

21<sup>ST</sup>  
CENTURY  
REFERENCE

— 21<sup>ST</sup> —  
CENTURY  
GRAMMAR  
HANDBOOK

■ ALL NEW

- THE MOST UP-TO-DATE GRAMMAR RULES
- EASY-TO-USE A TO Z DICTIONARY FORMAT
- CROSS-REFERENCED FOR EASY ACCESS
- A KEY WORD INDEX

EDITED BY  
THE PRINCETON LANGUAGE INSTITUTE

L A U R E L

— 2.5.1

CENTURY  
GRAMMAR  
HANDBOOK

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藏书

Edited by

THE PRINCETON LANGUAGE INSTITUTE

AND

JOSEPH HOLLANDER

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# How to Use This Book

The *21st Century Grammar Handbook* is designed to give you direct and rapid answers to your questions about how to write or speak correctly. It is arranged like a dictionary: Its entries are in alphabetical order, covering not only grammar rules and examples of correct and incorrect usage but specific words or terms that often cause errors. It includes entries for *be*, *is*, *am*, *are*, *was*, and *were*, as well as the special names and terms used in English classrooms to analyze and categorize how these words work. The *21st Century Grammar Handbook* is constructed to help you find solutions quickly and directly even if you don't know classroom grammar terminology.

You can also use the *21st Century Grammar Handbook* to improve your writing and speaking overall—to identify the areas in which you are weak or need pointers and then to find all the entries that will help.

To find answers to immediate problems you are having with your writing or speaking, simply look up the word or words that are bothering you. For example, to find out whether you should use “who” or “whom,” just look under *who*. You will discover right and wrong examples, an explanation of why the rules work the way they do, and suggestions for other entries to look at if you need more information.

But what if you know something is wrong but don't know exactly what the problem is or what it is called? Then look at the next section of this book: “How to Know What You

Don't Know." Here you will find a listing of the most common writing and speaking problems along with suggestions for places to look for answers. The list asks some questions that will help guide you to the places where your problems will be solved simply and swiftly.

If you don't find a match for your problem by looking through this section, then try to look up words that are similar to the ones that are causing you difficulty or that you think are okay in your sentence but that might be hiding errors: Look under *and* or *is* or *that* or *comma* or *-ly* or *s*. Then follow the suggestions for looking at related entries until you have identified what's wrong and how to fix it. If you still can't find what you don't know, try the entries on very broad topics like *rules*, *style*, *bland writing*, and similar subjects. There you will find not only specific answers to immediate problems but many hints about other areas you might consider to find the root of your difficulties.

If you do know the name of the grammar category or term with which you need help, you can look in the entries for the full citation and also find related entries on the subject that interests you.

To teach yourself better grammar and writing or speaking, first take the self-assessment quiz called "How Good Are My Grammar, Writing, and Speaking?" It will help you identify weak spots in your statements, places where tips and tricks will help make your writing or speaking stronger and more effective, and ways to avoid common pitfalls and take advantage of your stylistic strengths.

In each entry related subjects are highlighted in *italic type*. Examples are set off in quotation marks and clearly marked as RIGHT or WRONG.

# HOW TO KNOW WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW

This list contains the most common errors and confusions that beset writers and speakers. It is designed to highlight the most likely places for you to look for answers to your questions. Be sure to check entries for similar words or terms as well as for the things in your statement that seem correct to you but that might in fact be what is causing problems. Remember that the *Handbook* includes entries for general problems like *bland writing*, *rules*, and *style*. Each of these entries includes not only solutions to immediate problems but ideas about where else to look in the book for help or answers.

The list of topics to look at is not alphabetical for each problem but in order of where you are most likely to find specific answers to specific problems.

1. SPELLING: How do I know a word is spelled wrong? See *spelling*, *dictionary*, and *languages*.

2. RULES: Do I always have to follow them? See *rules*, *style*, *dialect*, *grammar*, and *standard English*.

3. RULES AGAIN: How do I know when I've broken them? See *editing*, *revision*, and *audience*.

4. PUNCTUATION: Who cares? See *comma*, *period*, *quotation mark*, *question mark*, *exclamation point*, *colon*, *semicolon*, *conjunction*, *clause*, *sentence*, *ellipsis*, *bracket*, *symbol*, and *hyphen*.

5. VERBS: What are they, and how do I use them? See *be*, *is*, *am*, *was*, *were*, *are*, *will*, *would*, *should*, *shall*,

*tense, verbs, conjugation, clauses, agreement, and fragments.*

6. PRONOUNS: When do I use “who” and “whom” or “she” and “her”? See the entries for the specific words as well as *pronoun, personal pronoun*, and the related grammatical listings.

7. NOUNS: What are they? See the entries for *noun, proper noun, names, title, capitalization*, and suggested related topics in those entries.

8. CONJUNCTIONS: How do parts of sentences get linked together? See the entries on *conjunction*; specific conjunctions like *and*; and *parallelism, emphasis, clause*, and so on.

9. MODIFIERS: “Good” and “well” drive me crazy. Look them up, along with *adjective, adverb, comparison*, and many other subjects.

10. CONFUSING WORDS: What is the difference between “their” and “they’re” and “there”? Look them up, and see the entry for *homonym*.

11. SEXIST AND OFFENSIVE LANGUAGE: When should I call a woman “Ms.” or “Miss” or “Mrs.”? All these words are listed, and there are entries on *sexist language, titles of people, names*, and many related subjects.

12. USING NUMBERS: Is it the “23rd Precinct” or “Twenty-third Precinct”? Look under *numbers, cardinal number, ordinal number*, and related topics.

# How Good Are My GRAMMAR, WRITING, AND SPEAKING?

Mark any errors you find in the following sentences, each of which is numbered. The answers follow and are listed by the number of the sentence. Look for possible mistakes and whether your solutions are the right ones for making the sentence more accurate or better written. Other things to think about when you write or speak are noted as well. Be careful; there are some tricky things in the samples.

## SAMPLES

1. I didn't know who to give the book to.
2. She completed the operation, and then walked out of the operating room.
3. A doctor is supposed to keep his hands clean.
4. Its clear whats gotta be done.
5. Speaking of grammar, errors are to common to worry about.
6. In the spring the birds begin to sing and the bees begin to sting.
7. Joans book is called, "How To Write Better."
8. I read the book, that is about grammar, and writing.
9. There is great value to an university education but it is weak.



10. The cases of sexual harassment which is common bothers me.

11. Predominant forms of transgressive behavior, deviance that is selfgenerated, and retrogressive emotions.

12. Examples are given so that help can be provided where it is needed.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Remember that *italicized words* refer to entries in the *Handbook* you should look at for answers, details, and explanations. Keep in mind as well that the samples are purposely tricky sentences that are not meant to embarrass or fool you but to help you identify as many areas as possible that you should pay attention to when you write or speak.

## ANSWERS

1. **I didn't know who to give the book to.** In this sentence, "*who*" is not right. In fact it should be "*whom*" because you should use the *objective case* of a *pronoun* before an *infinitive* ("They asked me to improve.") and because "*who*" can also be seen as the *object* of the *preposition* "*to*" that dangles at the end of the sentence.

But it might not be as obvious that there are other things in this sentence that don't meet the formal requirements of *standard English* or that could be written more clearly or carefully. First, a *contraction* like "didn't" may not be

acceptable if the *audience* for this statement sets very high, formal standards for writing. It's better to use "did not" if this sentence is to appear in a school paper, scholarly publication, or some similar place.

The dangling preposition "*to*" might confuse some readers or offend those who apply grammar rules strictly. Better to edit or revise this sentence along these lines: "I did not know to whom to give the book." Of course, you can't edit words you've already spoken, and you might feel that the people who are going to read this sentence will understand you perfectly and either not notice or not care about your "errors." But be sure you know your audience will be that tolerant, and be aware that informal *style* is not always appropriate. See also *dangling modifier*, *editing*, and *revision*.

2. **She completed the speech, and then walked out of the lecture hall.** No *comma* is needed before a *compound predicate* like "completed . . . and . . . walked." Overuse of *punctuation* is as much an error as underuse, and it can lead to a very heavy or boring *style*. Also see *and* and *predicate*.

3. **A doctor is supposed to keep his hands clean.** Not all doctors are men, so the *possessive* pronoun "his" is misleading and lacks *agreement* with its *antecedent*. This *sentence* should be revised to something like: "All doctors should keep their hands clean." Or: "A doctor should keep her or his hands clean." This is an instance of *sexist language* or offensive language. See also *pronouns*, *gender*, and *revision*.

4. **Its clear whats gotta be done.** This information *sentence* would not be considered appropriate in most

written communications except perhaps a personal letter. The most glaring error is “gotta,” which would be just as wrong if it were “got to.” Formal, *standard English* requires “must,” “should,” “has,” or a similar construction: “. . . what should be done.”

Two *apostrophes* are missing from *contractions*: “It’s” (compare the *possessive* pronoun “its”) and “what’s.” And in more formal *style* contractions might not be appropriate, although this *rule* is less rigid than it used to be. Here is a possible *revision* that would meet most standards: “It’s clear what has to be done.” Change “It’s” to “It is” to satisfy the most rigorous *audience*. See also *possessive* and *pronoun*.

5. **Speaking of grammar, errors are to common to worry about.** The first verbal phrase (“Speaking of grammar”) is a *dangling modifier* or *misplaced modifier* that has no clear *antecedent*, or referent. “Errors” were not speaking of grammar, nor was anything or anyone else in the *sentence*. Moreover, the form of the phrase does not show whether it is an adjectival usage (modifying a *noun*) or an adverbial construction (modifying a *verb*; surely the phrase does not refer to “are”). Most readers will actually “understand” this sentence on a first and rapid reading, but any closer attention will lead to puzzlement, the need to reread and try to figure out what is meant, and a loss of *clarity* and *efficiency* of communication. See also *adjective*.

You can avoid *bland writing* or weak writing by starting sentences with phrases instead of noun *subjects*. But you need to be careful that the phrases are constructed properly and refer clearly to something or someone appearing soon after in the sentence.

The first “*to*” is also wrong; instead of the *preposition* “*to*,” its *homonym*, the *adverb* “*too*,” is required here.

The *preposition* “*about*” at the end of the sentence is not dangling since it is an integral part of the verb. Dropping it would make the sentence unintelligible, while *revising* to add an *object* or inserting a pronoun object would make the sentence very stilted.

The whole sentence could be rewritten as follows: “When one is talking about grammar, errors are too common to worry about.” If the last preposition troubles you because it seems to be dangling, try: “When the subject is grammar, errors are too common to cause worry.” See *revision* and *editing*.

6. **In the spring the birds begin to sing and the bees begin to sting.** A *comma* should be inserted after “*sing*” because the two *clauses* in this sentence are independent. Modern *usage* permits the dropping of such commas between short independent clauses, particularly in less formal or journalistic writing. If you are striving for a racy effect, need to save space by cutting down on *punctuation*, or want to defy authority a bit, the comma could be left out, but not in most classroom work or more formal writing.

7. **Joans book is called, “How To Write Better.”** “Joan’s” is a *possessive* that requires an *apostrophe* before the “s” (as do all singular *nouns* in the possessive *case* no matter how they are spelled: “Gus’s book”). But the *comma* before the *quotation marks* isn’t necessary because what follows is not someone’s speech but a *title* of a work. Book titles are usually underlined or italicized rather than being set off in quotes. Within *capitalized* titles of works, *conjunctions*, *prepositions*, and the “*to*” of *infinitives* are

not capitalized. The rules of capitalization are complex and flexible, depending on the purposes of your writing and your *audience*. See also *possessive* and *italics*.

8. **I read the book, that is about grammar, and writing.** The choice of the definite article “*the*” is probably poor since there are many books about grammar and writing: “a book” would likely be better. *That* is a *relative pronoun* used to introduce a *restrictive phrase* or *restrictive clause*; *nonrestrictive phrases*, *nonrestrictive clauses*, or *appositives* are not set off by *commas*. “Which” could be used here with a comma to make a nonrestrictive clause, but the sentence then wouldn’t make sense (try it). The best revision might be: “I read a book about grammar and writing.” This is less wordy and solves the pronoun problem by eliminating the pronoun altogether.

The final comma (after “grammar”) is not needed since there are only two words in this *series*; standard English requires a comma before “*and*” only in series of more than two elements: “. . . a book that is about grammar, usage, and writing.” See also *phrase*, *clause*, *a*, and *standard English*.

9. **There is great value to an university education but it is weak.** The indefinite article “*an*” is wrong because “university” begins with a consonant sound. Only words that begin with vowel sounds should take “*an*” (“an owl,” “a one-time offer,” “a university,” “an unclean house”).

There should be a *comma* between the two independent *clauses* that are joined by the *conjunction* “*but*.” However, something must be done about “*it*.” There is no clear *antecedent*, or referent, for this *pronoun*, and therefore, what is weak is completely unclear. Since “university” is a

*noun* serving as an *adjective* in this sentence, and since the sentence begins with the weak opening “There is,” which presents no clear *subject*, the reader could assume “it” has something to do with “value,” “university,” or “education” (see *expletive*). Whatever assumption a reader makes, time will be lost trying to figure out what is meant, and *clarity* will never be achieved.

It is not wrong to begin sentences with vague opening *phrases* like “It is” or “There is.” But overreliance on them can lead to boring, unclear statements, particularly if later pronouns in such sentences are not given clear antecedents. *Revision* of this sample sentence requires going back to square one and rethinking what it is you have to say before setting pen to paper.

10. **The cases of sexual harassment which is common bothers me.** Here a *nonrestrictive clause*, properly introduced by “which,” needs to be set off by *commas*, and the main *verb* (“bothers”) should be *plural* to agree with the *subject* (“cases”): “The cases of sexual harassment, which is common, bother me.” The sentence is now grammatically correct, but *editing* or rewriting would help eliminate the *awkwardness* of a plural subject separated from its verb by a singular *clause*: “I am bothered by the cases of sexual harassment, which is common.” Although this change creates a *passive* construction, the sentence is clearer. See also *that* and *agreement*.

11. **Predominant forms of transgressive behavior, deviance that is selfgenerated, and retrogressive emotions.** Although there is a *linking verb* (“is”) in a restrictive dependent *clause* in this set of words, the example is not a *sentence* since it lacks a main *verb*. The



*compound word* “self-generated” should also be hyphenated. See *is*, *hyphen*, *restrictive clause*, and *fragment*.

Another problem here is the heavy *vocabulary*, made up mainly of words derived from *Latin*. In some professional or technical contexts, such display of learning might be acceptable or even expected. But in most common communication, it is better to use fewer long, abstract words. Of course, there are some concepts so complex (like scientific ideas) that they defy expression in ordinary words. But if you are not a scholar or scientist or if it is possible your statements will not be read exclusively by specialists able to penetrate *jargon*, write as clearly and simply as you can. And even if you are an expert, you might try to find language the uninitiated can understand and enjoy. See *scientific language* and *clarity*.

**12. Examples are given so that help can be provided where it is needed.** There are no grammatical errors in this *sentence*. However, it does contain three *passive verbal constructions*. Not only do passives tend to weaken writing *style* by removing actors or *agents* from sentences, but they also add words and make it somewhat harder to find referents and *antecedents*. A possible *revision*: “We give examples to provide help where you need help.” This sentence could be criticized for addressing an assumed reader (“you”), but it is more direct, shorter, and clearer than the sample.

If you review all the italicized words, terms, and ideas in the answers, you will not become an expert in grammar or stop making mistakes in writing or speaking. But you will gain some insight into the possible deficiencies in your

statements and some ways to identify them quickly so that you can seek further help in the *Handbook*. That help—plus care, attention, and constant rethinking and revision—will go a long way toward making you a more accurate, better writer.

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