DO YOU KNOW YOUR COMMON GRAMMAR ISSUES?

SENTENCE PROBLEMS

Vague Pronoun Reference: A pronoun should refer clearly to the word or words it replaces (called the antecedent) elsewhere in the sentence or in a previous sentence. If more than one word could be the antecedent, or if no specific antecedent is present, edit to make the meaning clear.

1) Because Senator Martin is less interested in the environment than in economic development, he sometimes neglects **it**. ("it" could refer to the environment or econ. development)
2) Transmitting radio signals by satellite is a way of overcoming the problem of scarce airwaves and limiting how **they** are used. ("they" could refer to "radio signals" or to "scarce airwaves")

Dangling Modifier: Place modifiers (or words that describe some part of the sentence) near the words they describe; be sure the modified words actually appear in the sentence.

3) <u>Drenched and sore</u>, **it** would be a long time before the next canoeing trip. ("it" can't be drenched and sore)
4) When <u>writing a proposal</u>, **an original task** is set for research. (a "task" can't write a proposal)

Problems with Parallelism: Parallelism means that all elements appear in the same grammatical form: *singing, eating dancing,* or *to sing, to eat, to dance*. It's a type of stylistic repetition employed by writers for rhythm and impact. A lack of parallel structure can be confusing, especially in regard to lists.

5) The candidate's goals include **winning** the election, **a national health program**, and the **educational system**. ("winning" is not parallel to "program" and "system")
6) Alexander Hamilton influenced the creation of the United States through **his authorship** of the Federalist Papers, **established** the National Bank, and **participating** in the writing of the Constitution. ("authorship", "established" and "participating" are not parallel)

COMMA PROBLEMS

Missing Commas: 1) Use commas after an introductory word, phrase or clause. Readers usually need a small pause, signaled by a comma, between an introductory word, phrase, or clause and the main part of the sentence. Use a comma after every introductory element. When the introductory element is very short, you don't always need a comma, but including it is never wrong. 2) Also, use commas with "which" or "who" clauses that modify a person, object or concept that is already known or identified.

7) When it comes to <u>eating people</u> differ in their tastes. (place a comma between "eating" and "people"
8) Determined to get the job <u>done we</u> worked all weekend. (place a comma between "done" and "we")

9) <u>Marina who</u> was the president of the <u>club was</u> the first to speak. (place commas around "who is the president of the club")

Commas with Compound Sentences: A compound sentence consists of two or more parts that could each stand alone as a sentence. When the parts are joined by a coordinating conjunction, use a comma before the conjunction to indicate a pause between the two thoughts.

10) Meredith waited for <u>Samir and</u> her sister grew impatient. (place a comma before "and")

Overuse of Commas: Do NOT use commas to set off restrictive elements that are necessary to the meaning of the words they modify. Do not use a comma before a coordinating conjunction (and, but, for, nor, or, so, yet) **when** the conjunction does not join parts of a compound sentence. Do not use a comma: 1) before the first or after the last item in a series, 2) between a subject and verb, 3) between a verb and its object or complement, or 3) before a prepositional phrase in the middle or at the end of a sentence.

11) Field trips are **required, in** several courses, such as, botany and geology. (remove the comma before "in")
12) This conclusion applies to the United **States, and** to the rest of the world. (remove the comma before "and")
13) The **man, I met for coffee, has** a lot of money. (remove all commas)

Comma Splice: A comma splice occurs when only a comma separates clauses that could each stand alone as complete sentences. To correct a comma splice, you can insert a semicolon or period, connect the clauses with a word such as *and* or *because*, or restructure the sentence.

14) Klee's paintings seem **simple, they** are very sophisticated. (change the comma to a period or semi-colon OR add "yet")
15) I was strongly attracted **to her, she** was beautiful and funny. (change the comma to a period or semi-colon OR remove the command and add "because")

APOSTROPHE PROBLEMS

Apostrophes: To make a noun possessive, add either an apostrophe and an *s* (*Ed's* book) or an apostrophe alone (the *boys'* gym – here *boys* is plural). Do not use an apostrophe in the possessive pronouns *ours, yours, and hers*. Use *its* to mean "belong to it"; use *it's* only when you mean *it is* or *it has*. Use *whose* to mean "belong to a thing" (the country *whose* border I crossed…) and *who's* to mean "who is".

16) In the current conflict its uncertain **who's** borders their contesting. (whose)
17) The Aztecs **ritual's** of renewal increased in frequency over the course of time. (Aztecs' rituals – because they probably had more than one ritual)
18) The car is lying on **it's** side in the ditch. **Its** a white 2004 Passat. (its side// it's a Passat)

VERB PROBLEMS

Subject Verb Agreement: In present tense verbs, verbs must agree with their grammatical subject. Mistakes in subject-verb agreement are most likely when the subject is separated from the verb by several words.

19) The **research** of Professor Roy Walford and some other scientists **<u>have not yielded</u>** a definite conclusion. (has not yielded)

Verb Tense Shift: Sometimes writers change verb tenses halfway through a sentence or paragraph, causing confusion. Instead, make sure the verb tenses are consistent. Verbs that shift from one tense to another with no clear reason can confuse readers.

20) The method we **use** is interview and survey. We **found** that most people **voted** for the candidate whose name **is** familiar, regardless of the candidate's political leanings. (used/ found/ voted/ was)
21) Priya **was** watching the great blue heron. Then she **slips** and **falls** into the swamp. (was/ slipped/ fell)
22) Although it **was** only a four-hour ride from my home in Pennsylvania to my boyfriend's home in Virginia, I **was** terrified. Looking back, I **thought** my feelings **are influenced** by stereotypes of the Old South. (is/ was/ think/ were influenced)

STYLISTIC PROBLEMS

Sentence Sprawl: When you have too many equally weighted clauses or phrases, the writing lacks rhythm and emphasis. This makes the writing style boring.

23) The hearing was planned for Monday, December 2, but not all of the witnesses could be available, so it was rescheduled for the following Friday, and then all the witnesses could attend.

Wordiness: Wordy sentences are not concise. They use 3-4 words where 1 or 2 would do.

1) Basically, **in light of the fact that** Congressman Fuenches was **totally** exhausted by his last campaign, **there was an expectation on the part of the voters** that he would not **reduplicate his effort to achieve office in government** again.

   Basically, ~~in light of the fact that~~ (because) Congressman Fuenches was ~~totally~~ exhausted by his last campaign, ~~there was an expectation on the part of the voters~~ (voters expected) that he would ~~not reduplicate his effort to achieve office in government~~ (run for office) again.

2) My sister, **who is employed as** a nutritionist at the University of Michigan, recommends **the** daily **intake of** megadoses of Vitamin C.

   My sister, ~~who is employed as~~ a nutritionist at the University of Michigan, recommends ~~the daily intake of~~ megadoses of Vitamin C daily.