

# Chapter 4 – Focus on Grammar

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- **The language used in writing for the public must be clear, precise, simple and consistent**
  - Mill: the structure of every sentence is a lesson in logic”
  - Must be in control of the basics
- **Language depends heavily on grammar: the arrangement of words according to tense, gender, number and other rules to create shared meaning**
  - We create meaning through grammar
    - Harriet is not leaving the party just to make you angry
    - Harriet is not leaving the party, just to make you angry
  - Context makes meaning clear
  - Meaning resides in the way words are organized
  - For journalists, style is the body of guidelines that ensures consistency in presenting information to the public
- **Parts of speech**
  - Nouns: represent people, places, things and ideas. Common nouns are general: woman, city, car, religion. Proper nouns are specific names and are capitalized: Hannah, Rome, Chevrolet
  - Pronouns: stand in for nouns, usually so that we can avoid cumbersome repetition: Cristina is class president. She was elected last Month. Christina is the noun and the antecedent of the pronoun she. A pronoun must always agree in number with its antecedent. Pronouns include: personal (I/me, we/us, you, he/him); relative (who/whom, that, which), and the indefinite (anybody, both, neither, nothing). When indefinite pronouns refers to an unknown or a collective group, they do not require an antecedent
  - Verbs may represent activity or a state of being. Verbs are action words and are therefore the strongest tools we have for energetic writing. Good editors favor precise, vibrant verbs
  - Adjectives and adverbs describe, limit, specify or otherwise modify other words, and for that reason are often called modifiers.
  - Prepositions are short linking words such as by, with, in, on, from and to. They show relationship of one thing to another, and is usually positioned in front of a noun or pronoun, which is called the object of the preposition
  - Conjunctions are also connecting words but generally connect phrases clauses, sentences and verbs. A conjunction may also link the elements of a series, and, or, but and while are among the most frequently used conjunctions.
  - Interjections, also known as exclamations, are isolated words or phrases expressing shock, pleasure or other strong emotion.
  - **Nouns:**
    - Singular common nouns ending in –s take the standard -’s unless the following word begins with s
    - Singular proper nouns ending in –s take only an apostrophe
    - Singular nouns that are always plural in form that only an apostrophe
  - **Plural Possessive nouns**
    - Plural nouns ending in –s or –es take only an apostrophe
    - Plural nouns that do not end in –s or –es take –’s, like most singular nouns

- When referring to the proper name of an organization or other title that uses a **plural possessive**, most media guides defer to the preference of the group
- Sports editors: a team name, when accompanying a player's position, does not require an apostrophe, because it is regarded as a descriptive rather than a possessive modifier. However if the player's name alone is used with the team designation, the relationship is considered possessive and the apostrophe is retained.
- A special form of **plural possessive** shows up often in news about crime and the courts. Note the apostrophes: Garrett was sentenced to two years' prison, four years' probation and 300 hours' community service. Years and hours are plural possessives because the writer could correctly substitute *of* for the apostrophe in each instance
- **Compound nouns** in the possessive case are the simplest. An -'s is added to the end of the compound phrase to create the possessive
- **Joint possessives** involve two or more roughly equal nouns in common possession of something else. Possessive ending only for the final noun. But don't join two possessives that refer to different things, even if they seem similar
- Be careful not to write confusing or tangled sentences by placing one possessive inside another—rewrite using "of"
- **Collective nouns:** 1) Remember, the pronoun must agree in number with its antecedent 2) sometimes clarity requires a plural noun
- **Pronouns**
  - Avoid multiple antecedents
  - Make pronouns and antecedents agree in number
  - Establish the proper case (the form a noun or pronoun takes according to its role in a specific sentence)
    - a pronoun replacing the subject of the sentence must be in the subjective case (nominative case)
    - a pronoun replacing an object of a verb or preposition must be in the objective case
    - a pronoun replacing a noun showing possession must be in the possessive case (genitive case)
    - While pronouns change in each of the three cases, nouns remain exactly the same in the subjective and object cases. But it is sometimes difficult to tell whether the substituted pronoun should be subjective or objective without examining the sentence more closely
  - Relative pronoun
    - who: is used when the relative pronoun is the subject of a verb of sentence
    - whom is used when the relative pronoun is the object of a verb
    - How to know
      - isolate how the pronoun works in the clause—what is the relationship between the pronoun and the verb to which it is attached. Does the verb already have a subject? If not, the pronoun is the subject and should be who or whoever

- if the sentence is a question, juggle it mentally: The reporter should interview whom for their story? This forces the subject and object into clearer positions
  - Substitute he or him (or she or her). They are the personal-pronoun equivalents to the relative pronouns who and whom. If by rearranging the sentence of clause slightly you can substitute he or she, who is the right choice, if him or her, whom is correct.
- **Essential and Non-essential**
  - An essential clause is essential to the basic meaning of the sentence—it begins with “that.” NOT set off by commas
  - Non-essential clause is not crucial to the meaning of the sentence. It begins with which. A non-essential clause is set off by commas
- **Who, When, Where**
  - Importance of comma placement—it’s essential for proper understanding.
- **Verbs**
  - Show various kinds of doing or being. Whether the actions or process is physical or mental, visible or invisible, concrete or abstract, the verb is the heart.
  - **Active/passive**
  - **Tenses**
  - **Transitive/Intransitive**
    - **Transitive** verbs require an object and establish the relationship between the subject and the object: The band played songs from its new album.
    - **Intransitive** verbs, by contrast, need no object; they are self-contained: The band jammed. President Lincoln died hours after he was shot.
      - Lay: to put down or place in a certain position (transitive)
      - Lie: to rest or take a reclining position (intransitive)
    - **Verbals:** verb forms that act like nouns, adjectives or adverbs.
      - **infinitive:** uses the word “to” plus the present tense of the verb: To be or not to be.
      - Don’t split the infinitive in most cases
      - **Participles** end in –ed, or –ing (past and present participle). Participles act as adjectives, modifying nouns or pronouns: Here’s some **breaking** news.
      - Gerunds are also present participles, but they behave as nouns rather than modifiers: **Dancing** was her favorite activity.