Grammar Slammer 1:
Punctuation
Punctuation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

• Use a comma after introductory material.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

• Semicolons are used in a list to separate items that require significant internal punctuation.
  – Survivors include his wife, Jean; a daughter, Jesse Wilkins, of Marietta, Ga.; and a son, Bill, of Midland, Texas.
  – I have lived in Dayton, Ohio; Nashville, Tenn.; Tuscaloosa, Ala.; and Lubbock, Texas.
• Colons precede formal lists.
• Do not put a colon after *including*.
  – The following students passed the exam: Mary Wilson, Ada Stone, Joseph Michaels and Bob Stoops.
  – I’m taking four classes this semester: French, journalism, history and English.
  – I love vegetables, including squash, peas and corn.
Hyphens—Rule 1

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

• When used as a subject, the pronouns *each, either, neither, anyone, everyone, much, no one, nothing* and *someone* are always singular, regardless of what follows them in a phrase.
  – Each of the boys has his own personality.
  – Everyone in the class has a computer.
  – Neither of the candidates has my vote.
  – Anyone is capable of learning grammar.
Either/or and neither/nor

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

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

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

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

• A singular subject followed by phrases such as
  **together with, in addition to, and as well as**
  always takes a singular verb.
    – The tax resolution, together with its amendments,
      has been sent to the president for her signature.
Prepositional phrases

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

• To lie is to recline.
  – Lie, lay, have lain, lying
  – She wanted to lie down after dinner.
  – He lay on the sofa for two weeks.
A short quiz

- For each sentence, select the letter corresponding to the underlined section that contains the error. Choose “e” if there is no error.
Neither the dog nor her puppies is going to eat the food. No error.
The Super Bowl will be boring, because the Colts are not in it.

No error.
Jason See bought two books, and then returned both of them.

No error.
If a student contracts **measles**, they **a** are asked to **b** leave **c** until the disease **d** is under control. No error. **e**
The man, who shot my mother, received a 10-year prison sentence although he had no prior record. No error.
Grammar Slammer 3: Word Usage
Among or between?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

• Bad is an adjective. It describes someone’s state of being.
  – Mayor Jim Smith feels bad about lying to his constituents.
• Badly is an adverb. It tells how someone does something.
  – He plays the guitar badly.
Fewer vs. less

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

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

• Limit the meaning of *insure* to activities of insurance companies.

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

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

• Alright — that’s also wrong!
  – It should be all right (two words).
  – Things will be all right soon.
How much do you know?
• The Wilson who was convicted is not Ted R. Wilson who is a student here.

• The three year program is a heaven sent blessing for study weary students.
• Neither Jesse Colter nor Waylon Jennings are going to sing.

• Neither the dog nor her puppies are going to eat the food.
• An excess of spelling errors are in her copy.

• She went to the store and he took a long nap at home.
• Jason bought three books and returned only two of them.

• After a long period of time the judges’ resumed their deliberations.
• Gunther in his tiresome way slipped into and out of a coma several times during the board meeting.

• Since we moved into town, our fuel bill has tripled.
• However he tried to use the bottle opener, it wouldn’t work.

• Oil, that is lighter than water rises to the surface.
• He replied “I have no idea what you mean.”

• Dec. 7, 1941 will never be forgotten.
• The letter did not effect the outcome of the vote.

• The dog lost it’s collar.
• The body laid in the field from Tuesday until Thursday.

• If a student contracts measles, they are asked to leave until the disease is under control.
• Give this work to whoever looks idle.

• My oldest son, James, was in the U.S. Army.