Line by Line

HOW TO IMPROVE

Claire Kehrwald Cook

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HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR OWN WRITING

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Manufactured in the United States of America

to Betty Gile

Guiding Genius for a Generation
of Copy Editors

Preface

Like most copy editors, those of us who style manuscripts for the Modern Language Association have had our share of appreciative authors, and not uncommonly they claim that we have taught them something. "I enjoyed being edited by you," one said. "I hadn't learned anything about my writing for years, but this year I did." Another said, "I feel I learned a bit about good prose from comparing the original and improved versions of certain sentences and I appreciate the pedagogic value of the process." Remarks like these ultimately led to this book, but at first they puzzled us. In editing, we apply principles spelled out in many style manuals—principles that our erudite authors, especially the English teachers among them, would be likely to know. Even Homer can nod, of course, and writers preoccupied with content naturally lack an editor's focus of attention. Some of them, pressed for time, may even rely on editors to smooth out the rough spots. But why had these authors learned from us?

In discussing that question at lunch one day, my colleagues and I came to realize what should have been obvious all along, that a knowledge of principles does not necessarily confer the ability to put them into practice. We began to see that our approach to sentence repair involves specialized techniques that writers could profitably train themselves to use. In revising their own writing, they would have advantages denied the copy editor—an awareness of their aims and the freedom to make substantive corrections. If professors of

literature had found our methods instructive, we reasoned, writers in fields less directly concerned with language stood to benefit even more. And so we conceived the notion of this book, a book that would show writers how to edit their own work. Its execution eventually fell to me.

In some seventeen years of editing, at the MLA and elsewhere, I have worked on a wide variety of manuscripts—not only scholarly essays, professional articles, reference guides, and research summaries but also press releases and promotional material, business articles, technical manuals, trade books, and textbooks in such diverse fields as mathematics, engineering, acting, broadcasting, and sociology. I have spent most of my working life rewriting writing, and some of it in training others to do so, and the techniques I describe here adapt to almost any sort of exposition. They should serve all writers, various creative authors aside, who care enough about their style to work at crafting clear, readable sentences—scholars and serious students, certainly, but also those in business, government, and the professions who have to prepare reports, proposals, or presentations. To anyone sufficiently motivated to polish a final draft this book offers ways and means.

Copy editors work line by line on finished manuscripts. They concern themselves with correcting sentences already written. Thus this guide deals not at all with the earlier and broader aspects of composition, such as gathering, ordering, and developing ideas or using examples and setting the tone. It focuses on eliminating the stylistic faults that most often impede reading and obscure meaning. These errors fall into five categories, corresponding to the chapters of this book: (1) needless words, (2) words in the wrong order, (3) equivalent but unbalanced sentence elements, (4) imprecise relations between subjects and verbs and between pronouns and antecedents, and (5) inappropriate punctuation. Punctuation merits inclusion here because it affects the clarity of sentences, but the other mechanics of writing—spelling, capitalization, abbreviations, and so on—lie outside the scope of this guide. However much these details concern professional copy editors, they have little bearing on how sentences work.

Two appendixes supplement the text. The first describes the parts of a sentence and the ways they fit together—the fundamentals of syntax. Those who have only an uneasy grasp of grammar should find this review helpful in following the explanations in the various chapters. Although I discuss grammar in the traditional terms that I am most comfortable with and that are still likely to be the most widely known, I do not mean to oppose or dismiss the newer systems. They simply seem less pertinent to my purpose.

The second appendix presents a glossary of questionable usage. While the dubious constructions it cites are only peripherally detrimental to good prose, writers who care enough about their work to do their own editing will probably want to avoid wording likely to provoke criticism. The concept of "correct English" is controversial, but no one denies the interest in the subject or the prevalence of language watchers ready to pounce on what they consider improprieties. Such flaws stand out like red flags to copy editors committed to upholding conventional standards. Violations can distract discriminating readers from a writer's ideas and may even diminish the writer's authority.

Editors apply their knowledge of syntax and disputed usage in routinely examining sentences for imperfections and making the required adjustments. Automatically checking for stylistic faults is what this book is all about. It is also, I understand, what some computer programs are all about. Colorado State University, for example, has been using such a program in English composition courses. Students type their themes into a word processor, which identifies various kinds of errors, and if they press the SUGGEST button, it offers possible remedies. This program obviously has a lot in common with a copy editor.

Although not many students, so far, have worked with these teaching aids, initial results indicate that those who have had this opportunity do better than control groups restricted to conventional instruction. Unquestionably the program owes its success in part to its one-on-one guidance. Students learn better by seeing their own mistakes highlighted than by doing textbook exercises that may or may not reflect the kinds of errors they are likely to make—just as authors who know the principles of good writing nonetheless learn from reviewing their copy-edited manuscripts. It's hard for writers to apply objective standards to their own work, especially when they are concerned with much more than style. The computer program or the copy editor makes the application for them.

Computerized teaching seems so promising that I naturally wondered whether this book would be obsolete before it got into print. From the practical point of view, of course, the day when every writer has the services of copy-editing software still seems far off. Moreover, impressive as the new word processors are, they must be less efficient than human beings who have absorbed more sophisticated programs. What this book tries to do is to program you to edit sentences, to train you to process your own words. Without buttons and display screens, without any cumbersome and expensive paraphernalia, and with far less chance of going "down," you can instantly react to flabby sentences, dangling modifiers, unbalanced constructions, and errors in subject-verb agreement.

And like a computer, even better than a computer, you will know how to go about eliminating the errors you detect. Neither you nor a computer, however, can be programmed to select the best remedy automatically. The choice here remains a matter of individual judgment based on your objectives and the context in which the error occurs. Thus far at least, there is no mechanized way to take context into account. If, for example, you discover *however* in consecutive sentences, you first have to decide which occurrence to eliminate. You can change one *however* to *but* or to *in contrast* or put the contrasting idea in an *even though* clause. What you do will depend on such considerations as the presence or absence of similar clauses nearby, the incidence of surrounding *buts*, and the structure of adjacent sentences. This book, like a computer's teaching program, can only suggest solutions. It presents revisions as possibilities and often offers alternatives.

Because the flawed sentences that serve as examples appear out of context, the discussions of possible solutions suffer somewhat from artificiality. The poor wording may seem perverse if a better version comes readily to mind, but considerations outside our view may have precluded what looks like the obvious revision. Isolating badly written sentences also compounds the difficulty of deciphering them. Several examples I chose were so muddy that I had to guess at the writers' intentions, and sometimes I could only infer the meaning from the context—a context impractical to reproduce. Thus some of the suggested revisions may appear to differ in sense from the examples. For our purposes, though, these apparent discrepancies do not greatly matter. Since we are concerned here with how writers can edit their own work, you should be looking at the examples as if you yourself had written them. Presumably you would know what you intended and could judge the validity of the changes you contemplate. Your revision might differ in nuance from your first version because you didn't initially succeed in saying precisely what you meant or because the slight change in meaning or emphasis makes no difference to you and permits a much improved sentence. Certainly as a copy editor I do not reword with the abandon I do here, and if I do suggest a major change, I ask the author's approval. But in the guise of a writer, I can obviously do as I please. And that, of course, is the guise you should assume in studying the examples and the revisions in this book.

Although I have copied most of the examples verbatim from printed or manuscript sources, I have doctored some to make them intelligible out of context. In these circumstances I have kept the structure that embodies the problem but changed the wording. I also admit to concocting a few examples of common errors when I grew frustrated in looking for suitable prototypes, but these, too, closely

resemble real-life models. In the two appendixes, however, as well as in the Introduction and the chapter on punctuation, I have shamelessly fabricated illustrations to make my points as expeditiously as possible.

In likening this book to a computer program and stressing the semiautomatic aspects of revision, I do not mean to downplay the importance of the individual voice or to imply that edited manuscripts must sound as if they had been composed by machine. This book shows writers how to detect stylistic weaknesses and, without prescribing single remedies, suggests approaches to revision. It leaves ample room for choice and self-expression. Few, I think, would argue that their unique personal styles require leaving awkwardness and ambiguity intact. Those who know the rules but break them for deliberate effect are not the writers this book addresses.

Probably the best way to use this guide is to read through it first without attempting to study it—or even to argue with it along the way, since you may find objections answered later on. You will become familiar with the range of errors it covers and the editorial approach it advocates. If you are still shaky about some of the grammatical concepts, you should be comfortable with them by the time you finish and better equipped to benefit from the book when you take another look at it. You can then profitably return to the pertinent parts as the need arises.

When it comes to giving credit to those who have helped me with this book, I must begin by acknowledging my indebtedness to the authors of several style or usage guides: Jacques Barzun, Theodore M. Bernstein, Wilson Follett, H. W. Fowler, William Strunk, Jr., and E. B. White. When I mention these authors in the text, I am referring to the books that I list as primary references in the Selected Bibliography. These volumes are the most thumb-worn in my library, and the principles of style that I endorse are largely a distillation and synthesis of those they have taught me. In the ideological conflict between orthodox and permissive grammarians, all these authors clearly range on the side of the traditionalists, the side that it behooves an MLA copy editor to honor; but in the body of this book I have drawn on these writers not so much for their pronouncements on usage as for their advice on effective prose. In naming the books that have most influenced me, I am not necessarily recommending them over the competition. Readers who find no mention of their own favorite mentors should not take offense. The literature in this field is vast, and though I have sampled considerably more of it than my list of citations suggests, I am doubtless unfamiliar with many excellent contributions.

I am grateful, too, for the assistance of my family, my friends, and my colleagues at the MLA who furnished examples and acted as

sounding boards for parts of the book during its preparation. Special thanks must go to Thomas Clayton and Walker Gibson, consultant readers for the MLA, who offered constructive advice on a preliminary draft; to Jenny Ruiz and her colleagues in secretarial services, who time and again converted heavily corrected manuscript pages into clean printouts; and to Walter Achtert, director of book publications and research programs at the MLA, who enthusiastically endorsed this project and brought it to the attention of Houghton Mifflin. But I am indebted most of all to Judy Goulding, the managing editor of MLA publications, for getting it under way. She and I planned the book as a joint endeavor, and though in the end the demands on her time prevented her from sharing in the writing, she cleared the way for me, freeing me from my ordinary responsibilities at no little inconvenience to herself. Moreover, she conferred with me at every stage, critically reviewed the entire manuscript, and contributed many useful suggestions. Her help and encouragement have been invaluable.

Finally, I wish to thank my collaborators at Houghton Mifflin not only for their skill and care in processing this book but for their unfailing consideration and tact in dealing with me. I must mention in particular Margery S. Berube, director of editorial operations, and Donna L. Muise, production assistant, who efficiently coordinated the editorial and production activities; editors Kaethe Ellis and David Jost, whose prodigious double-checking repeatedly saved me from myself; and Anne Soukhanov, senior editor, whose gracious and understanding support eased my transition from editor to author.

On Looking at Sentences

Authors whose writing has been professionally edited often marvel at the improvement, apparently regarding a blue pencil as some sort of magic wand. But those of us in the business of wielding that pencil know that most of the wonders we work are the routine adjustments of trained specialists. This book aims at demystifying the copy-editing process, at showing writers how to polish their own prose.

By the time a manuscript accepted for publication is ready for copy-editing, the consulting editor and the author have already attended to whatever major additions, deletions, rearrangements, or new approaches have seemed desirable. Charged with preparing the manuscript for conversion into print, the copy editor, sometimes called a line editor or subeditor, concentrates on the fine points, styling "mechanics" and revising sentences that are unclear, imprecise, awkward, or grammatically incorrect.

The mechanics of style are matters of form, such considerations as spelling, capitalization, treatment of numbers and abbreviations, types of headings, and systems of citation. In a first close reading of the manuscript the copy editor focuses full attention on these routine details and brings them into line with house standards. In addition to specifying the dictionaries and other reference works to follow for mechanics, publishers have guidelines governing the choices where these authorities allow options—between, for example, *adviser* and *advisor, the Third World* and *the third world, two and a half* and *2½*. The

point here is not so much correctness as consistency. Arbitrary variations can be distracting, since they would seem to indicate distinctions where none are intended. Even if house style does not prescribe one of two acceptable alternatives, the copy editor does not allow both to appear indiscriminately but settles on whichever predominates in the manuscript. Conscientious writers, especially if they do not expect the services of copy editors, should similarly verify questionable forms and strive for consistency, but they need no special knowledge to emulate editors in this respect.

Styling mechanics is a painstaking process that leaves little room for paying attention to entire sentences, no less to the argument of the text. Unless you blot out every other consideration, you can glide right over errors and discrepancies. Ideally, therefore, the copy editor devotes a separate close reading—or several readings if time allows—to removing any obstacles to the clarity and grace of sentences. With mechanics out of the way, the editor checks sentences for common structural weaknesses and applies the remedies indicated. It is this procedure that the following chapters describe, for it is here that pumpkins turn into coaches.

Although you can profitably learn to apply editorial techniques to your own writing, you will not be working in quite the same way that copy editors do. You will not have to worry about the author's intentions and sensibilities or about publishing costs and schedules. Copy editors have to guard against distorting the author's meaning or introducing changes that seem arbitrary or inconsistent with the author's tone. Often they cannot do as much as they would like, either because the publisher's budget precludes taking the necessary time or because the author's attitude discourages tampering with the text. Deciding what to alter and what to leave alone, when to revise and when to suggest a revision, involves considerable tact and judgment, and queries and explanations require sensitive wording. In correcting your own work, you have a free hand. You don't need editorial delicacy and diplomacy. You only need editorial skills that will enable you to look objectively at what you have written. If you can master them, you can do more to improve your writing than anyone else can.

To use an editor's techniques, you need, first of all, an editor's knowledge of sentence structure. The line-by-line editor looks at each sentence analytically, seeing its components and inner workings, using grammatical concepts as a set of tools for detecting and eliminating flaws. If you simply recognize that a sentence sounds bad, you can't necessarily pinpoint and correct what's wrong. Like the driver who knows that the car won't start but has no idea what to look for under the dutifully raised hood, you can only fiddle with this and that in hit-or-miss fashion.

Thus any manual of sentence repair must begin by naming parts and their functions. However much composition instructors would like to avoid jargon, they almost always end up using specialized terminology in training students to look at sentences with an eye to revision. In *Errors and Expectations,* a breakthrough text for teachers of basic writing, Mina P. Shaughnessy says that explanations of what ails particular sentences "inevitably involve grammatical as well as semantic concepts and are much easier to give if the student has some knowledge of the parts and basic patterns of the sentence. . . . [A] rudimentary grasp of such grammatical concepts as subject, verb, object, indirect object, modifier, etc. is almost indispensable if *one intends to talk* with students about their sentences."

This guide, of course, addresses writers far more sophisticated than the students in a remedial composition course, but many college graduates, including some English majors, claim not to know the language of grammar. If you are in this category, do not despair. The subject is much less forbidding than it may have seemed when you were a child, and even grammarphobes may readily learn as adults the battery of terms that made their eyes glaze over in junior high. Though the examples used throughout should clarify technical terms as you encounter them, you can profit most from the text if you start off knowing something about the anatomy of a sentence. Appendix A explains the parts of a sentence in considerable detail, and you may want to turn to it before you read the rest of the book. But this introduction, which provides a short preview of the appendix, may be all you need. Or it may be more than you need. If you're good at parsing sentences, you can stop right here and move on to chapter 1.

To look at a sentence analytically, you have to recognize (1) the units that fit together to compose the whole and (2) the types of words, called parts of speech, that make up the various units. Let's look first at the larger elements, the building blocks of the sentence.

A sentence is a group of words—or, occasionally, a single word—that readers recognize as a complete statement. The conventional type says that someone or something acts, experiences, or exists in a stated way (or did do so or will do so). Its two basic components are the subject, the someone or something, and the predicate, the statement about the subject's action, experience, or state of being.

The heart of the predicate, and sometimes the entire predicate, is the verb, a word that denotes mental or physical action or asserts existence and that can change in form to show the time of the action or existence as past, present, or future. Ordinarily, the subject comes first, as in *Children played, Glass breaks, Poltergeists exist.* It is the word or group of words that answers the question formed by putting *What* or *Who* before the verb. But though it governs the verb in the predicate,

it does not necessarily dominate the sentence. Grammatically speaking, the subject of the sentence may not be the topic under discussion. If you say *I prefer vodka to gin,* the subject is *I,* but the subject matter is liquor.

Verb forms that consist of two or more words—for example, *were playing, will be broken,* and *have existed*—may be called verb phrases, since a phrase is any group of related words that functions as a unit but lacks a subject and a predicate. A clause, in contrast, is a group of related words that does contain a subject-verb combination. Not all clauses qualify as sentences. Though word groups like *while they were gone, after we had left, that you won,* and *as you believe* have subjects and predicates, they strike readers as incomplete. Unable to stand alone, these subordinate clauses must serve as adjuncts to independent clauses, which do seem complete in themselves.

A simple sentence contains only one clause. It is, of course, an independent clause, but that term comes into play only when sentences have more than one clause. Two or more attached independent clauses without a dependent clause make a compound sentence, and a single independent clause that incorporates at least one dependent clause constitutes a complex sentence. A compound-complex sentence, logically enough, has two or more attached independent clauses and at least one dependent clause.

Although, as we have seen, a conventional sentence can consist entirely of a subject and a verb, most statements need more words to express their meaning. The predicate may tell not only what the subject is doing but also what or whom the subject is doing it to, that is, who or what is receiving the action. In *Jones handles advertising,* for example, *advertising* undergoes the handling. Such a word is called a direct object. If you ask *What?* or *Whom?* after a verb denoting a mental or physical action performed by the subject, the answer will be the direct object. In each of the following sentences, the third word is the direct object: *I read stories, We made gifts, They gave advice.*

A sentence may also tell *who* or *what* receives the direct object; that is, it may state the indirect object of the action. This element goes between the verb and the direct object: *I read him stories, We made them gifts, They gave us advice.* When the same information follows the direct object, it appears as part of a phrase, after the word *to* or *for,* and the term *indirect object* no longer applies: *I read stories to him, We made gifts for them, They gave advice to us.*

Strictly speaking, direct and indirect objects occur only in sentences in which the subject performs the action that the verb describes. If the subject is not acting but acted on—as in *Stories were read, Gifts were made, Advice was given*—the subject receives the action, and there is no direct object. When the subject receives the action only

indirectly, as in *Rookies were given advice by veterans,* the element that resembles a direct object (*advice* in the example) is called a retained object. The subject of such a sentence would become an indirect object if you revised the structure to make the subject the acting element: *Veterans gave rookies advice.* A verb is in the active voice when it states what the subject does and in the passive voice when it tells what is done to or for the subject.

Some verbs convey no action but simply state existence and lead to words that say something about that existence. A verb like *be, become, seem, appear,* or *remain* links its subject to a complement, a word or group of words that either describes the subject or serves as its synonym, thus completing the meaning of the sentence. Each of the following sentences ends with a complement: *She seems angry, You look ill, He remained silent, Running Water became chief, Cars can be lemons, We had been friends.* Some think of a complement as completing the meaning of the predicate and call it a predicate complement; others think of it as completing the meaning of the subject and call it a subjective complement. Those who prefer one of these terms may use the word *complement* alone to designate either an object or a predicate complement; here, however, the term has only the narrower meaning given above—a word that follows a linking verb and defines or describes the subject.

The two basic parts of a sentence, then—or, for that matter, of any clause—are the subject and predicate, and the major components of the predicate are the verb and its objects or complements. Although the examples used so far include only single-word subjects, objects, indirect objects, and complements, these elements often comprise a group of related words that function as a unit; in other words, a phrase or a clause may serve as a subject, an object, or a complement. In *That he did not reply does not necessarily mean that he did not get your letter,* both the subject and the object are clauses; and in *She seems out of sorts,* the complement is a phrase.

Most sentences flesh out their skeletal parts with secondary components called modifiers—words, phrases, or clauses that describe or qualify other elements, either restricting their meaning or giving supplementary information about them. In *The man in the apartment downstairs is eighty-five years old,* the modifying *in* phrase identifies the subject, narrowing the meaning of *man* to a specific individual. Such a modifier is called restrictive or defining. In *My mother's father, who lives in the apartment downstairs, is eighty-five years old,* the modifying *who* clause in no way limits or defines the meaning of *My mother's father;* it simply adds a detail. We would know the subject's identity even if the *who* clause were omitted. Such a modifier is called nonrestrictive or nondefining.

Now let's look at the ingredients of the various sentence components: the types of words, or parts of speech, that serve as subjects, predicates, objects, complements, and modifiers. One of these, the verb, is the central element in the predicate of a clause. Since the term *verb* technically designates a part of speech, we should say *simple predicate* when we discuss the verb's function in a sentence, but since both terms designate the same word in a given context, the distinction becomes blurred.

Nouns denote persons, places, things, qualities, or feelings (*teacher, John Dewey, Chicago, cities, toys, beauty, grief*). They serve as subjects, objects, or complements (predicate nouns), and a group of related words that plays any of these roles is called a noun phrase or a noun clause (*Living on a poet's income* means *that you don't eat very well*).

Pronouns function exactly as nouns do, but without naming anything. Most of them stand for preceding nouns or pronouns and derive their meaning from the words they replace—their "antecedents" or "principals" or "head words." While such pronouns provide a useful means of avoiding repetition, they are clear only if they refer unambiguously to their antecedents. (In the last sentence *pronouns* is the antecedent of *they* and *their*.) Of the various types, those that come first to mind are probably the personal pronouns. These have the forms *I, we, you, he, she, it,* and *they* as subjects or complements and the forms *me, us, you, him, her, it,* and *them* as objects. Other important categories are the demonstrative pronouns—*this, that, these,* and *those*—which point to the words they replace (as *These* does in the preceding sentence), and the relative pronouns—principally *who, whom, which,* and *that*—which introduce clauses modifying the words they stand for. Indefinite pronouns—for example, *one, another, some, each,* and *everyone*—differ from the other types: although they qualify as pronouns (since they perform the functions of nouns but do not name anything), their identities do not depend on antecedents. Indefinite in meaning, words like *anyone, many,* and *few* do not refer to specific individuals and thus have no need for principals.

Two parts of speech serve as modifiers—adjectives and adverbs. Adjectives modify nouns or pronouns, indicating some quality of the words they describe (a *colorful* sunset, a *heavy* object, a *long* interval), showing degree, amount, or number (*slight* increases, *several* ideas, *two* signs), or singling out an individual from its category (*a* book, *my* report, the *third* quarter). A group of words that modifies a noun or a pronoun is called an adjective phrase or an adjective clause (the woman *in the gray flannel suit,* the man *who came to dinner*).

Adverbs qualify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs. When modifying other modifiers, they usually indicate extent or degree (*extremely* happy, *somewhat* earlier, *quite* witty, *fairly* well, *partly* responsible).

Most adverbs answer the questions *How? Where? When?* or *Why?* about the verbs they qualify (danced *gracefully,* went *there,* arrives *early, sometimes* regrets, *therefore* declines). A group of words that modifies a verb or a modifier is called an adverbial phrase or an adverbial clause (went *to the bank,* refused *because I had an earlier engagement*).

The two remaining parts of speech that concern us, prepositions and conjunctions, are more functional than substantive: they show how the elements they precede fit into the context. A preposition—a word like *by, in, of, on, to,* or *with*—relates the noun or noun equivalent it introduces, the object of the preposition, to another word in the sentence. A preposition *by definition* is always part *of a phrase* that consists *of itself and its object or objects, along with any modifiers.* In the last sentence the prepositional phrases are italicized.

Conjunctions, the second category of connectives, come in two main varieties, coordinating and subordinating. The coordinating conjunctions—principally *and, but, for, nor,* and *or*—link elements equivalent in weight and function. In other words, they join compound elements: two subjects of the same verb, two verbs with the same subject, two objects, two complements, two modifiers, or two dependent or independent clauses. The subordinating conjunctions indicate the roles of modifying clauses, usually adverbial ones. Such clauses may, for example, state a condition (*if, unless*), a time (*when, before, after*), a contrast (*although, than*), or a cause (*since, because*). While a coordinating conjunction can connect parallel clauses, a subordinating conjunction is always part of a clause, just as a preposition is part of a phrase. In the last sentence, *while* and *as* are subordinating conjunctions.

As dictionary part-of-speech labels indicate, many words have fixed identities, but many others commonly function in two or more ways. Some words can be nouns or verbs (*love, hate, promise, race, effect, object*), others can be adverbs or adjectives (*fast, early, late*), and still others can be adverbs, conjunctions, or prepositions (*before, after, since*). *Like* can be a preposition (*You look like your sister*), a verb (*I like my work*), an adjective (*I am of like mind*), or a noun (*Likes repel*). *Near* can be a preposition (*I sat near the stove*), an adjective (*We had a near miss*), an adverb (*The hour draws near*), or a verb (*We are nearing our destination*).

Even words that are usually confined to single roles can sometimes function atypically. Thus, *horse* and *kitchen,* ordinarily identified as nouns, assume the guise of adjectives in the phrases *a horse race* and *the kitchen sink;* adjectives can turn into nouns, as in *the beautiful and the damned;* and parts of verbs regularly become nouns or adjectives, as in *I like dancing* and *a found object.* In general, we recognize a word as one part of speech or another by the way it functions in a given context.