.

5.225 ***Nine techniques for achieving gender neutrality.*** There are many ways to achieve gender-neutral language, but it takes some thought and often some hard work. Nine methods are suggested below because no single method will work for every writer. And one method won't neatly resolve every gender-bias problem. Some of them—for example, repeating the noun or using "he or she"—will irritate readers if overused. All of them risk changing the intended meaning: though slight changes in meaning are inevitable, additional rewording may be necessary.

1. Omit the pronoun: *the programmer should update the records when data is transferred to her by the head office* becomes *the programmer should update the records when data is transferred by the head office.*
2. Repeat the noun: *a writer should be careful not to needlessly antagonize readers, because her credibility will suffer* becomes *a writer should be careful not to needlessly antagonize readers, because the writer's credibility will suffer.*
3. Use a plural antecedent: *a contestant must conduct himself with dignity at all times* becomes *contestants must conduct themselves with dignity at all times.*
4. Use an article instead of a personal pronoun: *a student accused of cheating must actively waive his right to have his guidance counselor present* becomes *a student accused of cheating must actively waive the right to have a guidance counselor present.*
5. Use the neutral singular pronoun *one*: *an actor in New York is likely to earn more than he is in Paducah* becomes *an actor in New York is likely to earn more than one in Paducah.*
6. Use the relative pronoun *who* (works best when it replaces a personal pronoun that follows *if*): *employers presume that if an applicant can't write well, he won't be a good employee* becomes *employers presume that an applicant who can't write well won't be a good employee.*
7. Use the imperative mood: *a lifeguard must keep a close watch over children while he is monitoring the pool* becomes *keep a close watch over children while monitoring the pool.*
8. Use *he or she* (sparingly): *if a complainant is not satisfied with the board's decision, then he can ask for a rehearing* becomes *if a complainant is not satisfied with the board's decision, then he or she can ask for a rehearing.*
9. Revise the clause: *a person who decides not to admit he lied will be considered honest until someone exposes his lie* becomes *a person who denies lying will be considered honest until the lie is exposed.*

5.226 ***Sex-specific labels as adjectives.*** When gender is relevant, it's acceptable to use the noun *woman* as a modifier {woman judge}. In recent decades,

woman has been rapidly replacing *lady* in such constructions. The adjective *female* is also often used unobjectionably. In isolated contexts it may strike some readers as being dismissive or derogatory (perhaps because it's a biological term used for animals as well as humans), but when parallel references to both sexes are required, the adjectives *male* and *female* are typically the most serviceable choices {the police force has 834 male and 635 female officers}.

5.227 ***Gender-neutral singular pronouns.*** The only gender-neutral third-person singular personal pronoun in English is *it*, which doesn't refer to humans (with very limited exceptions). Clumsy artifices such as *s/he* and *(wo)man* or artificial genderless pronouns have been tried—for many years—with no success. They won't succeed. And those who use them invite credibility problems. Indefinite pronouns such as *anybody* and *someone* don't always satisfy the need for a gender-neutral alternative because they are traditionally regarded as singular antecedents that call for a third-person singular pronoun. Many people substitute the plural *they* and *their* for the singular *he* or *she*. Although *they* and *their* have become common in informal usage, neither is considered acceptable in formal writing, so unless you are given guidelines to the contrary, do not use them in a singular sense.

5.228 ***Problematic suffixes.*** The trend in American English is toward eliminating sex-specific suffixes. Words with feminine suffixes such as *-ess* and *-ette* are easily replaced with the suffix-free forms, which are increasingly accepted as applying to both men and women. For example, *author* and *testator* are preferable to *authoress* and *testatrix*. Compounds with *-man* are more problematic. The word *person* rarely functions well in such a compound; *chairperson* and *anchorperson* sound more pompous and wooden than the simpler (and correct) *chair* or *anchor*. Unless a word is established (such as *salesperson*, which dates from 1901), don't automatically substitute *-person* for *-man*. English has many alternatives that are not necessarily newly coined, including *police officer* (first recorded in 1797), *firefighter* (1903), and *mail carrier* (1788).

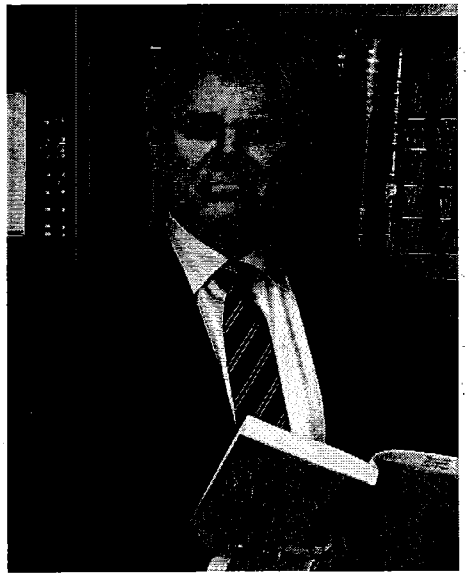
5.229 ***Necessary gender-specific language.*** It isn't always necessary or desirable to use gender-neutral terms and phrasings. If you're writing about something that clearly concerns only one sex (e.g., *women's studies*; *men's golf championship*) or an inherently single-sex institution (e.g., a sorority; a Masonic lodge), trying to use gender-neutral language may lead to absurd prose {be solicitous of a pregnant friend's comfort; he or she will need your support}.

5.230 ***Avoiding other biased language.*** Comments that betray a writer's conscious or unconscious biases or ignorance may cause readers to lose respect for the writer and interpret the writer's words in ways that were never intended. In general, emphasize the person, not a characteristic. A characteristic is a label. It should preferably be used as an adjective, not as a noun. Instead of referring to someone as, for instance, *a Catholic* or *a deaf-mute*, put the person first by writing *a Catholic man* or *he is Catholic*, and *a deaf-and-mute child* or *the child is deaf and mute*. Avoid irrelevant references to personal characteristics such as sex, race, ethnicity, disability, age, religion, sexual orientation, or social standing. Such pointless references may affect a reader's perception of you or the person you are writing about or both. They may also invoke a reader's biases and cloud your meaning. When it is important to mention a characteristic because it will help the reader develop a picture of the person you are writing about, use care. For instance, in the sentence *Shirley Chisholm was probably the finest African American woman member of the House of Representatives that New York has ever had*, the phrase *African American woman* may imply to some readers that Chisholm was a great representative "for a woman" but may be surpassed by many or all men, that she stands out only among African American members of Congress, or that it is unusual for a woman or an African American to hold high office. But in *Shirley Chisholm was the first African American woman to be elected to Congress and one of New York's all-time best representatives*, the purpose of the phrase *African American woman* is not likely to be misunderstood.

6 Punctuation

Bryan Garner talks about *The Chicago Guide to Grammar, Usage, and Punctuation*

Chicago Manual / October 11, 2016



Bryan A. Garner *is the author of the new book* The Chicago Guide to Grammar, Usage, and Punctuation *as well as the author of the "Grammar and Usage" chapter of* The Chicago Manual of Style. *His other best-selling books include* Garner's Modern English Usage. *He is president of LawProse, Inc., and Distinguished Research Professor of Law at Southern Methodist University.*

CMOS: First, congratulations on the publication of *The Chicago Guide to Grammar, Usage, and Punctuation*. Would you be able to explain where the new book stands in the corpus of your works on grammar and style and how it relates to the grammar chapter you wrote for *The Chicago Manual of Style*?

BG: To take your second question first, it's a big expansion of the grammar chapter for the *Chicago Manual*. That chapter in itself was a hundred-page compendium on English grammar and usage, and so it made a nice starting point for a five-hundred-page text on English grammar. The purpose was to write a grammar that would be accessible to the interested nonspecialist, but one that takes advantage of modern research into the English language. Believe it or not, nobody has really tried this since the 1930s or so. In the field of grammar, an intellectual apartheid keeps the specialists walled off from everyone else. Modern grammarians

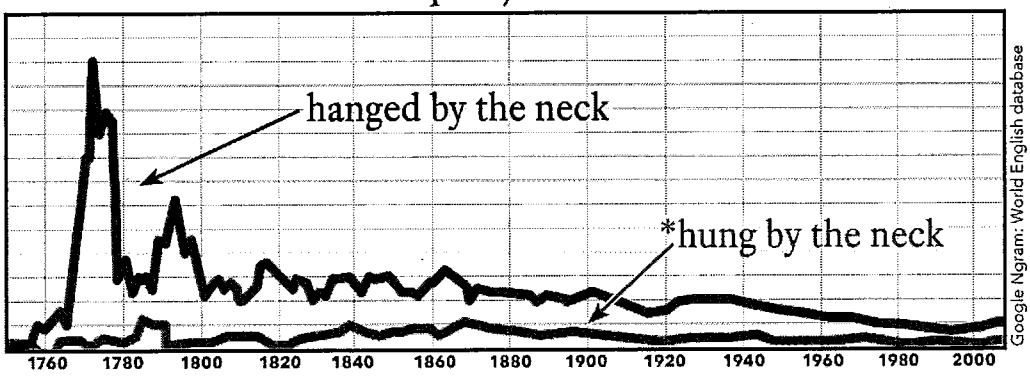
tend to use vocabulary that makes their subject inaccessible to most people. With *The Chicago Guide to Grammar, Usage, and Punctuation,* I wanted to remedy that.

CMOS: This is much needed. We constantly get queries from educated readers who can't cite a recent grammar source. They quote their high school or college grammars, which are by now many decades out of date.

Something new and fascinating in the "Word Usage" section of *The Chicago Guide* is your inclusion of sixty-seven "ngrams" from Google's Ngram Viewer, which allows one to search for a given word or phrase through millions of sources printed from 1500 to 2008. In your introduction, you say that "this previously unavailable big-data tool allows us to gauge questions of English in a way never before possible." Could you give an example?

BG: Yes. Take "hanged by the neck." In the eighteenth century, prisoners subject to the death penalty were said to be *hanged* (not *hung*) by the neck. That's been the predominant literary usage forever. But the competitive gap between the terms in this context has narrowed. In 1817, the ratio of *hanged* versus *hung* by the neck was 13:1; in the most recent statistic available (2008), it's 3:1. In other words, many more people now use *hung* in reference to the gallows.

1817 Ratio of Frequency in Printed Books: 13:1
2008 Ratio of Frequency in Printed Books: 3:1



Although literary usage still prefers *hanged,* the competing form *hung* is now getting closer. The Google ngram shows you that it's mostly because *hanged* has declined in use; it's not that there's been an upsurge of *hung*. Perhaps this is a reflection of (1) the decline of the death penalty, and (2) the replacement of hanging with other means of execution in some places where the death penalty still exists.

These ngrams contain all sorts of information that one might speculate about, some of it linguistic and some of it anthropological. The diagram shows the modern writer or editor what literary choice has been traditional, and for how long. That's useful.

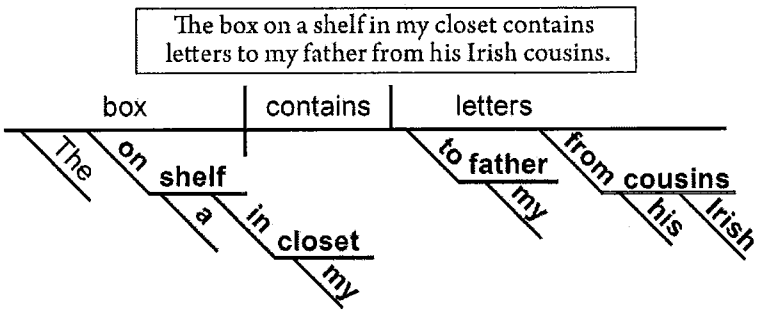
CMOS: So any writer or editor who's curious about a suspicious construction can go to the Ngram Viewer online and track its progress in published books over the decades. Do you have advice for someone using it for the first time? Are there ways ngrams can be misinterpreted or misused?

BG: I encourage serious editors to play with them a bit. Ngrams are useful whether you're trying to figure out which preposition goes after the noun *animadversion* or which plural to use

for *syllabus* (the answer is different for American English [*syllabi*] and for British English [*syllabuses*]). *The Chicago Guide* is the first linguistic book that reproduces ngrams, and I think they add both fascinating information and visual appeal. *Garner's Modern English Usage* shows no ngrams but contains about 2,500 ratios calculated from ngrams. There you'll learn that in AmE *syllabi* outranks *syllabuses* by a 6:1 ratio in print sources; but in BrE *syllabuses* is favored by a 1.4:1 ratio. That's a little surprising, since on the whole BrE is usually more tenacious than AmE in holding on to classical plurals.

CMOS: Another intriguing feature of your book, in the "Syntax" section, is the inclusion of sentence diagrams. Older readers will remember either loving or hating these exercises in school. Are you hoping to revive a lost art, or are you responding to a revival that's already happening?

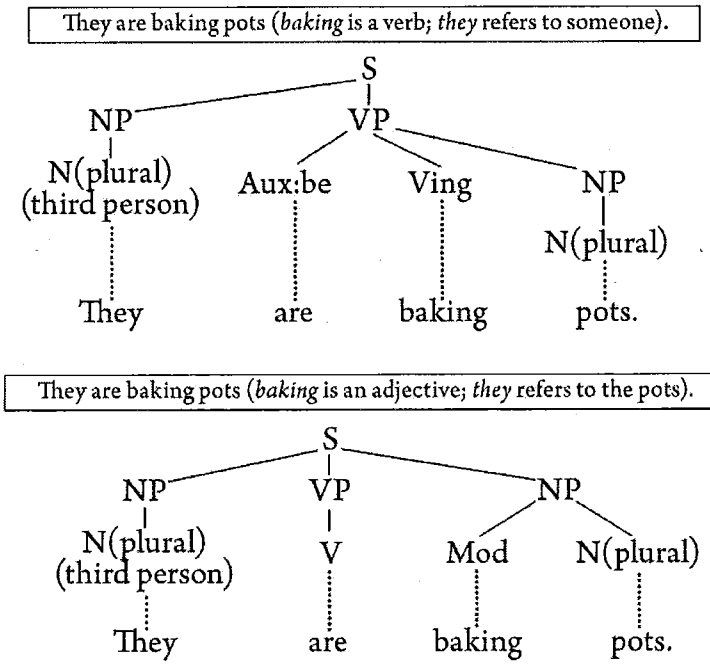
TRADITIONAL SENTENCE DIAGRAM



This sentence contains four prepositional phrases: *on a shelf* modifies the subject, *box*; *in my closet* modifies the object of that preposition, *shelf*; *to my father* modifies the direct object, *letters*, as does *from his Irish cousins*.

BG: In my weekly training of lawyers, I hear many who decry the loss of sentence diagrams. So I devoted a fifteen-page chapter showing how to diagram sentences the traditional way. But I devoted another fifteen-page chapter to the more modern transformational tree diagrams. The idea was to cover these different approaches for the benefit of any teacher or student of grammar who wants a comprehensive treatment. I also begin the book with the justification for learning the subject—a kind of gentle exhortation.

TRANSFORMATIONAL TREE DIAGRAMS



CMOS: Could you use the example to explain some of the advantages of using the tree diagrams of transformational grammar over traditional diagrams?

BG: The tree diagrams have relatively little pedagogical value. In the example you've chosen, it's easy to see the two possible readings of *baking*. In a sense, though, I suppose tree diagrams also reinforce one's knowledge of syntax and phrasing, just as traditional sentence diagrams do.

CMOS: A reader flipping through the book can't help but notice many little shaded boxes with quotations.

BG: *The Chicago Guide* was lots of fun to write, and I interspersed it with quotable observations by major linguists, grammarians, and rhetoricians over the years. And in the punctuation chapter, I illustrate every legitimate use of every punctuation mark with actual sentences from major writers such as Alain de Botton, Saul Bellow, Pauline Kael, Archibald MacLeish, Nancy Mitford, J. K. Rowling, James Thurber, E. B. White, and Virginia Woolf. There are literary nuggets in there. I hope readers will enjoy them.

Photo: Courtesy of Winn Fuqua. *Diagrams:* Bryan A. Garner, *The Chicago Guide to Grammar, Usage, and Punctuation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 187, 208, 278, courtesy of the publisher.

ACADEMIC LANGUAGE OF RESEARCH—ACKNOWLEDGING AND RESPONDING

Recall that a research argument is not a one-sided lecture to passive listeners but a two-sided conversation in which you speak with and for your readers. You must *acknowledge* the questions and objections your readers might raise and then *respond* to them.

Use the following language and sentence stems to help you acknowledge and respond to anticipated questions or objections:

Forms for Acknowledging

1. You can downplay an alternative by summarizing it in a short phrase introduced with *despite, regardless of, notwithstanding, although, while,* or *even though.*

   ***Despite** Congress's claims that it wants to cut taxes,*$_{\text{acknowledgment}}$ *the public believes that . . .*$_{\text{response}}$

2. You can signal an alternative with *seem* or *appear,* or with a qualifying adverb, such as *plausibly, reasonably, understandably, surprisingly, foolishly,* or even *certainly.*

   In his letters, Lincoln expresses what **appears** *to be depression.*$_{\text{acknowledgment}}$ *But those who observed him . . .*$_{\text{response}}$

3. You can acknowledge an alternative without naming its source. This gives it just a little weight. If you name the source, that gives it more weight.

   ***Some evidence** might suggest that we should . . .*

   ***Jones** claims that we should . . .*

4. You can acknowledge an alternative in your own voice or with adverbs such as *admittedly, granted, to be sure,* and so on. This construction admits that the alternative has some validity, but by changing the words, you can qualify how valid you think it is.

   *We have to **raise** the **possibility** that further study **might** show . . .*

   *We have to **consider** the **probability** that further study **will** show . . .*

Forms for Responding

1. You can state that you don't entirely understand someone's objection.

   It is not clear to me that . . .

2. Or you can state that there are unsettled issues with someone's objection.

   But there are other issues . . .

3. You can respond more bluntly by claiming the acknowledged person is irrelevant or unreliable.

   But the evidence is unreliable . . .

Adapted from Kate L. Turabian, *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers,* 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 68, 70–72.

ACADEMIC LANGUAGE OF RESEARCH—VERBS FOR INTRODUCING A QUOTATION OR PARAPHRASE

Here is a quick guide to some of the verbs that introduce quotations and paraphrases.

All-Purpose Verbs

These are **neutral**: Source *says* that . . . (also: *writes, adds, notes, comments*)

These indicate **how strongly the source feels** about the information: Source *emphasizes* that . . . (also: *affirms, asserts, explains, suggests, hints*)

These indicate that the information is **a problem for the source:** Source *admits* that . . . (also: *acknowledges, grants, allows*)

Verbs for Argued Claims

These are **neutral:** Source *claims* that . . . (also: *argues, reasons, contends, maintains, holds*)

These indicate that you find the claim **convincing**: Source *proves* that . . . (also: *shows, demonstrates, determines*)

Verbs for Opinions

These are **neutral**: Source *thinks* that . . . (also: *believes, assumes, insists, declares*)

These indicate that you find the opinion **weak** or **irresponsible**: Source *wants to think* that . . . (also: *wants to believe, just assumes, merely takes for granted*)

Verbs for Matters of Judgment

Source *judges* that . . . (also: *concludes, infers*)

Adapted from Kate L. Turabian, *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers,* 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 95–96.