

Everything You Never Wanted to Know about Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics, but I'm Going to Tell You Anyway

Introductory Notes

Those of us who are familiar with some topic or idea sometimes forget that not everyone else has the same knowledge. This is why I included this guide. Unless you have taught English for a year at the eighth-grade level or higher, unless you have had a teacher somewhere along the way who has successfully taught you all the terms, or unless you have studied a grammar book from cover to cover and have kept up with all the changes, there is no way that you can know the rules of English grammar and usage and their many technical terms.

Complex as the language is, even we English teachers have trouble with some of the picky mechanical points of the language. We also disagree!

English is a fluid language. It changes with use. Thirty years ago we strewed commas with near abandon. Now we are eliminating many of them. People begin sentences with conjunctions. I have real trouble with this. Conjunctions are for joining ideas, not starting them. What teachers once called a "dependent clause" is now lumped under the heading of "subordinate clause," and so on. Because of this, we all do not follow identical rules and terms, yet all of us still can be officially correct at the same time.

Do not be afraid to disagree with me. Many points of mechanics, especially the use of some commas, are highly debatable, extremely personal, and sometimes linked to a particular generation. When I participated in writing the English curriculum for the middle schools in my county, seven English teachers sat around a table and argued various points. Each of us always could find a book that would support a specific opinion. After a few hot debates, we finally had to agree to use one standard book for reference.

When Maupin House asked me to include a section that could serve as a reference for the grammar, mechanics, and usage terms, frankly, I was apprehensive. It seemed to be a dangerous task for one person to attempt. Grammar books are usually written by committees and still have errors in them. I solicited the help of my mother and several of my colleagues, all excellent grammarians, to ensure accuracy.

Do not feel inadequate or undereducated if you find yourself frequently referring to this Appendix. Many of you, like me, probably did not major in English in college and do not read grammar textbooks for pleasure. This guide will help you understand the whys and wherefores of a sentence so that you can explain it to your children in a way that makes sense to them. Once students understand the underlying concept of a rule, they can apply that rule to their own sentences when they write.

The terms are listed in alphabetical order for easier reference. If you do not fully understand a term used in one explanation, you can look it up under its own heading. All the terms that a non-English major might need for clarity are cross-referenced. Also included in the guide are some tips for teaching some of these

concepts. I hope you find these suggestions useful. All of these teaching tips have proven successful with students.

Examples are included for each concept. If, after reading the explanation of a concept, you still do not feel comfortable with it, study the examples. Right here, I feel the need to apologize for the truly uninspired examples. The majority of them concern my dogs and cats. They are always present when I write, like furry muses.

I am aware that the current trend is to abandon the teaching of certain concepts and terms, such as the parts of speech. As a former foreign language teacher, however, I know that students need to be familiar with these terms to learn the new language. If a student is aware of the difference, for example, between a subject pronoun and an object pronoun, then French pronouns do not hold much horror.

In my French classes, I often found myself having to teach the parts of speech just so my students and I could have a common frame of reference. It is hard enough to learn a different vocabulary in another language. If, in addition, students have to learn basic grammar terms, it makes the task much more difficult. The grammar of languages based on Indo-European is basically similar. The verb may come at the end of a sentence in German or at the end of a subordinate clause in Dutch, or there may be an extra verb tense to learn in Spanish and French. The basic concepts and parts of speech, however, are the same in all these languages.

I believe, too, in the teaching of sentence diagramming to help students to think and to use logic. Diagramming reaches some left-brain students who otherwise might never understand sentence structure.

After teaching rudimentary sentence diagramming through the Caught'yas, I almost could see the light bulb go on in some students' eyes. I do not believe, however, in teaching all the picky points of English, like infinitive phrases, gerund phrases, etc., unless there is a reason for learning them, like learning the appropriate placement of commas.

Even then, when teaching the picky points is unavoidable, I advise trying to avoid using the abstruse, esoteric grammar terms. Instead, explain these points in simpler terms, using the eight parts of speech for reference. I don't say to students, for example, "If a participial phrase begins or interrupts a sentence, you need to set it off by commas. You need to know that a participial phrase is . . ." Even after you explain what a participial phrase is, your students probably are gazing out the window, minds elsewhere.

Try something like this instead. "Look at this phrase. What part of speech is it? An adjective? Right! You know the parts of speech! Well, look at it. It contains a form of a verb. If you see a group of words like this at the beginning of a sentence or in the middle of a sentence, you need to put commas after it or around it." That gets their attention because it is

something that makes sense to them. I do mention the words “participial phrase” so that students may recognize the term in the future in case other English teachers use it, but I stress the concept and not the specific term.

Other examples: instead of talking about “gerunds,” you can teach your students to use a verb or a verb phrase as a noun. In teaching verbs like “lie” and “lay,” “sit” and “set,” and “rise” and “raise,” a teacher can explain the use of each verb by talking about verbs that take direct objects and verbs that do not, instead of introducing new labels like “transitive” and “intransitive.”

Basically, the bottom line is to write correctly, not to memorize the names for everything or to identify certain phrases or clauses. When a student writes a sentence, the labels are useless. The task of English teachers is not to teach rules and technical terms, but to teach correct writing and editing skills.

Those of you who teach basic-skills classes or younger children will want to avoid the more complicated concepts anyway. Use your own judgement as to how much your students can comprehend and transfer to their writing. Each class is different. Each group has different needs. You know them best.

If you are writing your own sentences, make certain that you include in your story the grammar, mechanics, and usage that you know your students can grasp comfortably. This list is comprehensive so that this book can be used at any level. I hope that all of you find this guide a useful tool in teaching this beautiful language of ours.

Abbreviations

Most abbreviations are followed by a period.

Examples: Mr., Mrs.

If, however, all the letters of the abbreviation are capitals, a period is not used. These often are acronyms, words formed from the initial letters of a name.

Examples: NATO, USSR, USA

Usually abbreviations begin with a capital letter. Abbreviations of units of measure, however, do not begin with capital letters. They also do not require periods. The only exception is the abbreviation for inch.

Examples: mph, hp, l, km, and so on.

Exception: in.

Common abbreviations: Mr., Mrs., Ms., Dr., St., Rd., Ave., Co., Inc., days of the week, months of the year, A.M., P.M., O.K., etc.

State abbreviations: The United States Postal Service uses special abbreviations for each state. These are always two letters, both capitalized, without any periods. The postal code of twenty-nine states is the first two letters of the state. If the state has two words, the first letter of each word is used.

States that follow this rule: AL, AR, CA, CO, DE, FL, ID, IL, IN, MA, MI, NE, NH, NJ, NM, NY, NC, ND, OH, OK, OR, RI, SC, SD, UT, WA, WV, WI, and WY

Exceptions: Alaska (AK), Arizona (AZ), Connecticut (CT), Georgia (GA), Hawaii (HI), Iowa (IA), Kansas (KS), Kentucky (KY), Louisiana (LA), Maine (ME), Maryland (MD), Minnesota (MN), Mississippi (MS), Missouri (MO), Montana (MT), Nevada (NV), Pennsylvania (PA), Tennessee (TN), Texas (TX), Vermont (VT), and Virginia (VA).

Accept/Except

These two words often are confusing for students since they are so close in sound. Every time one of them appears in a Caught'ya, you can explain the difference.

1. Accept is a verb that means “to receive willingly.”

Example: The fat Rottweiler surely **will accept** the bone.

2. Except is a preposition that means “excluding” or “other than.” It also can be used as a verb that means “to leave out” or “exclude.”

Examples: The fat Rottweiler eats everything **except** onions. (preposition)

The fire department will **except** men over seventy-two inches from that kind of duty. (verb)

Active vs. Passive Verb Voices

1. **Active:** In the active voice, the subject **does** the action. Active voice is always better for more effective writing.

Example: The owner **pets** the happy dog on the head.

2. **Passive:** In the passive voice, the subject **receives** the action. Encourage students to try to avoid passive voice if at all possible. It weakens writing and often muddies the meaning in a sentence.

Example: The happy dog **was petted** on the head by the owner.

Adjective

An adjective describes a noun; it gives information about a noun.

Examples: ugly, pretty, big, little, this, four

An adjective answers one of the following three questions about a noun:

1) Which one?

2) What kind?

3) How many?

Example: **The amazing English** teacher taught **two** grade levels. (Which teacher? **The English** teacher; What kind of teacher? An **amazing** teacher; How many grade levels? **Two** grade levels.)

Adjective Clauses

An adjective clause is any subordinate clause (a complete sentence made into an incomplete sentence by the addition of a subordinating conjunction) that acts as an adjective in a sentence.

Example: The house **where she lives** is filled with animals. ("She lives." would be a complete sentence without the addition of "where." "Where she lives" modifies the noun "house.")

Adjective clauses also can begin with a relative pronoun: who, whom, whose, which, that, where, or when.

Examples: The oven **which was small and dirty** could not be used.

This is the school **where my child is a student**.

The school **that my child attends** is a good one.

The teacher **who loves to laugh** has more fun.

Monday is the day **when we always write in our journals**.

The teacher **whom we admire** is retiring.

Jane Kiester, **whose dogs are obese**, teaches middle school.

(*See Subordinate Clauses and Subordinating Conjunctions.*)

Adverb

An adverb is any word, phrase, or clause that tells more about a verb; many of the single-word adverbs end in "ly."

An adverb also tells to what extent an adjective or another adverb is true (very, extremely, and so on). This is called an intensifier.

Examples: a **very** hungry dog, an **extremely** sleepy cat

An adverb answers one of the following six questions about a verb, an adjective, or another adverb: where, when, why, how, how often, or to what extent it happened.

Examples: Where? The students learned grammar **at home**. (phrase)

When? **Yesterday** the teacher was absent.

How? The students **quickly** intimidated the substitute.

How often? The student yawned **four times** during class. (phrase)

To what extent? The teacher was **very** angry. (modifies the adjective "angry")

Why? She yelled **because she was angry**. (clause)

(*See Intensifiers.*)

Adverb Clauses

In the "olden days," an adverb clause was called an adverbial clause.

An adverb (or adverbial) clause is a subordinate clause that cannot stand on its own in a sentence. It acts as an adverb in a sentence.

Adverb clauses begin with a subordinating conjunction (*see list under Subordinating Conjunctions*).

Examples: **Whenever the teacher taught grammar**, the students groaned. (When did the students groan? "Whenever the teacher . . .")

The students went home **when the last bell rang**. (When did the students go home? "When the last bell rang.")

(*See Subordinate Clauses.*)

Affect/Effect

"Affect" and "effect" are two more words that many people confuse. If students have trouble with the correct use of these two words, use them in the Caught'yas and discuss their meanings.

1. Affect is a verb that means "to influence." It cannot be used as a noun.

Example: The eating habits of the fat Rottweiler will **affect** her girth.

2. Effect can be a noun or a verb. As a noun it means "the result of an action." As a verb it means "to cause to happen."

Examples: The **effect** of overeating is obvious in the width of the dog's belly. (noun)

The fat dog's owner **will effect** a new rule this week — no more scraps. (verb)

Agreement

1. **Antecedent and pronoun:** It is important that everything agrees in a sentence. If the subject is singular, then the pronoun used later in the sentence also must be singular. If the subject is plural, the pronoun should be plural.

Example of incorrect agreement: **Everyone** ate **their** pizza. (The indefinite pronoun "everyone" is singular, and thus the possessive pronoun which refers to it also must be singular.)

Examples of correct agreement: **Everyone** ate **his** or **her** pizza.

Each finished **his** or **her** lunch.

The **teachers** ate **their** lunch.

The **teacher** ate **his** lunch.

2. **Subject and verb:** If the subject is singular, then the verb must also be singular. If the subject is plural, then the verb must be plural.

Examples: The **dog bays** at the full moon. (singular)

The **dogs bay** at the full moon. (plural)

3. **Verbs in a story:** When writing a story an author must keep all the verbs in the same tense. If the story starts in the present tense, it must continue in the present tense (unless, of course, there is a flashback or a reference to something general). If a

story begins in the past, it must remain in the past, and so on.

Among and Between

“Among” and “between” are two prepositions that students often confuse, but they cease to be a problem very quickly after you point out the difference.

1. **Between** refers to two people, things, or groups.

Example: The cat slept **between** the two huge dogs.

2. **Among** refers to more than two people, things, or groups.

Example: The foolish cat slept **among** the four dogs.

Antecedents

These are the words that come before a given word in a sentence, as in “antecedent/pronoun agreement,” and are referred to by the given word. Thus, they must agree with each other. If one is singular, the other also must be singular, etc.

Example: The **pack** (antecedent) of dogs forsook **its** (pronoun) mistress. (“**Pack**” is singular and thus must be followed by a singular pronoun.)

(See *Collective Nouns*.)

Apostrophes

1. Contractions always contain apostrophes. A contraction comprises two words that are combined into one by omitting one or more letters. (See *Contractions* for more information and examples.)

Common contractions: I’m, I’ve, can’t, don’t, haven’t, isn’t, it’s, let’s, they’re, we’re, we’ve, won’t, you’re

2. **Possessive nouns** always contain apostrophes. A possessive noun is a noun that shows ownership of something.

Singular: Always add **'s** to the noun.

Examples: The **dog's** growl is ferocious. (The growl belongs to the dog.)

The **glass's** rim is dirty. (The rim belongs to the glass.)

Plural: Add **'** after the noun if the noun ends in “s.”

Add **'s** to the noun if the plural does not end in “s.”

Examples: The **dogs'** growls are ferocious. (Several dogs “own” their growls.)

The **children's** laughter fills the room. (Several children “own” the laughter.)

3. **Plurals of letters:** Form the plural of single letters by adding **"s."**

Examples: You will find more **"Es"** in words than any other letter.

She received all **"As"** on her report card.

Appositive

An appositive is a noun or a noun phrase that means the same thing as the noun that comes before it.

1. Appositives are set off by commas if they occur in the middle or end of a sentence and are not necessary to the meaning of the sentence.

Examples: Dino, **the Doberman with the floppy ears**, loves to eat bananas.

The dog who craves bananas is Dino, **the Doberman with the floppy ears**.

2. Appositives are set off by commas if the appositive is extra information and is not needed to complete the meaning of the sentence.

Examples: Jane Kiester, **an English teacher at Westwood**, loves dogs.

Always by her side are her two dogs, **a wimpy Rottweiler and an oversized Doberman**.

3. Appositives are not set off by commas if the information given is needed to identify the noun.

Example: Mrs. Kiester's son **John** loves to tease his mother.

(There are no commas to set off this appositive because Mrs. Kiester has more than one son. The name is necessary to determine to which son the sentence refers. Technically, this is called a restrictive modifier. If Mrs. Kiester has only one son, the comma is needed because the information is *not* necessary. This is called a non-restrictive modifier.)

(See *Modifiers and Misplaced Modifiers* for more information and examples.)

Articles

These are simply the three most commonly used adjectives. They are also called noun markers since they signal the arrival of a noun.

List of articles: a, an, the

These three adjectives answer the question “which one?” (See *Noun Markers*.)

1. Use **“a”** before a word that begins with a consonant.

Example: There is **a** lazy dog and **a** sleepy cat on the floor.

2. Use **“an”** before a word that begins with a vowel.

Example: **An** obnoxious black and white cat howled until someone let him out the door.

An exception to this rule is the letter **“h.”**

3. Use **“a”** before a word that begins with a pronounced, breathy **“h.”**

Example: She had **a** healthy baby.

4. Use **“an”** before a word that begins with an unpronounced **“h.”**

Example: They were **an** hour away from home.

Bad and Badly

These words often cause confusion. “Bad” is the adjective and should modify a noun. “Badly” is the adverb and should tell about a verb.

Examples: The **bad** dog begged for forgiveness. (adjective tells what kind of dog)

The poor dog **badly** wanted a bone. (adverb tells to what extent it wanted the bone)

When a sense verb such as “feel” functions as a verb of being, it is often followed by a predicate adjective. Thus, one would use the adjective form after such a verb.

Example: I feel **bad**. (Not “I feel badly,” since one would not say “I am badly.”)

Because and Since

If you never put a comma before “because” and “since,” you will be right ninety-eight percent of the time. While there are some exceptions to this, they are rare. The words “because” and “since” begin adverb clauses. An adverb clause that begins a sentence needs a comma, but an adverb clause that follows the independent clause usually does not need a comma. Saying the sentence aloud is a good test.

About the only exceptions to this would be with a quotation or in a series, in the case of “since” acting as a coordinating conjunction in a compound sentence, or in one of the few subordinate clauses that takes a comma for clarity.

Examples: **Because I like books about cats**, I read *The Literary Cat*. (adverb clause at the beginning of the sentence)

I read *The Literary Cat* **because I like books about cats**. (adverb clause that follows the independent clause)

Between (*See Among and Between*)

Bibliographical Forms

These do vary. Use the Modern Language Association (MLA) form, and you will be safe. Most traditional grammar books have a large list explaining how to write any reference you may need in correct bibliographical form. Just make sure that you insist that students list the books, articles, etc. in their bibliographies in alphabetical order.

Business Letters (Correct Format)

Sender’s address
Sender’s city, state zip
Date

Receiver’s name
Receiver’s address
Receiver’s city, state zip

Dear Sir or Madam:

The bulk of the letter should be written in block style, skipping lines between paragraphs.

Sincerely yours,
Sign name here in cursive.
Print or type name here.

Capitalization

Capitalize the following:

1. Abbreviations (*See Abbreviations for the exceptions.*)
2. Beginnings of sentences
3. First word in the greeting and closing of a letter
4. I
5. Names of months, days, and holidays
6. Proper nouns and proper adjectives
7. Titles of long works (*see Titles*)
 - Capitalize first and last words.
 - Capitalize all other words in title except prepositions, noun markers (a, an, the), and short conjunctions.

Chronological Order

In writing stories and paragraphs, it is important to narrate the action in a logical order. Chronological order maintains a sequence of time.

Clauses and Phrases

1. **Phrase:** Simply stated, a phrase is a group of words that serves as one part of speech (like a noun or an adjective or an adverb). It lacks a subject or a verb or both. Prepositional phrases are the most common. These are phrases that begin with a preposition and end with a noun.

Examples: in the dog house, to the store, filled with anger, rubbing his ears

2. **Clause:** A clause, on the other hand, is a group of words that contains a subject and a verb. With the removal of a subordinating conjunction that begins it, it could stand on its own as a sentence.

Example: because the dog is lazy (The subject is the word “dog.” The verb is the word “is.”)

(*See Prepositional Phrases.*)

Collective Nouns

Collective nouns are nouns that take a group of something (many) and make that group one thing.

Common collective nouns: crew, class, orchestra, chorus, committee, family, flock, herd, fleet, jury, group, team, majority.

1. Most collective nouns are singular and therefore require the singular form of the verb. Also, any pronoun that refers to such a collective noun must be singular.

Examples: A **flock** of big birds **flies** over her house every autumn. ("Fly" would be the plural form of the verb.)

The **group** applauded its leader. "Its" is the singular pronoun; "their" is the plural pronoun and thus is incorrect. This is one of the most common mistakes that people make in speech and in writing.

Example: The girl's **family** took **its** vacation in June.

2. A few collective nouns are plural.

Example: The **people** took **their** dogs to the veterinarian.

Colons

1. Use a colon before a list but never after a verb or a preposition.

Example: It is important to remember to bring the following to class: pencil, paper, and a big grin.

2. Use after the greeting in a business letter.

Examples: Dear Sir or Madam:

To Whom It May Concern:

3. Use a colon to separate the hour from the minute in telling time.

Examples: 5:45 P.M., 6:24 A.M.

4. If the wording that follows a colon forms a complete sentence, do not capitalize the first letter of the sentence.

Example: The question is as follows: do Dobermans like to eat broccoli?

Combining Sentences for Clearer, More Concise Writing

Combine two related sentences into one by making a compound subject and/or a compound verb or by adding an appositive. There are other ways to combine sentences. These are the most common.

Examples: Change "The teacher hated spelling. Her students hated spelling." to "The teacher and her students hated spelling." (compound subject)

Change "The Rottweiler loved to sleep. She liked to lick her owner's face in the morning." to "The Rottweiler loved to sleep and liked to lick her owner's face in the morning." (compound verb)

Change "The Doberman had floppy ears. He also had a sweet disposition." to "The Doberman, who had floppy ears, had a sweet disposition." (adding an adjective clause)

(*See Appositive, Compound Sentences, and Compound Subjects and Compound Predicates.*)

Comma Rules

1. Use commas to separate items in a series. There are many different kinds of series, one for each part of speech except conjunctions.

Examples: The teacher **entered** the class, **wrote** on the board, and **sat** down at her desk. (verb series)

The teacher ate **apples, bananas, and cherries.** (noun series)

The **nice, kind, and beautiful** teacher assigned no homework for the weekend. (adjective series)

The teacher sat down **quickly, quietly, and with great dignity.** (adverb series)

He went **to the store, down the aisle, and into the vegetable section.** (prepositional phrase series)

She sat with **him, her, and them.** (series of pronouns)

Oh boy, wow, and whoopee, the teacher had a great class! (series of interjections)

You also can have a series of predicate nouns and adjectives. (These are just nouns and adjectives that are located after the predicate.)

2. Use commas between two or more adjectives that precede a noun unless one of the adjectives expresses a single idea with the noun (jet plane) or the last adjective tells color (green, etc.) or age (old, young).

Comma needed: The **cute, fuzzy** dog barked at everyone.

Comma omitted: The **cute brown** dog barked at everyone. (color adjective)

Examples: The **noisy jet** plane flew overhead. ("Jet plane" is one idea. The adjective is really part of the noun.)

The **ugly young** dog wolfed down its food. (age adjective).

The general "rule of thumb" is to use a comma if it sounds right to use the word "and" instead of a comma.

Examples: The **old oaken** bucket was covered with **wet green** moss. (No commas needed as it would be awkward to say "The old and oaken bucket was covered with wet and green moss.")

The **floppy-eared, lazy** Doberman slept all day. (Here you use a comma because it makes sense to say "The floppy-eared and lazy Doberman slept all day.")

3. Use commas to separate the simple sentences included in a compound sentence (*see Compound Sentences*).

Example: The teacher wrote the sentence, and she put in a comma because the sentence was compound.

4. Use commas after words, phrases, and clauses that come at the beginning of sentences. “No” and “yes” are included here. They always are followed by a comma.

Examples: **No**, you may not turn in your homework late.

Yes, you may do extra work if you wish.

Wow, the student earned an A+ on his test!

At the end of the phrase, there should be a comma.

If a subordinate clause is at the beginning of a sentence, you have to put a comma after it.

Suddenly, the teacher yelled. (This comma is often debated. Put a comma if a breath or a pause would help clarify the sentence or if you want to accentuate the adverb.)

Well, she said that she would come.

5. Use commas to separate interrupters such as parenthetical expressions, direct addresses, and unnecessary appositives in a sentence.

Examples: Parenthetical expression — The big dog, **of course**, was a wimp.

Direct address — You know, **parents**, it is important to write correctly.

Parents, you know it is important to write correctly.

Unnecessary appositive — My cat, **Skeeter**, likes to sit on my lap as I write. (I have only one cat; therefore his name is not necessary for the meaning of the sentence to be clear.)

My dog Dino has floppy ears. (No commas are needed because I have two dogs, and I need to identify to which dog I refer.)

6. Use commas to separate the month and the day from the year.

Example: September 15, 1945

7. Use commas between the city and the state and after the state as well if the address is within the sentence.

Example: The animal lover lives in **Gainesville, Florida**, and teaches English at a middle school.

8. Use commas after the greeting in friendly letters and after the closing in both friendly and business letters.

Examples: Dear Jane,

Sincerely yours,

9. Use commas with quotation marks to set off what is being said out loud.

Examples: “Get off my foot,” she whimpered to the heavy dog.

She whimpered to the heavy dog, “Get off my foot.”

“If you don’t get off my foot,” she said, “I’ll step on yours.”

(See *Appositive, Conjunctions, Direct Address, Interrupters, and Parenthetical Expressions.*)

Comparisons

Adjectives

1. If you are comparing two or more things and the adjective has fewer than three syllables, add “er” to the adjective.

Example: Florida is **warmer** than Maine in the winter.

2. If you are stating that something is the best (or worst), add “est” to the adjective if it has fewer than three syllables.

Example: Florida is the **warmest** state in the union.

3. Using “more” and “most”

Adjectives of three or more syllables almost always use the words “more” or “the most” to state comparison.

Examples: The Rottweiler is **more obnoxious** than the Doberman.

The black and white cat is **the most obnoxious** of all of the animals in her menagerie.

4. When comparing persons or things in the same group, use the word “other.”

Example: Jesse can run faster than **any other** boy in his club.

A few adjectives with irregular forms of comparison must be memorized: good-better-best; bad-worse-worst; many-more-most; much-more-most; little (quantity only)-less-least; far-farther-farthest.

Adverbs

1. If you are comparing two things, add “er” to the adverb. If you are saying that something is done better than anything else, add “est” to the adverb.

Examples: Planes travel faster than cars.

Rockets travel fastest of all.

2. Using “more” and “most”

There is no steadfast rule as to when you add “er” or “est” or when you use “more” or “most.” The best suggestion I can make is to go with what sounds correct. Most adverbs of two or more syllables form comparisons with “more” or “most.”

Example: comprehensively, more comprehensively, most comprehensively

Complex Sentences

A complex sentence is a sentence that has one or more independent clauses (a group of words that makes sense by itself) and a subordinate clause (a group of words with a subject and a verb but which does not make sense by itself).

The important thing to remember about a complex sentence is that if the subordinate clause begins the sentence, a comma must follow it.

Example: Although the dog sat on her foot, she did not say a word. (subordinate clause, independent clause)

(See also *Subordinate Clauses and Independent Clauses*.)

Compound Sentences

A compound sentence is composed of two complete sentences (related ideas only) joined together with a comma and a coordinating conjunction (and, or, nor, for, so, but, yet) or a semicolon.

Examples: The big dog sat on her foot, **and** she gazed up at her mistress with love. "The big dog sat on her foot" and "She gazed up at her mistress with love" are complete sentences.

I tell my students to put their finger over the coordinating conjunction and check whether there is a complete sentence on either side of the finger. If there are two sentences, a comma has to precede the conjunction because the sentence is compound.

Examples: The big dog licked his paw, **or** he licked his leg.

The big dog did not lick his paw, **nor** did he lick his leg.

The big dog sat on her foot, **for** he loved her.

The big dog ate too much, **so** he was rotund.

The big dog sat on her foot, **but** he didn't put his full weight on it.

The big dog sat on her foot, **yet** he still felt insecure.

Sometimes a compound sentence does not have a coordinating conjunction joining the two sentences. Instead, it has a semicolon.

Example: The big dog sat on her foot; it then licked her knee.

A compound sentence does not occur when the word "that" is included or implied after the word "so." "So that" is a subordinating conjunction of a subordinate clause. If a subordinate clause comes at the end of a sentence, there is no comma.

Examples: She grabbed the bone **so that** the other dog could not get it. (**So that** the other dog could not get it, she grabbed the bone.)

She gobbled her food **so** the other dog could not get it. ("That" is implied)

A compound imperative sentence **does not** take a comma because the subjects, while implied, are not stated.

Examples: Get off my feet and go lie down elsewhere. (to the dog)

Stop clawing my legs and settle down. (to the cat)

(See *Conjunctions, Imperatives, Subordinate Clauses, and Subordinating Conjunctions*.)

Compound Subjects and Compound Predicates

These should be recognized if only to ensure that the students know the meanings of the words "compound," "subject," and "predicate." These words appear on the standardized tests. I usually taught these in my diagramming unit. Diagramming makes compound subjects and predicates much clearer.

1. A compound subject is simply more than one thing or person doing the action.

Example: **Rottweilers** and **Dobermans** make wonderful pets.

2. A compound predicate is more than one verb supplying the action.

Example: Rottweilers **love** to eat and **enjoy** being petted.

Conjunctions

A conjunction is a word that joins words or groups of words together. Do not capitalize a conjunction in a title.

Example: The dog **and** the cat are friends.

1. **Coordinating conjunctions:** These are the conjunctions (joiners) which join two complete thoughts (independent clauses) together to form a compound sentence.

List of coordinating conjunctions: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so. I call these FANBOYS.

It is a good idea to chant these with your students every time you encounter a compound sentence in a Caught'ya.

Example: She loves ice cream, **and** she loves candy, too.

Do not begin a sentence with a coordinating conjunction since they are supposed to join, not begin. Many authors of fiction ignore this rule. This is fine, and it can make for very effective writing. I had to enforce this rule with those students who began almost every sentence with a conjunction.

2. **Correlative conjunctions:** These are used to join words or word groups. They appear in pairs.

Examples: **Either** you do your homework, **or** your grade will suffer.

Both Dobermans **and** Rottweilers make good companions.

List of correlative conjunctions: either/or, neither/nor, not only/but, both/and, just as/so.

3. **Subordinating conjunctions:** These conjunctions make a clause that was a complete sentence into a clause that cannot stand on its own. In other words, if a subordinating conjunction is placed before an independent clause (complete sentence), the clause becomes a dependent clause (subordinate clause).

Complete sentence: The dog licks the rug.

Dependent clause: **When** the dog licks the rug (no longer a complete sentence).

Subordinating conjunctions begin subordinate clauses. Always set off an introductory adverb clause (another word for a subordinate clause since subordinate clauses act as adverbs) with a comma.

Examples: **After the cat fell asleep**, he twitched his whiskers.

As the man shouted, the two dogs cringed.

Common subordinating conjunctions: after, although, as, as if, as long as, as soon as, as though, because, before, even though, if, in order that, provided that, since, so that, than, till, unless, until, when, whenever, where, whereas, wherever, while.

To make it easier for students to learn the subordinating conjunctions, I call them “A White Bus” words, and we memorize them. They are: **A**fter, although, as; **W**hen, while, where; **H**ow; **I**f; **T**han; **E**ven though; **B**ecause, before; **U**ntil, unless; **S**ince, so that.

(See *Adverb Clauses, Subordinate Clauses, and Subordinating Conjunctions*.)

Continued Quote

This is a sentence in a quote that is interrupted by identifying the speaker. It is important to recognize that when the quoted sentence continues, quotation marks are necessary, but the first letter should not be capitalized. This is also called an interrupted quote.

Example: “My Doberman is a lazy dog,” she said, “but my Rottweiler is even lazier.”

Contractions

A contraction is a word made by the shortening of two words into one, eliminating some letters in the process. The two words are then joined by an apostrophe.

1. Contractions can be made by shortening “not” to “n’t” and adding to a verb. Sometimes the spelling of the verb changes as when “n’t” is added to “shall,” “will,” or “can.”

Examples: is not/isn’t; does not/doesn’t; cannot/can’t; shall not/shan’t; will not/won’t.

2. It’s and its

“Its” is a possessive pronoun that shows that “it” owns something.

Example: The dog ate **its** food.

“It’s” is a contraction for “it is.”

Example: **It’s** a shame that she has so many animals to feed.

3. Contractions are also formed by joining nouns or pronouns with verbs.

Examples: I am/I’m; he is/he’s; he had/he’d; you are/you’re; she has/she’s, let us/let’s, they are/they’re.

Avoid contractions in formal writing. Contractions render writing informal, and unless a writer is

using dialogue or a truly informal style, the use of contractions probably should be avoided.

Dangling Participle

A dangling participle is a participle (present or past form of a verb) used as an adjective that is not adjacent to the noun that it modifies. Dangling participles should be avoided.

Example: **Snoring, the dog’s nose** twitched. (The dog’s nose did not do the snoring, the dog did. The word “dog” needs to follow the participle “snoring.”)

Snoring, the dog twitched his nose.

Dashes

A dash can be used to show a break or a shift in thought or structure. It also can signal an afterthought.

Examples: Now, when I was a boy — (break)

I found her most — well, I didn’t like her manner. (shift in structure)

The big Doberman — the one with the floppy ears — leans against walls and people. (break)

My floppy-eared Doberman often leans — you know, all Dobermans lean like that. (shift in thought)

It is important to limit the use of dashes when writing. Too many dashes make the writing seem confused and jerky.

Diagramming Sentences

Sentence diagramming takes every word in a sentence and places it, according to its use, in a diagram-like chart. It is a graphic picture of a sentence.

Diagramming sentences is a good skill for students to learn because it forces them to think logically. Diagramming sentences also teaches students good puzzle-solving techniques and makes them practice their knowledge of the eight parts of speech.

If you want students to diagram a few Caught’yas for practice, look at the section on diagramming sentences in any traditional grammar text.

The example on the following page shows how a diagram works for a compound sentence.

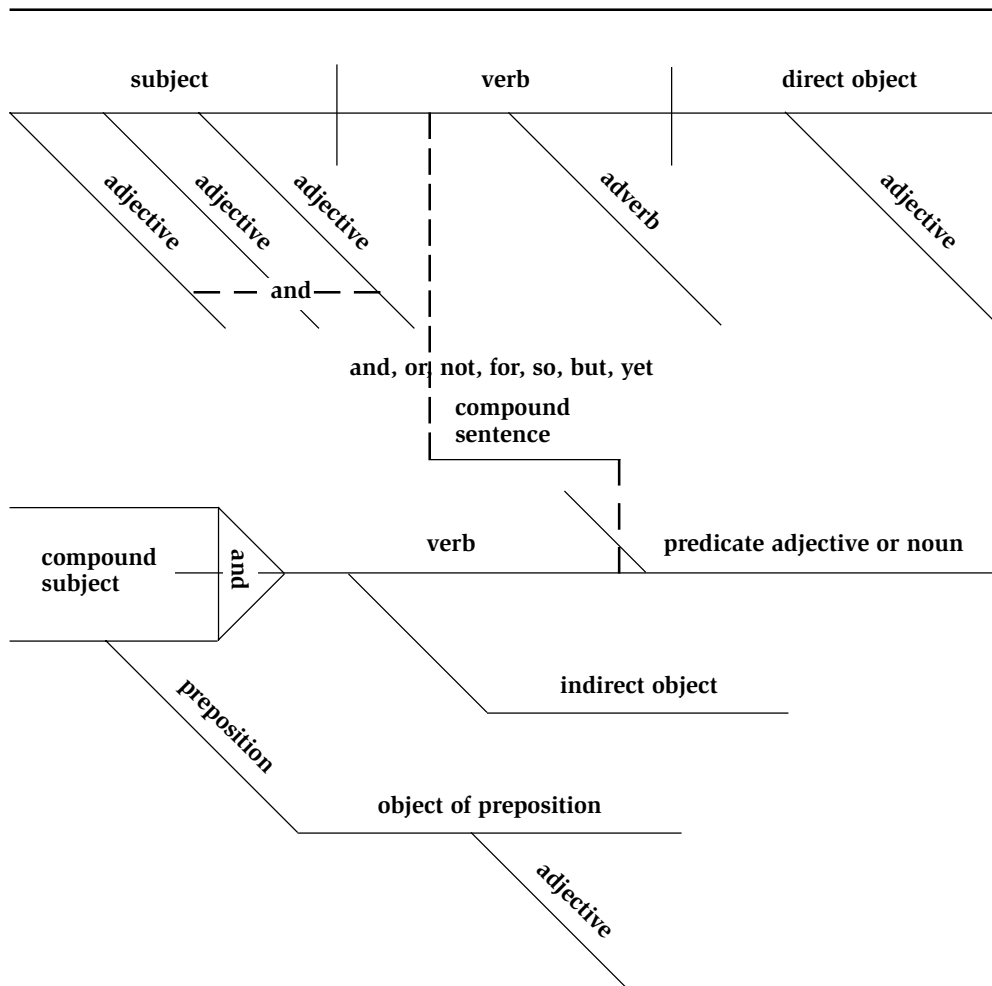
Dialogues

Begin a new paragraph every time a different person speaks. If a person’s speech includes more than one paragraph at a time, do not put quotation marks at the end of the first paragraph. Begin the next paragraph with quotation marks.

Example: (end of paragraph) “. . . and the teacher is always there.”

(new paragraph and speaker) “Students, on the other hand . . .”

Punctuation of quotes: Put quotation marks around what is said aloud. Capitalize the first letter of a quote



Basic example of a diagram for a compound sentence

unless the quote is a continued one. Set off the quote by commas or by end punctuation. Always put all punctuation inside the quotation marks.

Examples: "Close the window, you outdoor fanatic," she whimpered. "I'm freezing in here."

"Please close the window," she said, "or I'll become an icicle."

She pleaded again, "Close that window."

"Will you please close the window?" she asked.

"Close that window!" she yelled.

Direct Address

A direct address occurs when the writer is speaking directly to someone, telling someone something, and naming that someone.

Direct addresses also are called interrupters because they interrupt the flow of a sentence. Always set a direct address off by commas.

Examples: **Dog**, get off my foot. (talking to the **dog**)

If you don't get off my foot, **dog**, you are in big trouble.

Get off my foot, **dog**.

Direct and Indirect Objects

1. **Direct objects** are nouns or pronouns that directly receive the action of the verb. They, therefore, follow only transitive verbs. Direct objects answer the question "Whom or what receives the action of the verb?"

Examples: The dog licked the **teacher**. ("Teacher" answers the question "Whom?")

Students should do all their **homework**. ("Homework" answers the question "What?")

The dog licked **me**. (whom)

2. **Indirect objects** are nouns or pronouns that indirectly receive the action. The action happens to them or for them, but the indirect object does not

receive the action. This is an important concept to learn if anyone wants to learn a second language. Indirect objects follow only transitive verbs. You must have a direct object before you can have an indirect object. An indirect object answers the question "To whom or for whom is the action done?" (In English, "to" usually is implied for an indirect object, making it more difficult to identify.)

Examples: The teacher gave [to] **the children** (indirect object) **a short homework assignment** (direct object).

The dog gave [to] **me** (indirect object) **his paw** (direct object).

End Marks (Punctuation)

Make sure each sentence has one!

1. Use a period at the end of a statement (a sentence that tells something).

Example: Dobermans can be sweet dogs.

2. Use an exclamation mark at the end of a sentence that expresses powerful emotion or strong feeling. You also can use an exclamation mark after an interjection of strong emotion so that the interjection stands all by itself.

Examples: Get out of here!

Wow! I really like that.

3. Use a question mark at the end of an interrogative sentence (a sentence that asks a question).

Example: Will you please get out of here?

Except (*See Accept/Except*)

Exclamation Marks (*See End Marks*)

Extraneous Capital Letters

Make sure that students eliminate them. Some students throw capital letters around in their writing without any rhyme or reason. If any students do this, put a stop to it.

Farther/Further

These two words are sometimes used incorrectly, but it is really very easy to tell the difference between the two and, therefore, an easy mistake to correct. **Farther** talks about physical distance. **Further** talks about everything else.

Examples: Mark can throw a ball **farther** than Jesse can.

We will discuss this **further** after dinner.

Fewer and Less

Few, fewer, and fewest should be used with things that can be counted. Little, less, and least should be used with things that cannot be counted.

Examples: **Fewer** students are interested in literature these days. (You can count students.)

I have **less** interest in Poodles than I do in Dobermans. (You cannot count an abstract concept like interest.)

Finding and Identifying

It is extremely important that students be able to find and identify the following:

1. **Eight parts of speech:** Noun, verb, adjective, adverb, conjunction, interjection, preposition, pronoun. (*See each part of speech under its own heading.*)

2. **Predicates**

Simple — The main verb or the main verb with a helping verb

Complete — the verb and its complements or modifiers (adverbs, adverb phrases)

3. **Subjects**

Simple — the noun or pronoun that does the action

Complete — the noun or pronoun that does the action and its modifiers (adjectives, adjective phrases)

4. **Synonyms for better writing**

Encourage students to use in their writing the vocabulary words of the Caught'yas and to consult a thesaurus when they write.

Footnotes

Today, when a quote is used or referred to in the body of a paper, the trend is to list such a source in the bibliography rather than in footnotes or endnotes (footnotes at the end of a paper). The quote or reference in the text is followed by parentheses containing the author's name and the date of publication. When an author has published two sources within one year, list the title also.

Example: The section on footnotes in Kiester's book says that the trend is not to have footnotes or endnotes in a paper (**Kiester, 1992**).

Fragments

A sentence fragment is an incomplete thought (either lacking in subject or verb) that is used and punctuated incorrectly as a complete sentence. This is an egregious error. Help students overcome this habit. If students write fragments, then they probably don't understand what a subject and verb are. Frame your discussions accordingly.

Examples: A rather chubby dog on the floor. (no verb)

Slept on the floor by her side. (no subject)

Sticking his paws into the air. (no verb or subject)

Friendly Letters (Correct Format)

Sender's address
Sender's city, state zip
Date

Dear Jane,

The bulk of the letter goes here written without skipping lines between paragraphs.

With love,
Sign name here

Further (See Farther and Further)

Gerund

A gerund is a verb form that ends in "ing" and is used as a noun. A gerund can be used in any way that a noun can be used. Sometimes a gerund serves as the simple subject, direct object, or as the object of a preposition.

Examples: **Snorkeling** is my favorite sport. (subject)

I like **snorkeling**. (direct object)

I think of **snorkeling** a lot when I daydream. (object of the preposition)

Gerund Phrases

Depending on your point of view, gerund phrases are either fun or useless to learn. I believe that the understanding and recognizing of them serves no purpose since no placement of commas is involved. One of my colleagues, on the other hand, maintains that gerunds and gerund phrases are fun. She uses art work to teach the concept to her students. She may well be right.

A gerund phrase is a group of words that includes a gerund and other words that complete its meaning. It can be accompanied by an adjective, an adverb, a direct object, or a prepositional phrase.

A gerund phrase functions as a noun in a sentence. The gerund phrase can be a subject or an object.

Examples: **Speaking softly** was one of the rules. (subject)

She made **speaking softly** a requirement in her class. (object)

Good and Well

These two words often are confused.

1. "Good" is an adjective; it tells about the noun that must follow it.

Example: The **good** dog sat at her feet instead of on them. (adjective — tells what kind of dog)

2. "Well" is the adverb that modifies a verb; it often appears at the end of the sentence.

Examples: He did it **well**. (adverb — tells how he did it)

He did **well** on the test. (adverb — tells how he did)

You can, however, "feel good" because "feel" acts as a verb of being and thus "good" is a predicate adjective.

Example: **I feel good** when I pet my cat.

Helping Verbs

These verbs accompany a past or present participle in a sentence. My students and I called them "dead verbs" or "weak verbs." Help students limit them in their writing.

Common helping verbs: am, are, be, is, have, had, had been, has been, have been, was, were, will, and any form of "be" (such as could be, would be, might be, etc.).

Good writing uses strong, active verbs ("screamed" instead of "**was** screaming"). Look at literature!

Sense verbs (look, see, smell, feel, taste) can function as verbs of being or as action verbs.

Example: I **feel** loving today. (verb of being)

The boy **felt** the dog's broken leg. (action verb)

When a sense verb functions as a verb of being, it is often followed by a predicate adjective.

Example: I **feel** bad. (Not "I feel badly" since one would not say "I am badly.")

Homophones

Students need to be able to correctly use the most common ones.

Common homophones: there/their/they're; to/too/two; your/you're; no/know; its/it's; right/rite/write; threw/through; quiet/quit/quite; all ready/already; all together/altogether; hole/whole; pair/pare/pear; whose/who's.

Hyphens

1. Use a hyphen to divide a word at the end of a line. Divide only at syllables. Check a dictionary for syllables.

Example: The two huge dogs ran around the yard, **terrifying** the little girl.

2. Use a hyphen to separate the words in compound numbers from twenty-one to ninety-nine and in fractions that are used as adjectives.

Examples: The teacher had **thirty-five** pupils in the class.

They ate ten and **one-half** pizzas for lunch.

3. Use a hyphen in a compound noun that serves as an adjective. More simply stated, use with two or more words that express one thought and serve as one adjective. To test whether a hyphen is needed, simply see if each word alone makes sense in describing the noun.

Examples: an **up-to-the-minute** report
two **star-crossed** lovers
a very **well-known** man
bell-bottom trousers

4. Use a hyphen after the following prefixes: all-, ex-, self-.

Examples: all-knowing, ex-husband, self-deprecating

5. Use a hyphen to separate any prefix from a word that begins with a capital letter.

Example: **pre-Civil** War

Imperatives

Imperatives are sentences that are orders. The subject is omitted.

Examples: Get off my feet. (The subject of the dog has been left out.)

Do your homework now! (Again, the subject has been omitted.)

Compound imperative sentences do not take a comma because the subjects are not stated.

Example: Get off my feet and go lie down elsewhere.

Independent Clauses

An independent clause is a sentence within a sentence.

Example: **She petted the dog**, and **she kissed the cat**.

Indirect and Direct Objects (*See* Direct and Indirect Objects)

Indirect Quote

An indirect quote is really a reference to a direct quote. The use of the word “that” turns a direct quote into an indirect one. In an indirect quote, no quotation marks are necessary because a direct quote is being paraphrased. No comma is necessary either.

Examples: The student said **that she was hot**.

He told me **that he had a lot of homework to do**.

We shouted to her **that we didn’t want to walk the dogs**.

Infinitive

An infinitive is formed from the word “to” together with the basic form of a verb.

Examples: to go, to snore, to eat, to type

Do not split an infinitive with the adverb as in the introduction to the television show *Star Trek*.

Example of what to avoid: “. . . **to** boldly **go** where no man has gone before.” (*Star Trek*)

Correction: “. . . **to go** boldly where no man has gone before.”

You might want to explain the use of “to” as a part of a verb. Most students think it functions only as a preposition.

Infinitive Phrase

This is an infinitive and the words that complete the meaning. An infinitive phrase can serve as a noun, an adjective, or an adverb.

Examples:

Noun — **To teach grammar** is sometimes fun. (noun, subject)

Most students hate **to study grammar**. (object)

The goal of my first book was **to make grammar fun**. (predicate noun)

Adjective — It is now time **to learn your grammar**.

Adverb — The dog turned around six times **to get ready for his nap**.

Intensifiers

An intensifier is an adverb that tells to what extent an adjective or another adverb is true. The most common intensifiers are “very” and “extremely.”

Examples: an **extremely** angry (adjective) cat

a **very** placid (adjective) dog

The cat wanted to sit on his mistress’s lap **very** badly. (adverb)

She spoke **extremely** softly (adverb) because she was afraid to awaken the cat.

Interjection

An interjection is a word or group of words that expresses feeling (anger, surprise, happiness, pain, relief, grief).

Common interjections: ah, aha, awesome, bam, boom, bravo, good grief, goodness, hey, hooray, hurrah, oh, oh boy, oh dear, oh my, oh yes/no, okay, ouch, ow, phew, pow, shhh, ugh, uh-oh, well, whee, whoopee, whoops, wow.

Interjections that are at the beginning of the sentence can be followed either by a comma or by an exclamation mark. If an interjection is followed by an exclamation mark, the next word must begin with a capital letter.

Examples: **Well**, what are you doing there?

Okay, let’s finish going over your homework.

Wow! Those dogs are big.

Interrupted Quote (*See Continued Quote*)

Interrupters

An interrupter is any word, expression or phrase that interrupts the flow of a sentence. These can be appositives, direct addresses, parenthetical expressions, or any word, phrase, or clause that breaks the flow of a sentence.

Examples: The dog, **however**, refused to get off her foot.

The dog, **I think**, is stubborn.

The black and white cat, **by the way**, is obstreperous.

She loved her only cat, **Skeeter**, very much.

Intransitive Verbs

An intransitive verb never has a direct object. In a sentence where the verb is intransitive, the subject does the acting and does not do anything to anything or anyone else.

Examples: Dogs **bark**.

The teacher **sits** in the chair.

The class **sleeps** during long messages on the loud speaker.

The class **risers** with respect (dream on, fellow teachers) when the teacher enters the room.

The dog **lies** on the floor.

Introductory Words and Phrases

These are simply words and phrases that begin a sentence. The comma after some of these is hotly debated. Using commas makes sentences easier to understand because they signal a separation or a pause between parts. It sounds better to put a comma after an adverb that comes at the beginning of a sentence if that adverb has to do with time. It also helps clarify a sentence if one puts a comma after an introductory prepositional phrase that acts as an adverb and refers to time that has passed in some way.

1. **Adverb** (one-word adverbs): We commonly use a one-word adverb that indicates when the action (the verb) took place. Put a comma after it if you hear a pause when the sentence is spoken aloud.

Examples: **Meanwhile**, the dog's stomach growled.

Tomorrow, she will be fed again.

2. **Adverbial clauses** (subordinate clauses): A comma is needed after an adverbial clause that introduces a sentence.

Example: **After I feed the chubby Rottweiler**, I will feed the rotund Doberman.

3. **Participial phrases**: A comma is needed after a participial phrase that comes at the beginning of a sentence.

Example: **Traveling away from the city**, you can tour some of the beautiful antebellum homes in the country.

4. **Prepositional phrases**: The comma after these, too, is debatable. Many old-fashioned people, like my mother and I, put a comma after a longish prepositional phrase that comes at the beginning of a sentence, particularly if the phrase refers to time. This also can be called an "adverbial phrase."

Examples: **In about two weeks**, she will need to get her shots.

For a very long time, he will be able to exist on the food on the shelves.

A comma is needed after two or more prepositional phrases that follow each other at the beginning of a sentence.

Examples: **At the end of the day**, the fat dog tries to curl up on her "blankey" to go to sleep.

In one hour in the kitchen, the hungry dog will receive a dog biscuit.

In the fall of 1992, a presidential election was held in this country.

5. **Words**: A comma is needed to show a pause after an introductory word. The most common introductory words are "yes" and "no."

Examples: **Yes**, it is necessary to have a comma after introductory words.

No, many dogs do not receive five dog biscuits a day.

Irregular Verb Forms

Instead of forcing students to memorize a list which somehow never transfers to their writing, I taught each verb as it came up in students' writing. This makes it real to them. They know they made a mistake in a verb and are more receptive to learning the forms of that verb. Plus, overkill (there are so many irregular verbs) only confuses students.

Verbs to stress in Caught'yas: be, do, have, lay, lie, raise, rise, see, set, sit. If you want to teach a unit on irregular verbs, any traditional grammar book will have a complete list for you.

Lay/Lie

Few adults use these verbs correctly. Think about the trouble students must have with them!

1. **Lay**: **Lay**, used in the present tense, always has an object, and **laid**, in the past tense always has an object. You lay something on the table. You can't "lay" yourself on the table. That would be awkward as well as ungrammatical.

Principal parts of "lay":

lay (present)

laid (past)

laid (past participle)

Examples: The dog **lay** his head in his owner's lap. (present)

The dog **laid** his head on the rug yesterday. (past)

The dog always **has laid** its bone beside its bed. (past participle)

2. **Lie:** Lie means to recline. Lie never takes a direct object. You lie on a bed, but you can never “lie” something on that bed. The confusion **lies** when the past tense of **lie** is used; **lay** used as the past tense of **lie** does not take a direct object.

Principal parts of “lie”:

lie (present)

lay (past)

lain (past participle)

Examples: The dog **lies** on the floor today. (present)

The dog **lay** on the floor yesterday. (past)

The dog **is lying** on the floor right now. (present participle)

The dog **has lain** on the floor every day of its life. (past participle)

Less and Fewer (*See Fewer and Less*)

Metaphors

A metaphor is a comparison of two unlike things without using “like” or “as.”

Example: The tree **is a ballerina in green.**

Use metaphors in *Caught’yas*. Have your students write a “Metaphor Paper.” (*See Chapter 5 in Caught’ya Again!*) Encourage students to write metaphors. They make for beautiful writing. Emily Dickinson used metaphors in almost every poem. Metaphors are a wonderful tool to make writing more sophisticated.

Modifiers and Misplaced Modifiers

1. **Modifiers:** A modifier is simply another word for an adjective. A modifier may be classified as non-restrictive (non-essential) or restrictive (essential). A modifier can be a word, a phrase, or a clause.

An adjective, adjective phrase, or adjective clause is non-restrictive/non-essential when it is not necessary to the meaning of the sentence. The clause gives additional information. Use commas to set off non-restrictive modifiers.

Example: Dino, **who has floppy ears**, won a prize in obedience class. (The name of the dog has been identified, and it is not necessary to add more information about him.)

An adjective, adjective phrase, or adjective clause is restrictive/essential when it is necessary to the meaning of the sentence. Do not set off a restrictive modifier with commas.

Example: The dog **who won a prize in obedience class** has floppy ears. (This information is necessary since there are millions of dogs in the world.)

2. **Misplaced modifiers:** These are simply adjective phrases or clauses that are in the wrong place in a sentence so that they seem to modify the wrong noun. When you use modifiers in sentences, make sure that they are properly placed. The general rule to follow is this: place modifiers as close as possible to the sentence parts they modify.

Examples: The lady watched her dog **driving down the road.** (The dog is not driving down the road; the lady is.)

Corrected sentence: Driving down the road, the lady watched her dog.

After purchasing a skirt, her money was all gone. (The clause “her money was all gone” does not tell more about the skirt. It tells about the **person** “her” refers to and therefore should not come immediately after “skirt.”)

Corrected sentence: **After purchasing a skirt**, she had no more money.

Negatives

A negative is a word that expresses the lack of something.

Common negatives: no, not, neither, never, nobody, none, no one, nothing, nowhere, barely, scarcely, hardly.

All you need to stress about negatives is the importance of avoiding the use of two negatives in the same sentence like “don’t got no” or “don’t have nobody.” There should be only *one* negative word per sentence unless you are using the correlative conjunction “neither . . . nor.”

Only one negative word is necessary to convey the meaning. There are two ways to correct a sentence with a double negative.

Example: The telephone **isn’t no** new instrument.

Corrected sentence: The telephone is **no** new instrument. Or, The telephone is **not** a new instrument.

Noun

A noun is a person, a place, a thing, or an idea. It is important for students to recognize this part of speech and its function as a subject or object. Teach the difference between common and proper nouns.

Common nouns are terms for persons, places, things, or ideas.

Proper nouns are the names of particular persons, places, or things.

Examples:

Common nouns — girl, school, city

Proper nouns — Jane, Westwood School, Gainesville

Nouns have several functions in a sentence.

Subject — the person, place, or thing doing the action

Example: The **dog** yawned.

Direct object — the person, place, or thing who receives the action

Example: She stroked the **cat**.

Object of preposition — the person, place, or thing affected by the preposition

Example: He gave the bone to the **dog**.

Indirect object — the person, place, or thing for whom or to whom the action is done

Example: She gave the **dog** a big bone. (“to” is implied)

Noun Clause

A noun clause is a subordinate clause which is used as a noun. It can be used as a subject, direct object, indirect object, predicate noun, or object of a preposition in a sentence.

Noun clauses usually begin with the following words: how, if, that, what, whatever, where, when, wherever, whether, which, whichever, who, whom, whoever, whomever, why.

Noun clauses take the place of a noun anywhere in a sentence that a noun can be used (subject, direct or indirect object, object of a preposition, predicate noun).

Examples:

Subject — **What the dog intended** was obvious.

Direct object — I still don’t know **why he did it**.

Indirect object — Please give **whichever dog comes up to you** a pat under the chin.

Object of preposition — She tells her stories **to whoever will listen**.

Predicate noun — That is not **what the dog** intended to do.

Noun Markers

This is the term for the three demonstrative adjectives “a,” “an,” and “the.” When I introduced these to the students, I first made my hand into a trumpet, said “Toot-te-toot,” and then announced, “Noun coming!!!!!!” Students quickly got the idea, and we moved on to other things. Young students especially loved the drama of the hand trumpet and seemed to remember these three little words when they were presented in this fashion.

Example: The lady gave **an** old bone to **a** hungry dog.

Use “a” before a word that begins with a consonant and “an” before a word that begins with a vowel. These demonstrative adjectives are also called “articles.” (See *Articles* for more information and the rule about “h.”)

Objects

There are two kinds of objects, direct and indirect. Objects are nouns, noun clauses, or noun phrases that receive the action of the verb either directly or indirectly. They answer the following questions:

1. Whom? (direct object)
2. What? (direct object)
3. To or for whom? (indirect object)
4. To or for what? (indirect object)

(See *Direct and Indirect Objects* for further information about objects and for examples.)

Paragraphs

Discuss the need for a paragraph each time you do a Caught’ya. Correct paragraphing can be learned only through constant practice. While various writers may disagree as to the exact placement of a paragraph, there are some general rules.

1. In general, a new paragraph is needed if there has been a lapse of time, a change of subject, or a change of place. A paragraph is supposed to be about one basic idea. It needs a topic sentence and a concluding sentence (unless it is a quotation).
2. Use a new paragraph in conversations each time a new person speaks. This seems like such a simple thing to grasp, but students have a hard time learning it.

Example:

“Get out of here, you beastly dog!” cried the lady to the big brown Doberman cowering in the kitchen.

“You’re messing up my floor!”

“Rowrf, Rowrf!” barked back the dog as it slinked sheepishly away.

“Oh, come back here, you poor thing,” called the lady. “I’m sorry I yelled at you.”

“Rowrf!”

“I like you, too,” said the lady.

Parallel Construction

Parallel structure is the use of similar grammatical constructions. Similar forms of phrases, words, and clauses are used for items that are alike in a sentence.

Parallel construction means that if you begin with a word or a certain part of speech, you have to continue it if you have a series. It can, however, be implied, as in a series of infinitives.

Examples: The big Doberman likes **bananas, tomatoes, and broccoli**. (words — these are all nouns)

The two dogs liked **sleeping and eating**. (words — gerunds)

The chubby Rottweiler went **to her bowl, to her water dish, and then to her bed**. (phrases — prepositional)

She felt **that she was unloved** and **that she was unwanted** because there was no food in her bowl. (clauses)

He likes **to eat**, (to) **sleep**, and (to) **play**. (infinitives)

Parentheses

(As you may have noticed, I abuse these.)

Parentheses enclose information that isn't vital to the meaning of a sentence, but that is nevertheless important to include. Parentheses also can contain information that some of the readers of the sentence already know.

Examples: The author of this book (Jane Kiester) has a thing about animals.

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) is her favorite poet.

Frequent use of parentheses is not desirable. (Do as I say, not as I do.)

Parenthetical Expressions

Parenthetical expressions are phrases that are thrown into sentences as asides to the reader. They are not necessary to the meaning of the sentence and often interrupt a sentence's flow. Parenthetical expressions also are called interrupters.

Common parenthetical expressions: of course, however, for example, on the contrary, on the other hand, I suppose, in fact, by the way, in my opinion, to tell the truth, nevertheless, I believe, I think, etc.

Parenthetical expressions always are set off by commas no matter where they occur in a sentence.

Examples: The dog, **in fact**, was too chubby for her collar.

To tell the truth, two faithful dogs are a handful.

The cat, **however**, is quite a dapper fellow.

Cats are smarter than dogs, **of course**.

Participial Phrases (also called Participle Phrases)

These are groups of words that have the "ing," the "ed," or the special past form of the verb in them. In other words, they are phrases that contain a participle and its complement and modifiers. Participial phrases can come before or after the word that they modify and can give more information about a noun or an adjective. The participle will be present or past.

1. A **present participle** is the "ing" form of a verb. It can be used as an adjective by itself or in a participial or gerund phrase.

Examples: The **snoring** (adjective) **dog sleeping on the floor** (participial phrase) is the gentlest of animals.

Cramming before a test is a poor practice. (gerund phrase)

2. A **past participle** is the past tense form of a verb which usually ends in "ed." It can be used with a helping verb or as an adjective or in a participial phrase.

Examples: The chef served the fish **fried in butter**.

That **trained** (adjective) dog who didn't learn anything has barked all morning long.

Participial phrases act as adjectives.

Examples: **Rapidly gaining confidence**, the new teacher taught about participial phrases. (more about "teacher")

The new teacher, **feeling more sure of herself**, taught about participial phrases.

If the participial phrase begins the sentence or comes in the middle of the sentence, it usually is set off by commas. If, however, it is at the end of the sentence, it requires no comma.

Examples: **Groaning softly**, the dog kicked out in his sleep.

The dog, **groaning softly**, kicked out in his sleep.

She spied a dog **groaning softly in its sleep**.

Participle

A participle is just a fancy name for a verb form that is used as an adjective. It can be the present participial form of the verb ("-ing") or the past participial form of the verb (usually "-ed").

Examples: The **sleeping** dog blocked the doorway. (present)

A **trained** dog supposedly obeys better than an **untrained** one. (past)

(See *Participial Phrases and Dangling Participle*)

Parts of Speech

The eight parts of speech are the eight functional categories into which we can divide words. It is important that students learn the eight parts of speech to have a frame of reference and to have a way to understand the finer points of grammar.

The eight parts of speech: adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, verbs, interjections, nouns, prepositions, pronouns.

I liked to use the mnemonic device **NIPPAVAC** to teach them to my students.

Passive Voice (See *Active vs. Passive Verb Voices*)

Periods (See *End Marks*)

Plural

A plural is more than one of a noun. In the Caught'yas I covered the common mistakes students make. This is

another skill that should be taught individually. When one of your students makes a mistake with the plural of a word, include that word or a similar word in a Caught'ya and teach it.

Basic plural rules.

1. Add "s" to most singular nouns.

Examples: dog-dogs; piano-pianos; monkey-monkeys; cat-cats

2. Add "es" to singular nouns that end in ss, x, ch, sh, or z.

Examples: church-churches; mix-mixes; glass-glasses; buzz-buzzes; wish-wishes

3. Most nouns that end in "o" add "s" in their plural form, but a few that end in "o" and are preceded by a consonant form their plurals with "es." Some can end in either one.

Examples: tomato-tomatoes; potato-potatoes; BUT hero-heros or heroes

4. Change singular nouns that end in a consonant and a "y" to plural by changing the "y" to an "i" and adding "es." This rule does not apply to proper nouns that end in a consonant and a "y."

Examples: party-parties; baby-babies; BUT Mary-Marys

5. To form the plural of some nouns that end in "f" or "fe," change the "f" to a "v" and add "es."

Examples: calf-calves; knife-knives

6. To form the plural of any proper name, no matter what the end letters, add "s."

Examples: Brady-Bradys; Finch-Finchs

7. There are so many exceptions to these rules that it boggles the mind. If you want a complete list, see a traditional grammar text. Few people can memorize a list one day and then apply it to their writing a month later. Plurals are best taught on the spur of the moment, at the time they are written incorrectly.

Examples: foot-feet; mouse-mice; deer-deer; child-children

Plurals vs. Possessives

For some reason, this is a skill many students find beyond them. No general explanations seem to clear up this problem. Only specific focuses help. I told my students who put apostrophes on plural nouns to eliminate every apostrophe in their writing for a month. We then slowly put them back in possessives and in conjunctions. This worked better than anything else I had tried. I also kept plugging away in the Caught'yas by frequently inserting apostrophes correctly and incorrectly in the sentence that was put on the board. This forced students to think each time, "Does that apostrophe belong there? Is the word plural or possessive?" This way, students eventually got the hang of it.

Possessive Nouns

A possessive noun is a noun (a person, place, or thing) that shows ownership of something. Ownership is shown by the use of an apostrophe.

Examples: the dog's bone, the dogs' bones

The rules of possessive nouns are quite simple for something that gives students such anguish.

1. **Singular possessive nouns:** Add "'s" to any singular possessive noun no matter what letter ends it.

Examples: glass's, dog's, cat's, box's, church's, calf's, child's

2. **Plural possessive nouns:** Add an **apostrophe** to all plural possessive nouns that end in "s."

Examples: glasses', dogs', cats', boxes', churches', calves'

Add "'s" to any plural noun that does not end in "s."

Examples: children's, men's, mice's

Predicate

A predicate is the verb in a sentence and all the words that modify it.

Example: The black and white cat **sat on his mistress's lap.**

Preposition

A preposition is a little word that, with its object, acts either as an adjective or as an adverb in a sentence.

Examples: in the doghouse, on the roof, under the bed

List of prepositions: aboard, about, above, across, after, against, along, among, around, at, before, behind, below, beneath, between, beyond, by, down, during, except, for, from, in, into, like, of, off, on, onto, over, past, since, through, throughout, to, toward, under, underneath, until, up, upon, with, within, without.

Students should memorize the basic list for quick reference. Repeated daily in class, these prepositions are learned in about three weeks. Teach the prepositions early in the year, write poems where every line has to begin with a different preposition, and refer to them often. Once students have memorized the prepositions, they can begin to use them more effectively and capitalize them (or not) correctly in titles.

Do not end a sentence with a preposition. It is uncouth! Do not capitalize a preposition in a title unless it is the first word of that title.

Prepositional Phrases

A prepositional phrase is a preposition and a noun or pronoun plus the adjectives that modify it. It is a group of words that functions as a single word. Prepositional phrases can serve as adjectives to modify a noun or as adverbs to modify a verb.

Examples: I gave a bone **to the dog.** (adverb)

The dog **with the floppy ears** ate the bone. (adjective)

An adjective phrase usually follows the word it modifies.

Example: The dog **on the right** is snoring.

An adverb phrase, like adverbs, may shift position.

Examples: **In the middle**, lies the cat.

The cat lies **in the middle**.

Pronouns

Pronouns are words that take the place of nouns and cause much trouble. They are hateful but necessary. If you think these are bad, try teaching French pronouns!

Especially stress the difference between subject and object pronouns.

Subject pronouns: I, you, he, she, it, we, they

Object pronouns: me, you, him, her, it, us, them.

Include in many Caught'ya's "My friend and I did something." and "Someone did something to my friend and me."

Students experience much difficulty differentiating subject and object pronouns. They misuse them because they hear them misused all the time in common speech. Model the correct use as often as you can.

Examples of common errors: My friend and **me** went . . .

It is **me**.

She is better than **me**.

Correct examples: My friend and **I** went . . . ("I" is the subject of "went.")

It is **I**. (Implied here is "It is I who does something." "I" is a subject.)

She is better than **I** . . . (Again, something is implied. The word "am" has been left out. "I" is the subject of "am.")

Teach the correct use of the different kinds of pronouns. It is not the name of each that is important; it is recognizing the differences among them.

1. **Personal pronouns:** These are the subject and object pronouns listed above.
2. **Possessive pronouns:** These are pronouns that show ownership of something.

Singular possessive pronouns: my, mine, your, yours, his, her, hers, its

Plural possessive pronouns: our, ours, your, yours, their, theirs

3. **Interrogative pronouns:** These pronouns ask questions: Why? What? Which? Who? Whom?
4. **Demonstrative pronouns:** These pronouns point out people, places, or things and highlight them: this, that, these, those.

5. **Indefinite pronouns:** These are pronouns that refer to a person or a thing that is not identified. Some indefinite pronouns are singular. Some are plural. Some can act either way.

Singular: another, anybody, anyone, anything, each, either, everybody, everyone, everything, neither, nobody, no one, none, nothing, other, one, somebody, someone, something

Plural: both, few, many, ones, others, several

Either: all, any, most, some

It is important to teach agreement with indefinite pronouns. Many students find it difficult to make a verb or another pronoun agree with the indefinite pronoun.

6. **Reflexive and intensive pronouns:** These usually end in "self" or "selves" and refer to the subject of the sentence. For your trivia information of the day, you need to know that reflexive pronouns are necessary to the meaning of a sentence and cannot be left out. Intensive pronouns, on the other hand, are not necessary and can be left out without hurting the meaning of a sentence.

Examples: The teacher knows **herself** very well. (reflexive)

The teacher **herself** washed the blackboard. (intensive)

7. **Relative pronouns:** These are the pronouns that modify a noun: who, which, that.

There are two big problems with pronouns — using the correct one and making the rest of the sentence agree with it.

Punctuation

Each kind of punctuation is listed under its own heading.

Question Marks (See End Marks)

Quotation Marks (In Uses Other Than Conversation)

Use quotation marks around words referred to or letters referred to in the context of a sentence. Use them also with words that are meant tongue-in-cheek.

Periods and commas always go inside quotation marks.

Examples: If you wish to make plural the word "party," take off the "y" and add "ies."

He loves the poem "Mother to Son."

The corpulent Rottweiler has been nicknamed "Miss Tub."

Exclamation marks and question marks go outside the quotation marks unless they are part of the words in quotation marks.

Examples: She got an "A"!

Did he give an extra bone to “Miss Tub”?

Quotations can be avoided with the use of the word “that.” Instead of quotation marks, refer to what has been said with the word “that.” (See *Indirect Quote for more information*.)

Examples: She said that she was hungry and needed refreshments.

Despite her pleas, I told her that she was too chubby to get any more ice cream.

(See *Dialogues, Comma Rules, Indirect Quote, and Titles*)

Raise/Rise

These are two more verbs that confuse students. Again, as in “lie” and “lay” and “sit” and “set,” one takes an object and the other does not.

1. Raise means “to lift or to grow.” It requires an object that has to be “raised.”

Example: The cat **raised** his tail and stormed off when no food was offered.

2. Rise means “to get up.” It does not take an object.

Example: All students **rise** with a bow of respect when their English teacher enters the room.

Run-Ons

A run-on is a sentence that contains more than one thought. It goes on and on.

1. Sometimes run-on sentences simply lack punctuation.

Example: The dog lay on the floor she snored loudly.

Corrected: The dog lay on the floor. She snored loudly.

2. Sometimes run-on sentences are a group of sentences joined by coordinating conjunctions into one very long sentence.

Example: She lay on the floor, and she snored, but she didn’t groan, and she wiggled her ears.

Corrected: She lay on the floor. She snored, but she didn’t groan. She wiggled her ears.

Help your students avoid run-ons.

Semicolons

A semicolon is a punctuation mark (;) that is used to separate parts of a sentence.

1. Use semicolons in compound sentences instead of using a conjunction and a comma.

Example: The black cat nuzzled the big dog; it is either very friendly or very stupid.

2. Use semicolons in lists where the use of a lot of commas makes meaning difficult.

Example: Learn the meanings of these homophones: there, their, they’re; to, too, two; your, you’re; no, know; and hear, here.

3. Use a semicolon to join two independent clauses (two sentences within a sentence) when the second clause begins with however, nevertheless, consequently, besides, therefore, moreover, or furthermore.

Example: The Rottweiler may lick faces; however, she is charming.

4. To avoid confusion, use a semicolon to separate two independent clauses that have many commas within one or both of them.

Example: My Rottweiler likes to eat tomatoes, broccoli, and cucumbers; my Doberman likes to eat fruit, dog food, and cookies.

Set/Sit

These are two more verbs that students often use incorrectly.

1. Set means to put down. Set always takes an object. You set the sleeping cat in the chair or the milk on the table, but you never set yourself down anywhere. Tell students to think about it. You can’t put your hands under your feet and lift your entire body up and set it down on something.

Example: The dumb Doberman **set** his bone down on the floor, and the chubby Rottweiler grabbed it from under his nose.

2. Sit means to place yourself in a seated position. Sit does not take an object. You sit down, but you never sit something down.

Example: The stupid dog always **sits** on its owner’s foot.

Similes

A simile compares two unlike things and uses “like” or “as” in the comparison.

Examples: The cat sprawled on the rug **like a furry throw pillow**.

The leaves, **as agile as ballerinas**, seemed to dance in the wind.

Encourage students to use similes. I have included a plethora of them in the Caught’yas so that students can learn to recognize and use them. Point them out to students. Practice orally coming up with other similes.

Simple Sentence

A simple sentence is a sentence with one subject and one predicate. In a simple sentence, the subject and/or the verb can be more than one thing, as in a compound subject or a compound predicate, but only one idea is expressed.

Examples: The wimpy **Rottweiler sat** on her owner’s foot.

The wimpy **Rottweiler** and the brown **Doberman sat** by their owner's feet and **gazed** adoringly into their mistress's eyes. (Two subjects and two verbs, but it is still a simple sentence.)

Since (*See Because and Since*)

Spelling Errors (the Most Common)

1. All words with "ie" or "ei"

Examples: thief, relief, believe, weird, neighbor, receive

2. Plurals of nouns that end in "y"

Examples: parties, monkeys, babies

3. "A lot" (students write as one word)

Some teachers forbid the use of this in their classrooms. I agree. There are always ways to avoid the use of "a lot."

4. Doubling consonants in words that end in consonant/vowel/consonant plus a suffix that begins with a vowel (like "ed").

Examples: dropped, stopped, petted

5. Any grammar or spelling book will have a long list of commonly misspelled words, but very few people can memorize a long list of words and then remember the spelling of those words when they use them in their writing at a later date. It is better to attack these misspelled words as they appear in students' writings.

Spelling Rules

There are too many spelling rules and exceptions to the spelling rules to list here. See any standard spelling book for a discussion of this subject. The most common ones have been listed by the individual Caught'yas in which they appear.

Strong Verbs

These are verbs that are not helping verbs or sense verbs. They show rather than tell what is going on in a sentence. Use of these verbs fosters better writing. You will find the use of strong verbs in literature. There is even a language called E-Prime that is English minus the verb "to be." Try speaking or writing in E-Prime. The results are amazing, and the verb "to be" is only one of the "telling" verbs.

Examples: The dog **stretched** and **rolled** his big brown eyes at me.

He **ambled** to the door and **peaked** outside.

Dead verbs to avoid: to be — be, am, is, are, was, were; to have — has, have, had; become, became.

Sense verbs: sees, looks, feels, sounds, smells.

Any verb ending in "ing" is not a strong verb.

Subjects

A subject is the noun that performs the action in a sentence and everything that modifies it.

Example: The big black **cat** and his **mistress** like to snooze late on Saturday mornings.

Subject-Verb Agreement

Subject-verb agreement is very important to the coherence of a sentence. The subject of a sentence must agree as to whether it is singular or plural with the verb of the sentence.

If the subject is singular, then the verb should be singular. If the subject is plural, the verb should be plural.

Examples: **He think** he is right. (incorrect)

We goes to the circus every year. (incorrect)

Corrected examples: **He thinks** he is right.

We go to the circus every year.

Subordinate Clauses

1. A subordinate clause is a part of a sentence that has a subject and a verb but cannot stand on its own to express a complete thought. A subordinate clause begins with a subordinating conjunction — a conjunction that makes the clause not a complete sentence. (*See Subordinating Conjunctions for a complete list of them.*)

Examples: **When the teacher was funny**, the students laughed. ("The teacher was funny" is a complete sentence with a subject and a verb. If you add the subordinating conjunction "when," it can no longer stand on its own, and it needs the addition of an independent clause to form a complete sentence.)

While we sit here, I shall tell you my story.

I shall tell you my story **while we sit here**.

2. Subordinate clauses serve in a sentence as adverbs or adjectives. Subordinate clauses that are adverbs (adverb clauses) tell more about the verb and describe one of the following about a verb: when it happened, where it happened, how it happened, how often it happened, why it happened.

Examples: See Adverb Clauses.

3. Subordinate clauses that are adjectives (adjective clauses) tell more about a noun and describe one of the following about it: which one, what kind, how many.

Examples: See Adjective Clauses.

4. Punctuation of subordinate clauses is easy. Put a comma at the end of the clause if the clause begins the sentence. Do not put any commas if the clause does not begin the sentence.

Examples: **If you pet the dog**, you will get hairs on your suit.

You will get hairs on your suit **if you pet the dog**.

Subordinating Conjunctions

These are words that make something that was a complete sentence into an incomplete sentence. Subordinating conjunctions begin subordinate clauses (see above).

Example: **After** the cat fell asleep, he twitched his whiskers.

Common subordinating conjunctions: after, although, as, as if, as long as, as soon as, as though, because, before, even though, how, if, in order that, provided that, since, so that, than, till, unless, until, when, whenever, where, whereas, wherever, while. (See Conjunctions for a teaching suggestion.)

Summarizing

To summarize something you write a condensed version of it. This is a skill that is necessary in almost any job. A repair man has to summarize each house call. A doctor has to summarize each patient's problems, and so on. It is a skill that is easily practiced with the Caught'ya's. (See #9 of the General Writing Ideas in Chapter 5 of *Caught'ya Again!* for ideas to teach summarization skills.)

That

"That" is a relative or a demonstrative pronoun (depending on how it is used). Use "that" in an indirect quote to avoid the use of quotation marks.

Example: She said **that** she was going to feed the dogs.

Do not use "that" as a substitute for "who" or "whom." "That" refers to an object or a thing. "Who" and "whom" refer to people. This is an extremely common mistake.

Example: She is the one **whom** (not "that") I love.

Is feeding two hungry dogs **that** complicated?

She gave the dog the bone **that** seemed the biggest.

Titles

1. Underline titles of long works — books, magazines, newspapers, plays, movies, paintings, and long musical works.
2. Put quotation marks around short works — short stories, poems, chapters of books, magazine articles, and songs. It also is important to recall that if a comma or a period follows the quoted work, it must be placed inside the quotation mark. If a question mark or an exclamation point is not a part of the cited work, then the question mark or the exclamation point goes outside the quotation mark.

Examples: Although she read the article "Sentence Diagramming," she still didn't understand the concept.

She read the article "Sentence Diagramming."

Did she read the article "Sentence Diagramming"?

3. Do not capitalize prepositions, noun markers, or conjunctions in a title unless they are the first word of the title.

Example: The (noun marker) Dog under (preposition) a (noun marker) Human Roof and (conjunction) the (noun marker) Cat on (preposition) the (noun marker) Lap

The Dog under a Human Roof and the Cat on the Lap

Transitive Verbs

A transitive verb takes a direct object. In other words, it always has to do something to something or someone.

Example: The dog **lay** his **head** on the carpet today.

The cat **set** his **paw** on the table before attacking the plate.

The dog **raised** his **paw** for inspection.

Verb Tense Shift in a Story

Make sure that students stick to the same tense they begin with in any story or paragraph they write. If a story starts in the present tense, it should remain in the present tense. If it begins in the past tense, it should continue in the past tense.

To practice this skill, I frequently have changed the verb tense in the Caught'ya sentences. All of the stories have been told in the past tense, so I sometimes put the verb in the present tense. In the margin I warn the teacher to make sure that the students practice correcting "verb tense shift."

Verbs

For lists of verbs and appropriate forms of regular and irregular verbs, please refer to a traditional grammar text. Otherwise, just correct students as they make the mistakes in their writing. The latter is more effective.

Try to keep students from splitting helping verbs and the participles that follow.

Example: The cat also **has lain** on the carpet all day. (Not "**has** also **lain**")

While splitting helping verbs and the participles that follow is sometimes unavoidable, it is not correct English. Although more rigid grammarians disagree with me on this point, many of my colleagues and I believe that if avoiding the split creates an awkward sentence, the rule should be ignored.

Well (See *Good and Well*)

Who, Whoever, Whom, Whomever

These are relative or interrogative pronouns that are used to refer to people. These four pronouns are so misused in general parlance that to some students the correct form sounds incorrect! Simply correct students every time you hear an error in the use of these four pronouns. You may be making verbal corrections until

students feel “grammatically abused,” but the more students hear the correct way to use these pronouns, the more they will use them correctly.

Here’s a general rule of thumb that works about ninety-five percent of the time. I tell my students to use “who” and “whoever” if the word after it is a verb. If the word is not a verb but a pronoun or a noun, then they must use “whom” or “whomever.”

Another rule that often works even better is to substitute “he” or “she” for “who” and to substitute “him” or “her” for “whom” and see if it makes sense. These rules fail when you have one of those weird sentences or phrases that can be turned around like “Who I am” or when you have something else like “I think” between the subject and the verb. (She is the one who **I think** did it.)

1. **Who and whoever:** Used as interrogative pronouns, “who” and “whoever” are the subject of a simple or compound sentence. They should be followed by a verb, the thing that “who” does. Tell students, if they are in doubt, to try substituting “he” or “she” for “who” to see if it makes sense.

Examples: **Who is** that?

Who is sitting on my foot?

All right, **who ate** the dog food?

Whoever broke into the bag and ate the dog food is in big trouble.

Whoever is sitting on my foot had better get off.

Used as a relative pronoun, “who” and “whoever” may be the subject or the predicate noun of a clause.

Examples: **Whoever finishes first** will get extra ice cream for dessert. (subject)

We shall serve **whoever arrives first**. (predicate)

2. **Whom and whomever:** Whom and whomever are relative pronouns that serve as objects of sentences or clauses. They can be direct objects of a verb, indirect objects, or objects of a preposition. Tell students to try substituting “him” or “her” for “whom” to see if it sounds correct.

Examples: He is the one **whom** I love. (object of verb)

With **whom** did you go out last night? (object of preposition)

I will pick the one **whom** I want. (object of verb)

For **whom** does the lady buy diet dog food? (object of preposition)

I will give a dog biscuit to **whomever** I please.

3. **That:** Do not use “that” instead of “who” or “whom.” “That” refers to objects or things. “Who” and “whom” refer to people.

Examples: (See That)

To reinforce the correct use of “who” and “whom,” I told students that I would give them one point extra credit (three of them erase a zero in my grade book) if they caught someone at home making a “who/whom” error. Students wrote down the offending sentence, coerced the person into adding a note that he/she did, in fact, make the error, and brought the paper to me. At first I was afraid that I would have angry parents, but it turned out that I received only positive phone calls from grateful parents who were delighted to see their children taking an interest in correct English grammar.