

Copy-editing

with exercises and model answers

Barbara Horn

HEB

HORN EDITORIAL BOOKS *and* THE PUBLISHING TRAINING CENTRE
London



The PUBLISHING
TRAINING
CENTRE
AT BOOK HOUSE

First published in Great Britain in 2008 by Horn Editorial Books,
32 Greenway Close, London N20 8EN, and The Publishing Training
Centre at Book House, 45 East Hill, London SW18 2QZ.

© Barbara Horn 2008

Index © Christine Shuttleworth and Barbara Horn 2008

Barbara Horn has asserted her right to be identified
as the author of this work in accordance with the
Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any
means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise,
without the prior written permission of the publisher.

ISBN 978-0-9553404-1-3

A CIP record for this work can be obtained
from the British Library

Editor: Enid Barker

Proofreader: Margaret Aherne

Typeset in 11/14 Sabon by M Rules

Printed and bound in Great Britain by

Biddles, 24 Rollesby Road, King's Lynn, Norfolk

Contents

Preface	ix
Acknowledgements	xi
The copy-editor's world	xiii
Our colleagues	xv
Stages of production	xvi
Copy-editing tools	xxi
Copy-editing marks	xxi
House and book style	xxiii
Writing queries for authors	xxiv
1 Marking up	1
Designers and typesetters	1
How to mark up	3
What to mark up	5
2 Grammar and punctuation	34
Correct is not always appropriate	34
The author's voice	35
The house voice	36
Grammar	36
Punctuation	50
3 Cover to cover	77
Covers and binding	77
In the beginning	80
The body of the book	94
Endmatter	95
Running heads	100

vi	<i>Copy-editing</i>	
	Copyright	103
	Other legal issues	112
	You are responsible	114
4	Style and level	115
	Capitals	115
	Italics	125
	Numbers	134
	Purpose and level	145
5	Specialist texts	157
	Poetry	157
	Plays	165
	Manuals	173
	Jacket or cover copy	181
6	Tables, technical figures and copy-fitting	188
	Tables	188
	Technical figures	204
	Cutting and expanding	219
7	Endmatter	230
	Notes and reference systems	230
	Indexes	270
	Have toolkit, can travel	286
	Glossary	288
	Model Answers	295
	Resources	415
	General	415
	Style manuals	417

Contents vii

English usage and writing style	418
Copyright guides	419
Production	419
Organizations for editors in Europe	420
Organizations for editors outside Europe	421
Training organizations in Britain and Ireland	421
Other useful websites	422
Index	423

2 Grammar and punctuation

The aim of copy-editing is to make the text not simply grammatically correct but also appropriate for its purpose, so that it fulfils the intention of the author and serves the needs of the reader. A copy-editor must be fully competent in grammar. For most, if not all, of us, maintaining that competence is a continuing process of review – particularly as attitudes towards usage can, and often do, change over time. Obviously, this chapter cannot be, and is not intended as, a comprehensive course in grammar. For more information about, different views on, or other ways of explaining aspects of grammar, look at the books recommended in Resources.

When you understand the basic rules, you will know how and when they can be bent to achieve an effect desired by the author.

Correct is not always appropriate

There are rules about how sentences should be constructed and punctuated, and many of them can be, and often are, bent or broken to good effect. The purpose of the work and the type of reader it is aimed at determine how formal and how grammatically correct the text needs to be.

The purpose of non-fiction is to convey information. Following the rules of grammar will help the text to do so clearly and make it accessible to readers whose own speech may be quite different. While adhering to the rules, the style of the language can range from very formal, as in company reports and articles and books aimed at professionals, through less formal, as in company newsletters, books for the non-specialist reader and schoolbooks, to relatively informal, as in sales brochures and popular magazines.

The purposes of fiction are many and varied. Some fiction intends to convey information; some wants to convey messages about life, society, politics, or the universe; some aims to thrill, frighten or amuse, or present mysteries, dramas or romance. The way characters in a story think and speak should reflect who they are and the world

in which they live. Their world might be anywhere in the real world at any time in its history or at a future time of the author's creation, or in another world of the author's imagination. The way people spoke in, say, the eighteenth century is different from the way they speak now. The way educated adults speak is different from the way uneducated adults speak, and even highly educated people do not speak perfectly grammatically all the time – speech is informal. The way adults speak is different from the way children speak. There are differences in speech depending on the region in which people grew up. There are differences that can reveal whether people are speaking a language that is not their mother tongue, and how well they know it. Even people with the same background speak differently from each other in some ways. Vocabulary is the foundation of speech. Spelling can provide an accent or reflect a dialect. Grammar can be used or bent to indicate age, class, period, and regional background. The way the author uses these tools can create an individual voice for each character. You have to understand the context so that you can ensure that the grammar and style for the work and, if relevant, the characters in it are appropriate and consistent.

The author's voice

Authors also have their own voice, or style, which will be the only one in a work of non-fiction and may be that of the narrator or protagonist in a work of fiction. When an author is credited with a publication, **your job is to convey that author's voice(s) clearly and consistently, not substitute your own.** That clause is in bold because it is, in effect, a warning. On the editorial path there is a long muddy stretch created by the tears of authors frustrated by, distraught at and enraged by the thoughtless transformations of meaning and style imposed by misguided individuals. As you would expect, this book is designed to help you avoid slipping in it and adding to it.

There are authors with strong, clear voices, and others who mumble or whisper. It may be a matter of innate talent or experience. You might need only to impose house style on the strong voices and perhaps resolve the occasional ambiguity or hiccup; you will need to make the mumblers and whisperers clear and audible. Copy-editors should be given a brief telling them what to do on any document, but this doesn't always happen, and even when it does, it isn't enough.

36 *Copy-editing*

You have to *hear* the author's voice for yourself. Before you begin any editorial work, always read some of the text. *Listen* to it to get a feeling for the rhythm of the sentences and paragraphs. Look at how the author uses nouns and pronouns, modifiers and conjunctions. When you feel that you don't *like* a word, phrase or sentence, ask yourself why. Is it just a question of your style versus the author's, or is it something that does not work well to convey the author's message to the intended readership? Try to identify generally which aspects of the writing work well and which don't. Then when you begin to edit you will be better able to change the aspects that don't work into those that do in a way consistent with the author's own style.

The house voice

Some publications are not credited to specific authors and are not intended to have a personal voice. Organizations can create their own voice, a style that is imposed on the work of many individuals so that they all sound the same:

- where the information is more important than the writer's view, as in brochures and instruction leaflets
- where the publication needs to have a consistent style over successive issues, as in newsletters
- where there needs to be a consistent style throughout large works with text written by many contributors, such as encyclopedias.

Grammar

Now that you understand how the context determines what is appropriate, we'll look at some of the major issues of grammar. There are people who get worried or even frightened at the mention of 'grammar', maybe because they were never taught it and think it's a very difficult subject, or maybe because they were taught it badly. Grammar is simply the system of our language; you use it every day. From time to time you might need to think about certain points more than others, or consult a colleague or a reference book, but, happily, every grammatical problem has a solution. Often it's more important that it should be appropriate than 'right', and it can't bite. Reassured? Read on.

Rules that aren't rules

1 You must not use a conjunction at the beginning of a sentence.

Do not deprive your authors of this useful means of emphasis, but make sure they do not overuse it, as then it loses its impact.

2 You must not split infinitives.

Sometimes a split infinitive is necessary for clarity or to avoid an awkward or overly formal construction. For example, 'I want to closely observe the various ways in which the task is completed' is clearer than 'I want to observe the various ways in which the task is completed closely' and it overcomes the awkwardness of either 'I want closely to observe ...' or 'I want to observe closely ...'. However, 'I want to closely observe you' is not an improvement on 'I want to observe you closely'. Listening to the text will often guide you to the appropriate decision.

3 You cannot end a sentence with a preposition.

Yes you can. Prepositions are words that express a relationship, usually of time or place, between a preceding noun or pronoun and another word or phrase. The category includes *above, across, after, among, at, before, below, for, of, off, on, over, to, under, with*. You can allow a sentence to end with a preposition when it is appropriate for the tone of the document or the language of a character in a piece of fiction. For example, whether to allow 'Who are we doing this for?' or change it to 'For whom are we doing this?' will depend on the tone of the document: the former is more immediate and even urgent, and a reflection of the way many people speak; the latter is formal and impersonal.

Sentences

Sentences start with a capital and end with a full point, question mark or exclamation mark. They usually have a subject and a verb, unless they are representing dialogue or are single words or phrases used as imperatives or for emphatic effect. There is no minimum or maximum length for a sentence. There is no law against a mixture of long and short sentences; indeed, the variety reflects a natural speech pattern and avoids the monotony that sends a reader to sleep. Consider the reading ability of the target market. Listen to the author's voice, particularly its rhythm, and use punctuation to guide

38 *Copy-editing*

the reader, combining or separating sentences where grammar, clarity and the reader's ability demand.

Subject–verb agreement

Here are the points I'm sure you know, each followed by a perhaps lesser known related one.

- Singular or plural, the subject and the verb in a clause or sentence should agree:

This apple is red but those apples are green.

Certain nouns can be singular or plural: 'government', 'family' and 'team' are just a few examples. In British English the way these nouns of multitude, also called collective nouns, are used depends on whether the author is emphasizing the unity of the subject:

The company is having a celebration.

or the separateness or individuality of the parts of the unit:

The committee are determined to come to an agreement.

In the latter case, you can imagine 'the members of' preceding the subject. Whichever way it is used, you must ensure that the verb and any related, or attendant, pronoun in the same sentence are in agreement with it. This is referred to as 'agreement in number'. In American English collective nouns are usually singular.

- When singular nouns are linked by the conjunction 'and' or by a comma substituting for 'and', they form a plural subject and so need a plural verb:

The apple, the pear and the peach are on the table.

A singular noun that is followed by a clause introduced by a linking phrase such as 'as well as' or 'together with' and set within paired commas requires a singular verb:

The leader of the council, together with other council members, was standing on the stage.

It's as if the clause between the commas were within parentheses.

- When singular nouns are separated by the conjunction 'or', each one remains a singular subject and needs a singular verb:

An apple or a peach is a good snack.

But if a singular noun and a plural noun are each the subject, do you use a singular or plural verb?

The cats or the dog was [or were?] to blame.

Here's the answer: use the verb form that agrees with the subject nearest to it:

The cats or the dog was to blame.

or

The dog or the cats were to blame.

Most often, the plural subject is placed nearest the verb, so that there appears to be a logical increase from singular to plural.

The only time you can allow authors to break these rules is when they are writing dialogue for a child or an uneducated adult.

INDEFINITE NOUNS AND PRONOUNS

Of course you know that the pronoun must agree with the subject noun in number and gender. The one issue that is frequently debated is which pronoun and possessive to use when the subject is a non-gender-specific noun – for example, ‘an author’, ‘the patient’, ‘a client’, ‘a person’ – or an indefinite pronoun, such as ‘everyone’, ‘anyone’, ‘no one’. It has long been deemed sexist to use the masculine singulars – ‘he’, ‘him’, ‘his’ – and using both the masculine and feminine singulars – ‘he and/or she’ etc. – repeatedly can make the text sound stilted and awkward. There are people who defend using the third-person plural – ‘they’, ‘their’, ‘theirs’ – even though it obviously does not agree in number, on the grounds that instances of its use in that way go back to the sixteenth century. If you think for a moment of some of the truly awful things people have been doing for centuries, you will realize that time alone is not reason enough. As a copy-editor you must always think about the most appropriate usage in the context.

Using both the masculine and feminine singulars is clumsy if done repeatedly, but it is a good solution when the occurrence is occasional. Be careful, however, because there are contexts where gender is relevant. Medical texts are a good example: some conditions occur only

40 *Copy-editing*

in men and some only in women. In many texts, changing singular nouns to plurals does not affect the author's voice or meaning, and precludes problems with pronouns and possessives: notice how often 'authors' is used in this text for just that reason. And notice, too, that the noun can be used in both the singular and the plural, just not in the same sentence.

The indefinite pronoun may seem more difficult, but think how the author is using it. For example, whereas 'every one' written as two words is always singular, 'everyone' and 'everybody' are usually singular but can be used as a plural:

Everyone [i.e., all the people] found their way out of the tunnel.

Similarly, 'no one' is always singular, but the context – both the surrounding words and the intended meaning – will determine whether 'none' should be singular or plural:

None of the money was lost. None of the men and women were forgotten.

Every time you are faced with the issue of an indefinite noun or pronoun think until you find the best solution; it will not always be the same one.

'WAS' OR 'WERE'?

Both 'was' and 'were' are the past tense of 'to be'; they indicate something that has happened and, as we have seen, must agree in number with the subject. However, when 'to be' is used to indicate something that has *not* happened – a hypothesis, or something imagined or wished – only 'were' can be used and it agrees with both singular and plural subjects.

Don was a guest at the party. Mark and Simon were guests at the same party.

It happened.

Don wished he were at the party. He wished Mark and Simon were there too.

It hasn't happened.

When a hypothesis is introduced, the conclusion uses the conditional form:

If all politicians were pacifists, there would be fewer wars.

In the last two examples the first use of the verb ‘to be’ is in the subjunctive mood. Many people are unaware of the subjunctive mood and use ‘was’ in their speech, and some people argue that since this is the way people speak, we should allow it in writing. By now you know that is not reason enough. By all means, let authors use ‘was’ in their characters’ dialogue, but elsewhere make the distinction between what has and has not happened. As editors, we are trying to make the text clear to the reader, and we should use all the means available. If an author questions such a change, explain that you are merely correcting the grammar. To authors of English Language Teaching books, you could tactfully point out that it makes no sense to ignore the subjunctive when students understand its use in their native language.

The dangling participle and similar constructions

Starting a sentence with a present participle (the ‘-ing’ form of a verb) can help the rhythm of a paragraph, but there are dangers. The first is that authors sometimes neglect to connect the verb to the subject:

Being afraid of heights, a holiday in the mountains was not what I wanted.

The holiday is not afraid of heights, I am:

Being afraid of heights, I did not want a holiday in the mountains.

The second danger is that authors start lots of sentences with participles and the text becomes as monotonous as a ringing bell – ing, ing, ing – and difficult to understand because too many sentences are inverted from their usual order. Do not fall into the trap of changing the structure of all such sentences – that would be monotonous too; allow such inversions occasionally, so that they help to create a balanced rhythm in the text.

The same displacement can occur between other verb forms and the subject.

Based on the latest information, we drew an accurate map.

‘We’ are not based on the information, the map is:

We drew an accurate map based on the latest information.

42 *Copy-editing*

I found this next example in a cookery book, and it is now my favourite example of disjuncture between a prepositional phrase and the subject:

Of all the countries in the Middle East, allspice is used most in Turkey.

Misplaced modifiers

It is not uncommon to misplace modifiers when speaking, and authors may make their characters do this to give them verisimilitude. In other circumstances, ensure that adjectives and adverbs are placed so that they modify the right word or phrase. For example:

He only signs cheques on Thursday

means he doesn't do anything else on that day.

He signs cheques only on Thursday

and

He signs cheques on Thursday only

mean that Thursday is the only day on which he signs cheques.

Only he signs cheques on Thursday

means that no one else signs cheques on Thursday.

Exercise 2.1, focusing on the types of grammatical issues explained above

Brief

This text is from a wildlife newsletter for children aged 8–10. Read it to get a feeling for the author's style and to assess the problems it presents so that you can determine how to handle them. You should, of course, edit for consistency, spelling and punctuation as well as basic grammar.

The common frog grows up to 8 cm in length and has a smooth moist skin. Usually a yellowish brown, skin colours vary a lot, often including oranges, greens, red or even blue. A frog has an obvious

Grammar and punctuation 43

hump of their back and moves by hops, jumps and leaps. Toads have rougher, drier, warty skin and tend to crawl. 5

A frog has distinctive large eyes that stick up so they can see out of the water while their bodies are submerged. They have very good eyesight and can detect even the slightest movement from a unsuspecting creature. Using their long sticky tongue at high speed, their prey is quickly snapped up, they will eat almost anything that moves but their favourite food are snails and slugs. Frogs don't really have teeth, just small pegs in their jaws to stop their prey escaping. When they have an animal in their mouths, they squash it between their tongue and eyeballs (which can be drawn down into the head) to make them easier to swallow. 10 15

When it's warmer and the days are getting longer, frogs emerge from hibernation, crawling out from the bottom of ponds and from under rocks. In the relative safety of the pond a male tries to attract a mate. Slightly smaller and darker than the females, you can identify the males by the bluish tinge to their throats. Males climb on to a female's back and hang on with their front legs until she is ready to lay her eggs. The wait may be days or even weeks, and the male has special rough black swellings (called 'nuptial pads') on their thumbs that help them to hang on. Only a few of the 2,000 eggs the female lays will hatch into tadpoles. 20 25

The mass of black eggs, called frogspawn, have a jelly coating and are a very tasty and nutritious meal for fish, water beetles and

44 *Copy-editing*

dragonfly nymphs. The frogspawn floats on the surface of the water, warmed by the sun, and the tadpoles finally hatch after two to four weeks. Insects or fish not only eat frogspawn but also tadpoles, which try to hide among the weeds. 30

Tadpoles start life as vegetarians, mainly eating algae and plants, but after about seven weeks they start eating insects. It has gills so that it can breathe underwater. Until they are about four weeks old, the gills can be seen on the outside of the tadpole's body. Then the gills are absorbed into the body. The tadpole grows hind legs, then front ones, and finally loses its tail. After 12 weeks, with all four legs and the ability to breathe air, the tiny froglet climbs out of the pond to find a safe place on land to spend the rest of the summer. 35

From *Wildwatch* Scotland, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Spring 2004

EXERCISE FOLLOW-UP

Readers of this age will understand the use of the singular or the plural noun to represent all the individuals in the species, so you can use both forms – just not in the same sentence. A frog has, and frogs have, eyes and legs, but you had to decide whether ‘frogs’ have ‘mouths’ and ‘throats’ or ‘a mouth’ and ‘a throat’. The model answer shows the fewest changes to the author’s text that are compatible with clarity.

There were some errors that had to be corrected. The change to ‘and can be’ in lines 2–3 makes it clear that the other colours are not part of the yellowish brown, and ‘oranges’ and ‘greens’ are made singular for consistency with the form for all the other colours mentioned. After you solved the problem of the dangling modifier in lines 9–10, you needed to divide the run-on sentence into two. Changing ‘really’ in line 11 to ‘real’ and moving it to precede ‘teeth’ in line 12 improves precision, and changing ‘them’ to ‘it’ in line 15 makes the pronoun agree with the noun to which it refers.

The third sentence in paragraph 3 (line 19) begins with a dangling adverbial phrase; the reader is, presumably, not smaller and darker than a female frog. You could have revised this sentence in different ways, but it is easy to dispose of the phrase ‘you can identify’, as the author does not involve the reader directly elsewhere.

In the fourth paragraph, as well as making the verbs in lines 26–7 agree with the singular ‘mass’, you needed to delete the repeated ‘and’ at the end of line 26 and ensure that in line 30 ‘not only’ modifies the noun, not the verb. For the same reason, you should have transposed ‘mainly’ and ‘eating’ in line 32. Replacing the pronoun ‘they’ with the noun ‘tadpoles’ at the beginning of the next sentence resolves the problem of the dangling prepositional phrase.

There was no problem with the subjunctive in that exercise, but it will occur in others.

Relative pronouns

Relative pronouns introduce a clause that qualifies the preceding noun or pronoun. ‘That’ is called the defining, or restrictive, relative pronoun: it introduces a clause that defines, restricts the meaning of, or identifies the preceding noun:

There are many books in this room. The books that are on the table belong to the library.

Some of the books belong to the library, and the clause introduced by ‘that’ identifies them. Used as a relative pronoun, ‘that’ cannot be preceded by a comma; it can, however, often be omitted from a sentence without affecting the meaning:

The book that he was reading belonged to Mike.

The book he was reading belonged to Mike.

‘Which’ is called the non-defining, or non-restrictive, relative pronoun. Preceded by a comma, it introduces a clause that adds information about the preceding noun or pronoun. The clause must be followed by a comma when it comes between the subject and the remainder of the sentence.

The books, which are on the table, belong to the library.

This sentence tells us that all the books belong to the library, and the

46 *Copy-editing*

clause introduced by ‘, which’ adds information about their location. The clause is not essential to the identification of the books or to the grammatical structure of the sentence; it can be dropped without changing the meaning of the main clause:

The books belong to the library.

Many people use ‘which’ instead of ‘that’ and claim that the context makes the meaning clear. Sometimes it does, but why make the reader work any more than necessary to receive the author’s message? ‘That’ and ‘, which’ give the desired precision instantly, and avoid ambiguity. Most rules can be bent, and you need to be flexible in applying them too. For example, if ‘that’ appears nearby in the sentence as a determiner, an author might want to use ‘which’ as the relative pronoun:

The work that he did on that project ...

or

The work which he did on that project ...

When there is no ambiguity and it makes the sentence flow better, it is an acceptable choice. Copy-editing is about thinking and making appropriate choices, not merely following rules.

These relative pronouns are used for objects and animals. In introducing clauses referring to people, ‘who’ is the defining relative pronoun – the equivalent of ‘that’ – and ‘, who’ is the non-defining relative pronoun – the equivalent of ‘, which’.

The men who had worked hard were given a holiday.

Only those men got a holiday; the men who had not worked hard did not get a holiday.

The men, who had worked hard, were given a holiday.

All the men were given a holiday; they all had worked hard. Another way of introducing this clause would be:

The men, all of whom had worked hard, were given a holiday.

When a preposition precedes the relative pronoun, use ‘whom’.

Exercise 2.2, focusing on relative pronouns
Brief

Read or skim the article first to hear the author's voice and to assess the problems before you edit and mark up the text. The exercise focuses on the use of relative pronouns, but you must also correct errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation and consistency.

House style

- -ise for verbs
 - i.c. for headings
-

THE STATE OF OUR HEALTH

The NHS is always in the news. There is a cycle of articles about the seemingly endless reorganisations and restructurings; the long hours and the poor pay which results in people not entering the medical profession or leaving it quickly for private practise or better conditions abroad; the closure of wards because there aren't enough doctors and nurses; the lack of beds; the patients on trolleys in corridors where they lie untended for hours; the waiting lists; the post-code lottery. People can hardly be blamed for wondering whether you can get into a hospital if you need to and whether they'll get good care if they do.

Not As Bad As We Feared?

Visiting a close friend in hospital recently, he told me how hard everyone had worked to treat not only his medial condition but also to make him feel comfortable. There was the consultant who tried to alay his fears before the surgery by explaining what was about to happen. It had been the middle of the night and my friend was very

48 *Copy-editing*

weak from the loss of blood, he said, and could only remember what she said vaguely but her manner comforting. She came to see him the next day to reassure him that the operation had gone well. The nurses who, of course, gave him to his medications and the aides who saw to all his other needs, from smoothing the bedclothes to bringing his meals, were all efficient and personable. Everything was great, he told me, until our mutual friend Ted had turned up and started on about the resurgence of MRA, an infection which had been rampant in the early 2000s and could kill you. My friend hadn't known about it before and now was watching the cleaners like an eagle, checking that the nurse was wearing gloves when they changed his bandages, wondering if the plates had been sterilized and the aides washed their hands. Instead of believing the hospital was the right place for his recuperation, he now wanted to go home as soon as possible. His situation is so far from unique that action is finally being taken.

Are We Dreaming?

The government which knows it stands to lose many of its supporters if they don't produce a strategy to cope with the current problems has made a number of important decisions. Hospitals which fail to achieve the minimum standard will be told not only what their failings are, but also given funding to remedy them. Recognising that the rise in the spread of infections is a result of poor hygiene, money will be earmarked for employing additional cleaners. Other new policies which apply to all hospitals were announced by a man who had earned the public's confidence as

Minister for Scientific Advancement and is the new Minsiter for
 Health: Robin Natiramas. Signs will be placed in appropriate places 45
 to remind all staff, including doctors and nurses, to wash their hands
 and to wear and dispose of gowns and gloves appropriately. Senior
 staff in all departments will check that the proper procedures are
 being followed, particularly by new or temporary staff who might
 not be familiar with the new guidelines. A expert team of public- 50
 health inspectors will make unannounced visits to inspect kitchens
 where dirty surfaces, inefficient dishwashers and unrefrigerated
 food could lead to major disasters. Funds will be provided for
 rebuilding every hospital which is more than forty years old this
 year so that they will come up to the standard set out in the NHS 55
 Reform Act 2035.

EXERCISE FOLLOW-UP

The headings could have been marked A and B rather than in the way they are shown on the model answer, as long as you got the relationships right. The list is left embedded. If you did extract it, it should have been bulleted rather than numbered because the sequence of points is irrelevant and there is no indication that they will be referred to later.

There were choices elsewhere too. You could have decided to use the second-person singular throughout the last sentence in the first paragraph, but there are fewer changes the way I've done it. Perhaps you found another way to make the subject agree with the verb in line 13 (e.g. 'I visited . . . and he') and you may have decided to use 'thinking' or 'feeling' instead of 'believing' in line 30. You might have chosen to keep the present participle in line 40 and alter the second clause to 'the government will earmark'. There were, of course, no choices in correcting spelling, making tenses agree, or

50 *Copy-editing*

using the relative pronouns correctly – with one exception: you could have queried the author to find out if Ted was the only friend he or she shared with the man in hospital; if so, you would need commas around ‘Ted’.

Punctuation

Were you taught at school to put a comma where you pause for breath? Well, forget it. Punctuation is not a function of the respiratory system. It does not equate to breathing; it guides the reader through the sentence, signalling groupings of words, changes of tone, and relationships between clauses. The application of punctuation is, as you would expect, governed by rules, but personal taste also plays a role. When you edit, apply the rules in a way that’s consistent with the author’s style. A lot of information follows, and I suggest that you read it and reread it so that you absorb as much as you can; it’ll always be here for review.

The comma

Of all punctuation, the comma has the greatest number of jobs. It helps readers navigate through sentences by separating words, phrases and clauses to avoid ambiguity, and by acting as a substitute for words that would otherwise be repeated. We will examine its use with numerals in Chapter 4; here we will concentrate on words.

LISTS AND THE SERIAL COMMA

The comma separating items in a list is a substitute for ‘and’ or ‘or’.

He could buy apples, pears, bananas, peaches and [or] oranges.

We went swimming, rode horses, walked in the woods and played tennis.

Some authors always use the conjunctions instead of the comma, and it would be wrong to alter their style. Sometimes authors who usually use commas in lists use conjunctions instead, for emphasis, and it would be wrong to change their intended tone.

To use a comma before ‘and’ in a list seems redundant, but sometimes it is necessary to avoid ambiguity.

He bought books published by Hammer, Steel, Iron and Tack and Nail.

Is one publisher Iron and Tack and the other Nail, or is one Iron and the other Tack and Nail? The handy little comma will make it clear.

The comma before the final ‘and’ in a list is called the serial comma. It is sometimes called the Oxford comma, because it is the house style of Oxford University Press, one of the oldest publishers in Britain. Some authors and some organizations use it whether or not it is needed to avoid ambiguity; it’s their individual or house style. Their argument seems to be that if you always use it, you won’t have to think about using it to avoid ambiguity. Of course, if the serial comma is the house style of the organization you are working for, or the consistent style of an author, use it; but remember that thinking is what you should be doing all the time.

A list of adjectives preceding a noun should be separated by commas if each adjective modifies only the noun. The test is whether the sense permits you to put ‘and’ between them:

The Martins were a cheerful, musical family.

The Martins were a cheerful family and a musical family.

Do not use a comma after one adjective in a list that modifies subsequent adjectives combined with a noun:

The director advocated a radical economic policy.

The economic policy was radical.

MAIN CLAUSES

A main clause has a subject and a verb, and can stand on its own as a sentence, which is why it is also called an independent clause. Often, two independent clauses joined by a conjunction do not require any punctuation:

You will go to the north and I will go to the south.

He was out of breath but at least he was not late.

There is no change of tone, no added emphasis in the second clause.

However, a comma is used to separate such clauses when it is necessary to avoid ambiguity:

52 *Copy-editing*

He took care of the sales, and his brother took care of the purchases.

or to sharpen contrast:

They tried every possible solution, but it was to no avail.

No comma is needed before a conjunction when the subject of the first clause is implied in the second:

The cat jumped out of the window and chased the dog.

But when the verb or a modified noun is implied, it is replaced by a comma:

The children were frightened; the parents, calm.

Their first choice was a trip to the seaside; their second, a day by the pool.

SUBORDINATE CLAUSES

A subordinate clause cannot stand on its own, which is why it is also called a dependent clause. Just to add to the terminology, it is also a parenthetical clause and can be separated from the main clause by parentheses or dashes. We'll stick to commas for the present.

The car was relatively new, purchased only five months earlier.

In this sentence 'the car was relatively new' is the main clause and 'purchased only five months earlier' is the subordinate clause.

When a subordinate clause follows the main clause, as above, it is preceded by a comma; when it interrupts the main clause, it needs a comma at the end too:

The car, purchased only five months earlier, was relatively new.

Commas are often used after a subordinate clause that precedes a main clause:

Purchased only five months earlier, the car was relatively new.

This is also the case when the subordinate clause begins with an adverb (an adverbial clause):

When she burst into the room, David looked surprised.

A comma is not needed after a dependent phrase beginning with a preposition:

Under his management the company increased productivity.

In 2005 we had a holiday in Italy.

except when it is necessary to avoid even momentary ambiguity:

In the valley below, the farms were well protected.

In the morning, news of the truce reached the final outpost.

However, a comma is usually needed after a dependent clause beginning with a preposition:

If it continues to rain, the village will be flooded.

On reaching the station, she sighed with relief.

As we have seen above, a comma is used before a non-defining relative pronoun introducing a clause:

He chose the earrings, which matched the colour of her eyes.

and before and after the clause when it interrupts the sentence:

She asked the child, who was standing next to her, to open the door.

But a clause introduced by a defining relative pronoun does not have any commas:

He chose the earrings that matched the colour of her eyes.

She asked the child who was standing next to her to open the door.

APPOSITIVES

Like subordinate clauses but without the verbs, appositives are words or phrases in a sentence that add information about a preceding noun or noun phrase.

Anne Boleyn, the daughter of Elizabeth Howard and Sir Thomas Boleyn, was the second wife of Henry VIII.

My brother, Michael, will be best man.

This construction means that I have one brother and his name is Michael.

My brother Michael will be best man.

54 *Copy-editing*

This construction means that I have more than one brother and I am identifying the one who will be best man.

There can be a succession of appositives, each set off by commas:

Mr Weatherby, collector of medieval glassware, well-known philanthropist, amateur sleuth, was photographed arriving at the celebration.

ADVERBS

Commas usually should not be used to separate adverbs and short adverbial phrases from the subject:

Today it rained.

During the interval we had a drink.

Slowly flows the Don.

That said, there are some adverbs that need a comma when they begin a sentence, such as ‘moreover’ and ‘already’. ‘However’ is set off by a comma or commas at any position in a sentence when it is used to indicate contrast:

However, he tried to reword the report to make it sound more positive.

He tried to reword the report, however, to make it sound more positive.

but not when it is used to mean ‘in whatever way’:

However he tried to reword the report, the negative result was clear.

INTERJECTIONS

We all do it when we speak: add words and short phrases that express emotion or are verbal pauses, ranging from ‘oh’ and ‘well’ to ‘you see’, and ‘ya know whad I mean’. When authors do it in their text, use commas to set off these interjections:

‘Well, Herbie was really tired, you see,’ said Raj, ‘so I said I’d do the job.’

ADDRESSEES AND SPEAKERS

Commas are usually used to set off the character addressed from the rest of the dialogue at any position in the sentence:

'Mrs Adams, someone left this package for you.'

'C'mon, dog, let's go for a run.'

although there are times when the sense – and the sound – preclude them. Look at and listen to the differences here:

'Hey, you!'

'Hey you, get outta there!'

'Hey, you get outta there!'

Commas are also used in dialogue to separate the speaker from the speech:

The ticket seller said, 'The train for Brighton is waiting on platform 12.'

'The train for Brighton', the ticket seller said, 'is waiting on platform 12.'

Notice that the comma after 'Brighton' is outside the quotation mark, as it is not part of the quoted sentence. This will be explained further in the section 'Quotation marks' below.

Although some authors like to use the colon to separate speakers from their dialogue, this can be done only when the speakers are identified before the dialogue begins, as in the first example above. There would then be an inconsistency in style when the speaker is interposed in the speech, as in the second example above. You can point this out to an author, but if he or she prefers the inconsistency, perhaps arguing that the colon adds more emphasis or simply that it is a stylistic choice, you must accept it.

The semicolon

After all the ways to use a comma, it is a relief to encounter the semicolon. It has only two functions.

- Stronger than a comma, it separates lists or phrases that are already punctuated by commas:

She bought vanilla, chocolate and mint ice cream; raspberry, strawberry and blackberry sorbet; and macaroons and vanilla wafers.

There were suits of mail standing like ghosts in armour here and there; fantastic carvings brought from monkish cloisters; rusty weapons of various kinds; distorted figures in china, wood, iron and ivory; tapestry and strange furniture that might have been designed in dreams.

56 *Copy-editing*

I like to quote Dickens, as well as more recent authors, when people say sentences have to be short to be understood. The example above and the two below are all from *The Old Curiosity Shop*.

- Weaker than a full stop, the semicolon joins independent clauses that are not joined by a conjunction. A full stop could be used, but the author is emphasizing the close relationship of the two clauses by holding them together.

The haggard aspect of the little old man was wonderfully suited to the place; he might have groped among old churches and tombs and deserted houses, and gathered all the spoils with his own hands.

When a semicolon is used between independent clauses joined by a conjunction, it indicates more of a separation, change of tone or emphasis than a comma in this position would.

But her dwarfish spouse still smoked his cigar and drank his rum without heeding her; and it was not until the sun had sometime risen and the activity and noise of the city day were rife in the street that he deigned to recognize her presence by any word or sign.

The colon

The colon, as mentioned above, can be used to introduce dialogue, and is usually used for this purpose in scripts:

Juliet: O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?

It can introduce a list or example, which is done so frequently throughout this text I don't need to do it again here.

When it is used between two main clauses, it establishes a causal relationship, moving from cause to effect, from premiss to explanation or conclusion, from stimulus to response:

Dr Pavlov rang the bell: the dogs salivated.

It is never necessary to use a dash after a colon in modern texts.

Full stop, exclamation mark and question mark

A full stop ends a sentence, even if it is only a single word intended as a complete statement. Really.

Full stops are rarely used in abbreviations composed of capital letters, whether they are acronyms (UNICEF, OPEC) or initialisms (BBC, UK, EU). In British usage a full stop is placed at the end of an abbreviation: a word that has been shortened by omitting the ending: ‘abbr.’, ‘co.’, ‘inc.’. It is not used at the end of a contraction (a word shortened by using at least the first and the last letters): ‘Mr’, ‘Mrs’, ‘Dr’, ‘Ltd’. In American practice the full stop is still commonly used after both abbreviations and contractions.

Exclamation marks are used appropriately after words, phrases or sentences that express surprise, strong feelings, or raised voices. In non-fiction and literary works there is no reason to use more than one at the end of any sentence; a practice common in comic books. Scattered too freely through a text – in other words, overused – exclamation marks fail to express anything but may succeed in annoying the reader.

When doesn’t a question mark come at the end of a question?

- When it’s an indirect question, one that is incorporated into a statement:

He asked why cats like cream.

- When it’s a rhetorical question, one that doesn’t require an answer because it presupposes that there is only one possible answer:

What cat doesn’t like cream.

Will you please leave by the nearest exit.

Here, an author might choose to use a full stop instead of the question mark to emphasize this point or to indicate a tone of voice.

Similarly, sometimes authors use question marks with what appear to be statements to reflect the character’s tone of voice:

You didn’t eat the pie? You gave it to the dog?

After all that, I bet you’re just aching to do an exercise.

58 *Copy-editing*

Exercise 2.3, focusing on baseline punctuation**Brief**

As usual, read through the text first to get a feeling for the author's style. Then punctuate and correct any errors in grammar and spelling. When you are finished with the first paragraph, read it to see if your punctuation has given you a better understanding of the author's rhythm, then continue. Read the entire text over and make any final corrections before checking the model answer.

House style

- Use the serial comma only to avoid ambiguity.
-

On a fine summer morning when the leaves were warm under the sun and the more industrious bees abroad diving into every blue and red cup which could possibly be considered a flower Anne was sitting at the back window of her mother's portion of the house measuring out lengths of worsted for a fringed rug that she was making which lay about three-quarter finished beside her the work though chromatically brilliant was tedious a hearth-rug was a thing which nobody worked at from morning to night it was taken up and put down it was in the chair on the floor across the handrail under the bed kicked here kicked there rolled away in the closet brought out again and so on more capriciously perhaps than any other homemade article nobody was expected to finish a rug within a calculable period and the wools of the beginning became faded and historical before the end was reached a sense of this inherent nature of worsted-work rather than idleness led Anne to look rather frequently from the open casement

5
10
15

Grammar and punctuation 59

The girl glanced at the down and the sheep for no particular reason
 the steep margin of turf and daisies rising above the roofs chimneys
 apple trees and church tower of the hamlet around her bounded the
 view from her position and it was necessary to look somewhere 20
 when she raised her head. While thus engaged in working and
 stopping her attention was attracted by the sudden rising and running
 away of the sheep squatted on the down and there succeeded sounds
 of a heavy tramping over the hard sod which the sheep had quitted
 the tramp being accompanied by a metallic jingle turning her eyes 25
 further she beheld two cavalry soldiers on bulky grey chargers armed
 and accoutred throughout ascending the down at a point to the left
 where the incline was comparatively easy the burnished chains
 buckles and plates of their trappings shown like little looking-glasses
 and the blue red and white about them was unsubdued by weather or 30
 wear

The two trooper rode proudly on as if nothing less than crowns and
 empires ever concerned their magnificent minds they reached that
 part of the down which lay just in front of her where they came to a
 halt in another minute there appeared behind them a group 35
 containing some half dozen more of the same sort these came on
 halted and dismounted likewise

Two of the soldiers then walked some distance onward together
 when one stood still the other advancing further and stretching a
 white line of tape between them two more of the men marched to 40
 another outlying point where they made marks in the ground thus

60 *Copy-editing*

they walked about and took distances according to some
preconcerted scheme.

At the end of this systematic proceeding one solitary horsemen – a
commissioned officer if his uniform could be judged rightly at this 45
distance – rode up the down went over the ground looked at what
the others had done and seemed to think that it was good and then
the girl heard yet louder tramps and clankings and she beheld rising
from where the others had risen a whole column of calvary in
marching order at a distance behind these came a cloud of dust 50
enveloping more and more troops their arms and acoutrements
reflecting the sun through the haze in faint flashes stars and streaks of
light the whole body approached slowly towards the plateau at the
top of the down

Anne threw down her work and letting her eyes remain on the 55
nearing masses of cavalry the worseds getting entangled as they
would said ‘Mother, mother come here here’s such a fine sight what
does it mean what can they be going to do up there’

From Thomas Hardy, *The Trumpet-Major*

EXERCISE FOLLOW-UP

I really enjoyed the phrase ‘up the down’ and hope you didn’t change it to ‘downs’; if you had been in doubt, you should have checked in a dictionary. You would not have been technically wrong if you used full stops where the answer shows colons or semicolons, but compare the differences in the rhythm of the paragraph and the relationship between clauses and you will understand Hardy’s choices. You could make a case for commas around ‘rather than idleness’ but they are

not essential and change the tone. I left the dashes in the text because we have not yet discussed them. We're approaching them now.

Hyphens and en and em rules

These three mid-line punctuation marks have some similarities and, as you would expect, major differences. First, learn to distinguish them visually. Their relative sizes are the same in any typeface:

- the hyphen is a short, relatively thick mark;
- the en rule is longer and thinner; it measures an en in a given type size, so an 8-point en is shorter than a 14-point en;
- the em rule is twice as long as the en and the same weight (just as thin), and its length is also relative to its type size.

THE HYPHEN

If you are a proofreader, you won't be surprised to hear that there are two kinds of hyphen: the soft and the hard. They look identical but have different uses. The soft hyphen is used for word breaks at the end of a line of justified type. Because authors are usually asked not to justify type, editors should not see any soft hyphens. However, authors don't always do as requested. If you have the e-file, you can unjustify the type before you begin work and all the soft hyphens will disappear. If you don't have this opportunity and have to work on hard copy of justified text, mark soft hyphens for deletion because you cannot be sure whether they are in the e-file as soft or hard.

The hard hyphen is so called because it remains wherever the word comes on the line. If a hyphenated word has to be broken at the end of the line, the break comes at the hyphen. This type of word break can appear in an unjustified typescript; when it does, you mark it with the 'leave unchanged', or *stet*, symbol. You can use the dotted line under the hyphen but I prefer the circled tick above it (used only as a margin mark in proofreading), as I think it stands out more clearly.

When you need to add a hyphen to hard copy, just draw it in between the words if there is space, with a caret mark (^) under it, or above the line with an insert mark between the words. Draw only the hyphen, not the proof-correction symbol, as you are marking up a manuscript, not a page proof. Unless a rule between words is marked otherwise, the typesetter assumes it is a hyphen.