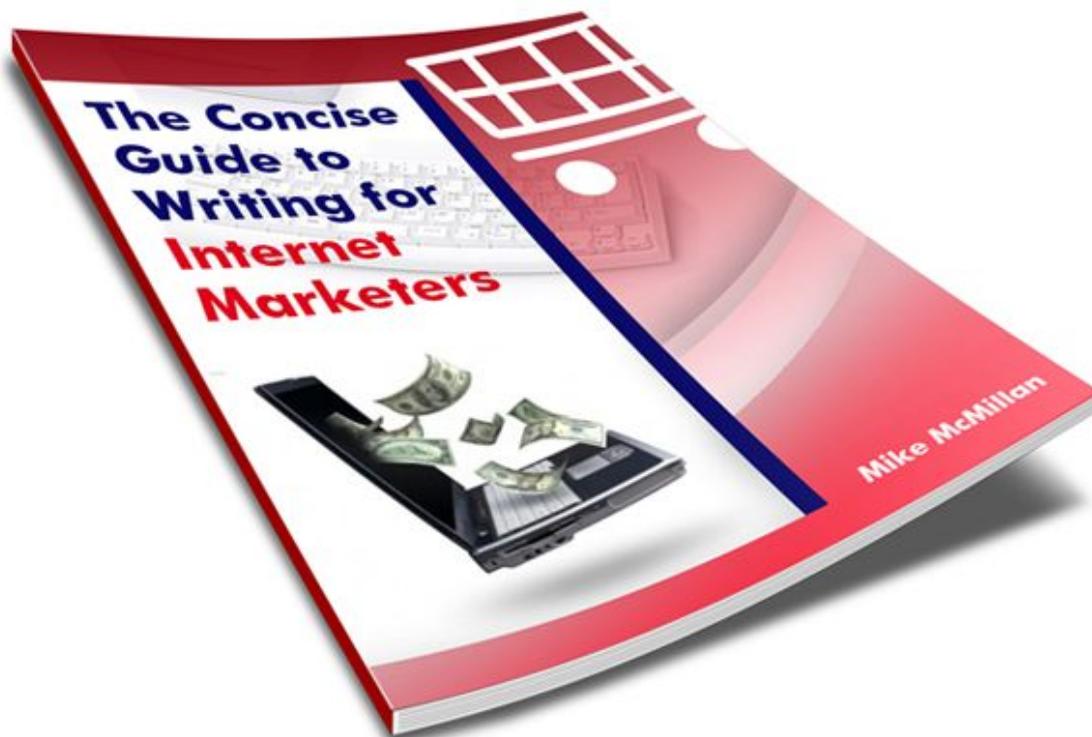


Mike McMillan's

Concise Guide To Writing For Internet Marketers

*A ready resource for bloggers, site owners,
forum posters, and ebook authors.*



Language is the antecedent to knowledge. A fundamental understanding of the rules of language is one of the most valuable assets a good writer possesses. Learn to use the written word properly and your readers will appreciate your efforts.

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Introduction

You should probably know I am a former inner-city teacher. I taught for 14 years, so I guess I still have a little bit of the teacher thing in me. And that's not all bad, but I'll try to remember I'm not lecturing you--I'm just sharing some things that get under my skin when I go through web sites, blogs, forums and ebooks.

This booklet actually got its start over 20 years ago. It looks a lot different now, but it started as an 8-10 page publication to my help students improve their writing skills in my classes. I taught math and chemistry, not English Composition, but the poor writing skills of my students came through loud and clear.

Then, when I started doing live writing and self-publishing seminars, I tweaked this publication a little more for use with my students. And sure, you can get a 400-page copy of the *Chicago Manual of Style* or *MLA Handbook* and get a much more thorough treatise on writing, but this is a little easier to use.

Then, back in around 2000, I began selling books on-line and I was shocked sober by writing issues I found on web pages and ebooks. Some people will say that writing skills aren't important online; I disagree. When I find a website or blog with horrible text, I simple won't buy anything through the site. If what is going on inside of the site owner's mind is that garbled up, I simply won't take a chance on purchasing anything they have.

My first point is this: The very first clue as to the overall intelligence of an individual is their mastery of the English language. (Assuming they are from an English-speaking country.) You may disagree with that statement, but I find it to be generally true.

Ernest Hemingway was once asked what was his greatest asset as a writer. He replied, "It's a built-in, shock-proof sh*t detector." He was, of course, referring to detecting sh*t in his own writing, but I apply that to the writing of others I come across.

Last evening I came across a blog that was offering a \$67 product I really wanted. The pitch was great although the supporting evidence backing up the claims of the author were a bit sketchy. But in reading through the sales material I don't think I found a single sentence without some glaring errors in grammar, punctuation, word usage, syntax, and yes—even spelling.

I thought to myself, if this guy is that messed up in his head, I just refuse to invest in his product no matter how good it sounds. I took a pass.

Another thing: The English language is a fluid, frothing, roiling thing that changes over time. Even the basic rules of writing change. However, there are some basic constructs of language that must be adhered to if one is to present himself as an authority figure in any niche.

Okay, having said that, this little booklet is not an authoritative source on writing. I have no credentials as an expert writer, but I do have some experience. I have written over 40 books and ebooks, and some of my materials have gone through official channels and been crawled over by professional editors at major publishing houses. Going through this process I

have become painfully aware of my own writing flaws and I work continually on improving.

My real impetus for further developing this booklet was about 4-5 years ago when I developed an on-line writing course. It is currently offered through over 1,400 colleges and universities in the U.S. and a handful of English speaking countries overseas.

The company that helped me develop my course provided me with two editors whose job was to crawl through my writing, millimeter by millimeter, character by character, making sure everything was proper. I thought I was a fairly good writer until I went through this editorial process. Every page I submitted came back with several mistakes they found. At first I considered my editors a royal nuisance, but I soon learned that they were forcing me to become a better writer. I'm still not close to perfect, but I'm a lot closer than I used to be.

Anyway, I added to this publication a bit in order to give myself a quick reference to use in my own writing.

And yet, despite the small size of this publication, it will help you to eliminate 95% of the errors you might be prone to make on your site, blog, or ebooks you write. If it does this for you I will be happy.

My very best wishes for your continued success!

Mike McMillan



Introductory Definitions

The **SUBJECT** is the part of a sentence about which something is being said.

Example: My fishing pole snapped and broke.
The subject is the phrase "*fishing pole*".

The **PREDICATE** is the part of the sentence which is saying something about the subject. It contains a verb (an action or "state of being" word).

The predicate in the above example is the phrase, "*snapped and broke*".

A **PHRASE** is a group of words that does not contain both a subject and its related predicate.

Example: *For six days* the sky was dark and cloudy.
For six days is a phrase. While it contains a noun (days), there is no verb or predicate to go with it.

A **CLAUSE** is a part of a sentence containing both a subject and a related predicate.

Example: Because you arrived early, *you won't have to wait in line*.
Subject: you
Related Predicate: wait in line

A **RESTRICTIVE CLAUSE OR PHRASE** is one which is essential to the main meaning of the sentence.

Example: Since it was third down and seven yards to go, *the team decided to punt*.

A **NON-RESTRICTIVE CLAUSE OR PHRASE** is one not essential to the meaning of the sentence.

Example: The banker, *who was wearing a brown sweater*, talked very slowly.

Example: *After the rain stopped*, we drove to the market.

This is important: I mention the difference between restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses and phrases because the punctuation involved can be different.

A **COMPLETE SENTENCE** contains a subject and its related predicate. It must express a complete thought.



Parts Of Speech

NOUNS

Nouns name persons, places, things or ideas.

Example: The *crowd* ran to the *bus*.

PROPER NOUNS name specific people, places or things and are always capitalized.

Example: *Andy* was the captain of the basketball team.

Example: The largest state east of the *Mississippi River* is *Georgia*.

PRONOUNS

Pronouns take the place of nouns in sentences.

Examples of pronouns: he, she, it, they, those, these, anyone...

Example: The pilot understood *he* was flying a delicate cargo.
(The pronoun "he" takes the place of the noun "pilot".)

ADJECTIVES

Adjectives describe nouns or pronouns.

Example: The *huge* ship was anchored off the coast of Florida.

(The adjective "huge" describes the noun "ship".)

VERBS

Verbs describe an action or state of being.

Example: I *am* excited about our upcoming family vacation.

(The verb "am" relates to a state of being.)

Examples of "state of being" verbs include is, are, were, be, etc.

Example: On our business trip we are *going* to Argentina.

(The word "going" is an action word.)

ADVERBS

Adverbs describe verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs.

Example: Marcus *quickly* ran to the front of the crowd.

(The adverb "quickly" describes the verb "ran".)

Example: The boy ran very quickly to the school.

(The adverb "very" describes the adverb "quickly".)

ARTICLES

The three articles are the words "a", "an", and "the".

Parts Of Speech, continued...

PREPOSITIONS

Prepositions are words which describe the relationships between things in time or space.

Examples of Prepositions: above, through, at, about, against, below, under, beside, by, up, over, with, of, to, across, like, from, before, within, after, while, aboard, beneath, and in.

Example: The rabbit ran *across* the field.
(The preposition "across" describes the relationship between the rabbit and where it ran.)

A PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE

A prepositional phrase consists of a preposition along with the words that relate to it.

Example: The wind blew *against the sails*.
(The prepositional phrase "against the sails" describes the relationship between the wind and the sails.)

CONJUNCTIONS

Conjunctions are used to join words together.

Examples of Conjunctions: and, but, or, for, so, yet, neither, either, nor, when, yet, whereas, and since.

Example: You are required to attend *either* the presentation *or* the meeting.
The conjunction "or" joins the words "presentation" and "meeting".

INTERJECTIONS

Interjections are simply words added to a sentence to emphasize a point.

Examples of interjections: Wow!, Oh great!, Yikes!, Hurrah!, Bravo!

Example: *Gads!* I've forgotten to thaw the steaks for dinner.

Proper Use Of Punctuation

THE PERIOD

A period is used at the end of a declarative sentence.

A declarative sentence is one which declares something, as opposed to a question (ending in a question mark), or an interjectory statement (ending in an exclamation point.)

Example: The sales page was poorly designed.

Example: The teacher's comment, "I can't wait until we cover Hamlet" was overheard by Janine. NOTE: When a quoted sentence is used within another sentence, no period is used at the end of the quote.

Example: The teacher's comment was, "I can't wait until we cover Hamlet." When quoted material comes at the end of a sentence, the period goes within the ending quotation mark.

THE COMMA

A comma indicates a small interruption in sentence flow.

- Commas are used to set off nonessential (nonrestrictive) clauses or phrases within a sentence. *A nonessential clause is one that adds meaning, but is not essential to the main point of the sentence.*

Example: Our football team, which has won its last four games, is playing at home tonight.

- Commas are not used to set off essential clauses or phrases in a sentence.

Example: The people standing in line *should think about finding their tickets.*

The italicized phrase is essential to the meaning of the sentence, so no comma is used to set it off from the rest of the sentence.

- Commas are not used to separate compound predicates.
(The predicate is the part of the sentence acting upon the subject.)

INCORRECT: In the afternoon the fisherman was in his boat, and was wearing his life jacket.

The above sentence contains a compound predicate:
was in his boat AND was wearing his life jacket

Thus, the predicates should not be separated with a comma.

CORRECTED: In the afternoon the fisherman was in his boat and was wearing his life jacket.

- Commas are used to separate words in a series if the word "and" could replace the comma and give the sentence the same meaning.

Example: The child's old, wrinkled hat had a hole in the top.

- Commas are used to separate independent clauses joined by coordinating conjunctions (such as: but, yet, so, or, or, for) or correlative conjunctions (such as: neither, not only, either).

Example: Tammy wanted to go to the game, but she lost her ticket.

Example: The concert was fun, not only because my friends were there, but because the band was great!

- A comma is used to separate a dependent clause which comes IMMEDIATELY before an independent clause.

Example: Before we went to the party, we washed and waxed the car.

The clause, "Before we went to the party" is dependent because it cannot stand by itself as a complete sentence. While it does contain both a subject and a verb, it does not express a complete thought.

- Commas are used to separate identical words in a sentence.

Example: The insects rushed in, in great numbers.

- Commas are used to separate conjunctive adverbs such as: however, moreover, and nonetheless from the rest of the sentence.

Example: Many of the reporters left at 5 o'clock, however, Mr. Brown stayed late to finish his story.

- Commas are used following all interjections within a sentence.

Example: Good grief, the cage door was left open and the dog escaped down the street.

- Commas are used to separate appositives from the noun they describe and the clause or phrase following the appositive.

An appositive is a noun or pronoun used to describe another noun or pronoun within a sentence.

Example: Ms. O'Connor, *the journalism teacher*, actually attended high school here as a student.

The appositive in the above sentence is "the journalism teacher".



The Comma Fault (Comma Splice)

A comma fault occurs when two independent clauses are joined by a comma to create a run-on sentence.

INCORRECT: The movie was horrible, I wish we would have stayed at home.

Here we have two independent clauses (each can stand alone as its own sentence). Joining these two independent clauses with a comma creates a "comma fault" and thus a run-on sentence.

Comma faults can be corrected by 1.) using a period to make two separate sentences, 2.) using a semi-colon to separate the run-on sentence into two independent clauses, or 3.) replacing the comma with a conjunction to create one single sentence.

CORRECTED: The movie was horrible. I wish we would have stayed at home.
 The movie was horrible; I wish we would have stayed at home.
 The movie was horrible and I wish we would have stayed at home.

THE SEMICOLON

A semicolon creates a more substantial interruption in the flow of a sentence than is created by a comma. NOTE: Both clauses separated by a semicolon must be able to stand alone as complete sentences on their own.

- A semicolon is used to separate independent clauses not joined by conjunctions.

EXAMPLE: Their new CD is wonderful; I will have to save some money to buy it.

EXAMPLE: Their new CD is wonderful, but I will have to save some money to buy it.

Here, since a conjunction (but) is used, we must use a comma rather than a semicolon to separate the clauses.

- A semicolon is used preceding transitional adverbs, such as: then, moreover, however, so, yet, indeed, hence, otherwise, for example, etc.

EXAMPLE: The movie was intense; indeed, it scared the audience out of their wits.

- A semicolon is used to separate independent clauses if those clauses are themselves divided by commas.

EXAMPLE: Katrina was at a softball game to watch her friends Julie, Becca, Andrea, and Toni play; then, suddenly, the dark, gloomy clouds broke loose with a torrential downpour of rain.

- A semicolon is used outside of parentheses or quotation marks.

EXAMPLE: Not only did the dance end on time (the band had to leave to catch their bus); it was the first profitable event our club has had all month.

EXAMPLE: Today we will discuss "To be or not to be"; this is the question Hamlet asks the reader.

THE COLON

A colon is used to connect two clauses and stress the connection of the second to the first.

- A colon may be used to introduce a series.

EXAMPLE: Marcus devoted his free time to three sports: basketball, soccer, and golf.

- A colon is used to set off part of a sentence that relates closely to the preceding clause.

CORRECT: The music is incredible: it captured my attention and my heart.

Notice how "it captured my attention and my heart" relates very closely to the subject of the first clause: "the music".

INCORRECT: The music was incredible: there were posters and banners all around the stage.

The second clause "there were posters and banners all around the stage" does not relate to the subject "the music" in the first clause so the use of the colon is incorrect.

QUOTATION MARKS

Quotation marks set off direct quotations or dialog in a sentence.

EXAMPLE: Jason's response was, "Of course I want to go with you."
A period is included within the quotation marks if the quoted material is at the end of the sentence.

EXAMPLE: Who was it that said, "Love is a rose"?
If the phrase or clause preceding the quotation is a question, the question mark goes outside of the ending quote.

EXAMPLE: The song's title was "How Can I Tell You?"
If quoted material at the end of a sentence asks a question, the question mark goes within the quotation marks.

PARENTHESES

Parentheses set off comments only incidentally related to the main concept of a sentence.

EXAMPLE: The store was filled with hurried shoppers (it was double coupon day) and it took us 20 minutes to get through the checkout line.

Text in parentheses within a sentence is not capitalized and does not end in a period.

EXAMPLE: The store was filled with hurried shoppers. (Today was Tuesday and it was double coupon day.) It took 20 minutes to get through the checkout line.

When the material in parentheses comes between two complete sentences, it is capitalized and ends in the required punctuation mark.

THE DASH

A dash represents a sudden break in thought.

EXAMPLE: Many of the children were running free—perhaps their parents were at the movie theatre in the mall.

EXAMPLE: Richard—the lead singer—arranged the concert.

A dash can also be used to set off an appositive from its noun or pronoun. An appositive is a word used as a substitute for a noun or pronoun. In the above sentence the appositive used for Richard is "the lead singer".

ELLIPSES

An ellipsis is used to indicate the omission of a word or phrase.

EXAMPLE: Their response was predictable: ". . . so, while we are interested in your idea, your report is sloppy and hard to read."

The ellipsis is used to indicate that "their" response began with words which were left out of the quote. NOTE: There should be one space between each dot in the ellipsis and also between the last dot and the first word of the following material.

ELLIPSES continued...

EXAMPLE: When we let freedom ring . . . we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! free at last! thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

–from Dr. Martin Luther King's 1963 "I Have A Dream" speech delivered at the Lincoln Memorial.

The ellipses indicate that words were left out from between "ring" and "we" in this paragraph.

THE APOSTROPHE

An apostrophe is used to create the possessive form of a noun or to show letters omitted in a contraction.

EXAMPLE: I can't see the runway through the clouds.
Can't is the contracted form of the word cannot.

Examples of apostrophes used to show the possessive form of a noun is discussed in the next section.



Possessive Forms Of Words

Perhaps one of the most confusing aspects of using the apostrophe is in the creation of possessive forms of words. This is especially true of words which end in the letter "s". The following examples will demonstrate how to correctly create possessive forms for such words.

Example: Anita's checkbook was found by the store clerk.

The possessives of most nouns, both proper and not, are formed by adding an apostrophe followed by an "s".

Example: The puppy's tail is black.

Here there is one puppy with a black tail.

Example: The puppies' tails are black.

Here there is a group of puppies, all with black tails.

Example: The boy's home is only three blocks away.

Only one boy is mentioned in the above sentence.

Example: The girls' home is only one mile from the school.

A group of girls is mentioned in the above sentence.

Example: The children's bedroom was clean and tidy.

When the noun is plural (children), the usual method for creating a possessive is to add an apostrophe followed by an "s".

Example: Mr. Jones' report was presented at the conference.

One person, named Jones, is mentioned above.

Example: The Joneses' home sold within three weeks of being listed.

With nouns ending in a "z" sound (Joneses), an "es" followed by an apostrophe is usually added. Here, a couple, the Joneses, sold their home.

Example: Jenny Roberts's car was damaged in the accident.

With nouns ending in an "s" sound, an apostrophe followed by an "s" is added. Some style books would permit "Jenny Roberts' car" as well.

Example: Bob and Linda's car is a red Camaro.

Here, Bob and Linda jointly own a red Camaro.

Possessive Forms Of Words, continued...

Example: Bob's and Linda's cars are red Camaros.

Here, Bob and Linda each own a red Camaro.

Mens Room vs Men's Room

You have likely seen signs such as this leading to rest rooms for men.

Which is correct? I could argue this all day with people, but I won't.

The correct answer is that either could be correct.

Mens Room: In this case "Mens" is interpreted as being an adjective describing the room. Nouns which assume the role of an adjective are referred to as attributive nouns. An attributive noun would not have an apostrophe since it is not used to show possession, but rather description.

Men's Room: Here, the apostrophe is used to show a possessive form of the word "men". We take "Men's" to indicate a possessive function--the room belonging to the men.

My advice: If you need to use the men's (mens) room really bad, don't stand there pondering the correct spelling and usage of the word, just walk in and get 'er done!



Problematic Word Pairs

Affect/Effect

Affect is a verb: How will this affect the project?

Effect is a noun: The photoelectric effect was studied by Einstein.

Accept/Except

Accept is a verb meaning to receive or agree to.

I accept your handshake as a gesture of friendship.

Except means "not including".

We have all of the components except for the Zenner diode.

Anyone/Any One

Anyone is a pronoun meaning any person or group of people.

Can anyone here read German?

Any one refers to one specific person.

Is there any one of us who can read German?

Compliment/Complement

To compliment is to give praise to.

I consider this award to be a great compliment to my genius.

To complement means to go with or to aid.

His knowledge of computers will complement your knowledge of math.

Discrete/Discreet

Discrete means separate or apart from.

The formula can be broken down into discrete units.

Discreet means to be careful or cautious.

Let us be discreet in our activities.

Disinterested/Uninterested

Disinterested means impartial.

We need a disinterested party to judge our contest.

Uninterested means not interested in.

He seems totally uninterested in learning about thermodynamics.

Farther/Further

Farther means a greater measurable distance.

Farther down the road you will find a forrest.

Further is a comparative word used when an actual distance cannot be implied.

The further we explored his illness, the more desperate we were to determine its cause.

Good/Well

Good is an adjective and is used to describe nouns

It would be a good idea to unplug the toaster before washing it.

The adjective "good" describes the noun "idea".

Well is an adverb.

I am well. Thank you for asking.

The adverb "well" describes the state of being verb "am".

Hung/Hanged

Hanged is a verb used only to describe the act or condition of a person being killed by suspending them by their neck from a rope.

Hung is usually used as the past tense or past participle of the word hang.

Imminent/Eminent

Imminent means something is about to happen.

We implied from the nearby gunshot that we were in imminent danger.

Eminent refers to the state of being distinguished.

Our eminent speaker is well known to all.

Imply/Infer

To imply is to suggest something (often somewhat indirectly).

He implied there would be food at the banquet.

To infer is to conclude based upon indirect evidence.

I inferred there would be food present from his remarks.

Insure/Ensure

To insure means to make available payment(s) in the case of damages.

I will insure my house against fire and flooding.

To ensure means to make sure something happens.

To ensure a lasting peace, a formal treaty was signed.

Less/Fewer

Less is used to compare things in which the component parts cannot be counted individually.

There is less water in the vase than in the bottle.

Fewer is used when actual physical units can be counted.

This line is for twelve items or fewer.

Lie/Lay

Lie refers to the placement of an object.

When I get tired I will lie on the floor.

Lay means to put or place something.

I will probably lay the carpet over the damaged floor.

Principle/Principal

A principle is a truth or accepted concept..

The semiconductor principle is based on surplus and deficit states in valence electrons.

Principal means the first, highest, or leading part of something.

The principal part of the device is the rotating disk.

Proceed/Precede

Proceed means to go ahead with or start an action.

You may proceed once the materials arrive.

Precede means to go before.

I was preceded in my talk by the singing of the national anthem.

Shall/Will

Honestly, I wouldn't worry to much about this pair. Even the experts can't agree and when they do it takes them ten pages of text to explain the difference.

However, "shall" is a more of a declarative and certain command.

There/Their/They're

"There" is an adverb.

The last time I saw her she was over there.

"There" is used as an adverb to describe the verb "was".

"Their" is a possessive adjective used to describe a noun or pronoun.

Their house is the second to the last one on the road.

"They're" is a contracted form of "they are".

The onions?—They're over there under the table.

Who/Whom

Whom is used only as the object of a verb or preposition.

From whom should I borrow tools?

"Whom" is the object.

"tools" is the subject

"borrow" is the predicate (verb)

Who is used only as the subject in a sentence.

Who can tell me the capital of West Virginia?

Confused? This always works: If you can substitute the word "he" for the word, it should be "who". Otherwise use the word "whom".

Your/You're

"Your" is an adjective. It describes a person, place or thing.

Is this your knife?

"You're" is a contracted form of the words "you are".

You're so vain!



Use Of Parallel Constructions

Parallel construction refers to the use of more than one word or phrase to relate to another part of a sentence. The components in the construction must agree in person (1st person [I], 2nd person [you], 3rd person [he, she, they]), in number (singular or plural), and in form (noun, adjective, adverb, etc.). To check for proper construction, the sentence can be broken apart and the components compared to one another for agreement.

It is much easier than I made it sound.

Example: I found the lecture to be stimulating, thought-provoking, and it was free.

Break the sentence apart into the three parallel components:

I found the lecture to be *stimulating*.
I found the lecture to be *thought-provoking*.
I found the lecture to be *and it was free*.

Notice how the first two sentences above make sense, but the third does not. It is of a different form than the first two. The original sentence, therefore, involves a faulty use of parallel construction.

The original sentence could be recast to give the following:

I found the lecture to be stimulating and thought-provoking. It was also free.

Example: I sang, danced, and she played the guitar.

Break the sentence apart into the three parallel components:

I sang. ("I" is 1st person)
I danced. ("I" is 1st person)
I she played the guitar. ("She" is 2nd person)

Again, notice how the first two sentences above make sense, but the third does not. This, too, is a faulty parallel construction.

The original sentence could be recast into:

I sang and danced. She played the guitar.

Use Of Parallel Constructions, continued...

Example: She loved to swim, playing tennis, and running.

Break the sentence apart into the three parallel components:

She loved *to swim*. (*To swim is an infinitive.*)

She loved *playing tennis*. (*playing tennis is a gerund.*)

She loved *running*. (*running is a gerund--a verb acting as a noun.*)

The original sentence could be recast to give the following:

Option 1: Convert all verb forms into infinitives.

She loved to swim, to play tennis, and to run.

Option 2: convert all verb forms into gerunds.

She loved swimming, playing tennis, and running.

NOTE: Gerunds are verb forms, but because of their "ing" ending, they are acting as nouns.

Infinitives are "to" forms of verbs. The following are all examples of infinitives: to run, to walk, to read, to think, etc.



Improper Use Of Modifiers

Modifiers are words that give clarity to some other part of a sentence. When used properly, they enhance a writer's thoughts. When modifiers are used incorrectly, or misplaced, they can confuse the thought being expressed.

Examples Of Dangling Modifiers

Running through the crowd of people, Susan's sunglasses fell out of her purse.

We can assume that Susan was doing the running, but that's not what the sentence says. Who or what was running is never stated, but the implication is that it was Susan's sunglasses that were running. That would be quite a sight!

"Running through the crowd of people" is said to dangle. It tries to hang on to something, but the reader isn't sure what it is.

CORRECTED: While Susan was running through the crowd, her sunglasses fell out of her purse.

Working around the clock, the newsletter was completed by the the team just minutes before the deadline.

Was the newsletter working around the clock? Of course not, but that is what the reader is led to believe.

BETTER: Working around the clock, the team completed the newsletter just minutes before the deadline.

BETTER: The team worked around the clock to complete the newsletter just minutes before the deadline.

The teacher spoke to the students on drugs.

What the heck?

CORRECTED: The teacher spoke to the students on the topic of drugs.



5 Of The Most Common Writing Mistakes

#1 Wasting Words

In William Zinsser's classic book, *On Writing Well*, he makes the following point:

"But the secret of good writing is to strip every sentence to its cleanest components. Every word that serves no function, every long word that could be a short word, every adverb that carries the same meaning that's already in the verb, every passive construction that leaves the reader unsure of who is doing what—these are the thousand and one adulterants that weaken the strength of a sentence."

When I was doing live writing and self-publishing seminars, I used to show a transparency of the following page. It is a quote from *Remembrances Of Things Past*, by French novelist Marcel Proust. (Rhymes with "boost".)
Take a look at it.

It's one hell of a sentence, isn't it? Yup—the entire page is only one sentence! There are a ton of subjects and predicates, and I guess it expresses a complete thought, although I can't honestly tell you what it is.

KEY POINT: You are not writing a novel like Proust's. You are writing nonfiction on your blogs, sites, sales letters, forum posts, and ebooks. Proust plays games with words; You do not have that luxury!

Distill your writing down into its essence. Waste no words. Get to the point and make that point crystal clear for the reader.

From: *Remembrances Of Things Past*, Marcel Proust

"He had the sudden suspicion that this hour spent in Odette's house, in the lamp light, was perhaps, after all, not an artificial hour, invented for his special use (with the object of concealing that frightening and delirious thing which was incessantly in his thoughts without his ever being able to form a satisfactory impression of it, an hour of Odette's real life, of her life when she was not there), with theatrical properties and pasteboard fruits, but was perhaps a genuine hour of Odette's life; that if he himself had not been there she would have poured out from him, not some unknown brew, but precisely this same orangeade; that the world inhabited by Odette was not that other fearful and supernatural world in which he spent placing her—and which existed, perhaps, only in his imagination—but the real world, exhaling a special atmosphere of gloom, comprising that table at which he was now being permitted to taste, all these objects which he contemplated with as much curiosity and admiration as gratitude for it, in absorbing him from them, they showed him the palpable realization of his fancies, and they impressed themselves upon his mind, took shape and grew solid before his eyes, at the same time as they soothed his troubled heart."

#2 Keeping A Consistent Point Of View

Writing can be in what we call the 1st person, the 2nd person, or the 3rd person. Let's use some examples to demonstrate what I mean.

An Example Of Writing In The First Person **From Herman Melville's *Moby Dick***

"Twords thee I roll, thou all-destroying but unconquering whale; to the last I grapple with thee; from hell's heart I stab at thee; for hate's sake I spit my last breath at thee. Sink all coffins and all hearses to one common pool!—and since chasing thee, though tied to thee, thou damned whale! Thus, I give up the spear!"

The fact that this excerpt is written in the first person is clear from the frequent use of the word "I". The writer tells the story as if he was a participant. When you use the words I, we, me, or us—you are writing in the first person.

Writing In The Second Person

The second person POV is characterized by using the word "you" as the reader is addressed. Some instructional materials, cookbooks, guidebooks, etc. are written in the second person.

Now, it's okay to change the point of view sometimes, but never, never, never do it midstream in a sentence. For example:

First you can begin by removing the loose paint from around the doorway and then we will go on to covering the woodwork with a new coat of primer.

The above sentence starts out writing in the 2nd person—addressing the reader as "you". Then, all of a sudden, the "you" becomes a "we". The reader is confused. Is the writer telling someone how to do something, or—is he retelling events in which he was an active participant?

Writing In The Third Person (From Chekov's *In The Cart*)

"She had lost the habit of thinking of the time before she became a schoolmistress and had almost forgotten all about it. She had once had a father and mother; they had lived in Moscow in a big apartment near the Red Gate, but all that was remained in her memory of that part of her life was something vague and formless like a dream."

In the previous example the writer is in the role of a witness to a story. He conveys the story to the reader as if he watched and retold it in writing. The words "she" and "they" rather than "I" or "you" indicate a third person narrative being used.

So what's the point in all of this 1st person, 2nd person, and 3rd person stuff Mike?

It's usually best to try to keep your writing in the same person as much as you can. It will almost always be necessary to jump from one person to another, but never do this within the same sentence. And, try to minimize shifts in person—it can keep the reader off balance when they don't know what your perspective is as the writer. Try to keep a fairly consistent point of view.

#3 Shifts Of Verb Tense

INCORRECT: Jimmy is practicing right now and he looked very good.

The verb "is" indicates the present tense, however, the verb "looked" indicates the past tense. There is confusion over whether the writer is talking about something that is happening right now or something that happened in the past.

CORRECTED: Jimmy is practicing right now and is looking very good in his event.

Both verbs are now in the present tense. The writer is commenting on what is happening at the present time.

#4 Subject-Verb Agreement

The subject and related verb in a sentence should agree. A singular subject must take a singular verb. A plural subject must take a plural verb.

INCORRECT: The fastest *athletes* in the contest *is* bound to win.

"Athletes" is a plural subject (more than one athlete).
"Is", is a singular verb (it relates to one of something).

CORRECTED: The fastest *athletes* in the contest *are* bound to win.

#5 Excessive Use Of Passive Voice

Writing in an active voice means that the subject of the sentence is doing the acting. In a passive voice the subject is being acted upon. An excessive use of passive voice sounds weak and not as forceful as is usually desired in nonfiction writing.

PASSIVE FORM OF A SENTENCE

The yearbook was completed by the students.

Here the subject, "yearbook" is being acted on by the students.

MORE ACTIVE FORM

The student completed the yearbook.

Here the subject, "students" are acting on the yearbook.

Well there you have it. And this little discourse really wasn't really such a bad thing to suffer through was it?

Whether you are adding content to your web site, blog, forum or ebook—I hope you can use some of these ideas. Good writing will probably sell more product for you, and I'll bet you feel better about what you create if you know your writing is up to snuff.

Hey, that's about all. But if you are serious about affiliate marketing or trying to write an ebook of your own, well—stop by and see me at www.niche-control-marketing.com. Grab a bunch of free stuff while you're there. I've got some free PDF files and videos related to affiliate marketing for you to download freely right now.

Again, my very best to your continued success.



Mike McMillan