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Puzzling Pronouns

Think about the following sentence:

Nicholas went to see the lion and he started roaring.

Who is roaring? You can't tell, because it's not clear to whom the pronoun *he* refers. Because of this, the sentence is ambiguous, or open to more than one meaning. Here is one way to make the sentence clear:

The lion started roaring when Nicholas went to see him.

Directions: Place a check (✓) next to the CLEAR sentence in each group. We did the first one for you.

1. **a** _____ When I dropped the vase on the table, it broke.
b ☒ The vase broke when I dropped it on the table.
2. **a** _____ Jenny emptied the trash out of her car and washed it.
b _____ Jenny washed her car and emptied the trash out of it.
3. **a** _____ Aaron's brother wondered how tall Aaron was going to be.
b _____ Aaron's brother wondered how tall he was going to be.
4. **a** _____ The teachers assured the students, "You will all pass the test on Friday."
b _____ The teachers assured the students that they would all pass the test on Friday.
5. **a** _____ Evan called Jon every day when he was at camp.
b _____ When Jon was at camp, Evan called him every day.

Directions: Revise the following sentences so that their meanings are clear. We did the first one for you.

6. Noelle and Kayla are twins, but she has always been taller.

Noelle and Kayla are twins, but Noelle has always been taller.

7. Marissa gave Shauna a new book that she couldn't put down.

8. The sweatshirt that Lucas borrowed from Victor is in his backpack.

9. My aunts blamed my uncles for their loss at the family volleyball tournament.

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Unnecessary Commas Between Subjects and Verbs

Consider the following sentence: *Laura is tall.*

Laura is the subject and *is* is the verb, and **a comma should never be placed between a subject and its verb.**

But when the subject of a sentence is long, it can be easy to get confused and place a comma where it doesn't belong. For example:

Incorrect: *The yellow shirt with the blue stripes that I bought last summer, has faded a lot.*

"The yellow shirt with the blue stripes that I bought last summer" is all part of the subject of this sentence and "has faded" is the verb. So there should NOT be a comma between *summer* and *has*.

Incorrect: *Anyone who arrives before the store opens, will have to wait outside, regardless of the weather.*

Here, "Anyone who arrives before the store opens" is the subject and "will have to wait" is the verb. The comma after *opens* has got to go!

Directions: Read each pair of sentences. Place a ✓ in front of the one in which commas are used correctly.

1. a. ____ Alisa is going to meet us at the restaurant.
b. ____ Alisa, is going to meet us at the restaurant.
2. a. ____ Your story about the hairy, poisonous spiders gave me nightmares!
b. ____ Your story about the hairy, poisonous spiders, gave me nightmares!
3. a. ____ The shop on Maple Street that you wanted to visit is closed today, but it will be open tomorrow.
b. ____ The shop on Maple Street that you wanted to visit, is closed today, but it will be open tomorrow.
4. a. ____ All of Jared's friends from his old neighborhood, will be at the party.
b. ____ All of Jared's friends from his old neighborhood will be at the party.

Directions: Cross out the commas that do not belong in the sentences below.

5. Zachary, put up his tent, climbed inside, and went to sleep.
6. My sister Sarah, stayed home with the flu four days last week, so she has a lot of catching up to do at school.
7. The movie that you're talking about, sounds familiar, but I'm not sure whether I saw it.
8. The best event at camp last summer, was the color war, followed by the boat-building competition.
9. Everyone who was there, witnessed something very strange, but they are all afraid to talk about it.

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The Worksheet on Redundancy Worksheet

To keep your writing clear and effective, it is important to avoid *redundancy*, or unnecessary repetition. For an example, check out the title of this worksheet! Here is another example:

Redundant: In my opinion, I think the Seahawks are the best team.

Nonredundant Option 1: In my opinion, the Seahawks are the best team.

Nonredundant Option 2: I think the Seahawks are the best team.

In the first sentence, *In my opinion* and *I think* mean the same thing. It is not necessary to use both.

Directions: Cross out the redundancies—that is, the unnecessary repetitions—in the the following sentences. We've done the first one for you.

1. Shane's alarm was set for 7 a.m. ~~in the morning~~.
2. The burglar returned back to the scene of the crime.
3. At the end of the concert, the crowd rose to its feet and gave the musicians a standing ovation.
4. We all need to cooperate together or we will never make any progress.
5. For most people, riding in a hot-air balloon is a rare, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.
6. The troops advanced forward toward the village.
7. Have you ever at any time spilled cranberry juice on a white carpet?
8. Many famous celebrities attended the Grammy Awards.
9. We asked Tanya to do some advance planning.

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Master Verb-Tense Consistency

A verb's *tense* indicates when the action that it describes takes place—in the past (*I ran*), in the present (*I run*), or in the future (*I will run*).

The verb tense you use should remain *consistent*, or the same, throughout sentences, throughout paragraphs, and throughout the entire body of whatever you are writing—unless you have a good reason to change it. For example:

Incorrect: During tomorrow's performance, we **will dance** and **sang**.
(*Will dance* is in the future tense, and *sang* is in the past tense—and there is no good reason for the shift.)

Correct: During tomorrow's performance, we **will dance** and **sing**.
(Both verbs are in the future tense.)

So what IS a good reason to change the verb tense you are using? Change tenses when you are describing events that happen at different times. For example:

Correct: My mom **drove** an SUV last year, but now she **drives** a small hybrid car.
(You are describing the car that your mom previously drove, and you are also describing the car she currently drives. The verb tenses should be different.)

Correct: Tomorrow we **are going** to a baseball game, and yesterday we **went** to a hockey game.
(You are describing what will happen in the future, and you are also describing something that happened in the past.)

Directions: Rewrite the sentences below so that the verb tenses are correct. Remember that in some sentences, verb tenses can be different.

1. Ariana Grande is my favorite singer now, but when I was in fifth grade, I like Justin Bieber. _____

2. I need to go to the dentist tomorrow because I miss my appointment today. _____

3. When my dad was in middle school, he surfs with his friends every day after school. _____

4. The school dance was a catastrophe. First, we dance to bad music. Then the photographer did not show up. After that, I will spill chocolate cake all over my dress. Then my best friend slips on the cake and twisted his ankle. What a nightmare! _____

5. When I missed the layup, I will lose the basketball game for my team. My teammates were so cool about it, though. They will tell me to stop beating myself up and that I would get a chance to redeem myself at the next game. _____

Directions: Rewrite the paragraph below so that the tense of the verbs is consistent. If you shift the verb tense at any point, make sure you have a good reason for doing so!

Storm clouds darkened the blue sky as I ride my bike home from the park. I had never seen clouds like that before, and the wind will shake the trees violently. I couldn't seem to pedal fast enough. Up ahead, I saw my house and breathe a sigh of relief. As soon as I walked in the door, I knew something was up. My mother explains that news reports will be saying that a big storm is coming. Suddenly, I hear a loud pop! Then there was another pop! And another! I will race to look out the window and saw hail the size of golf balls falling all over my street. I am so thankful I made it home before it will start falling!
