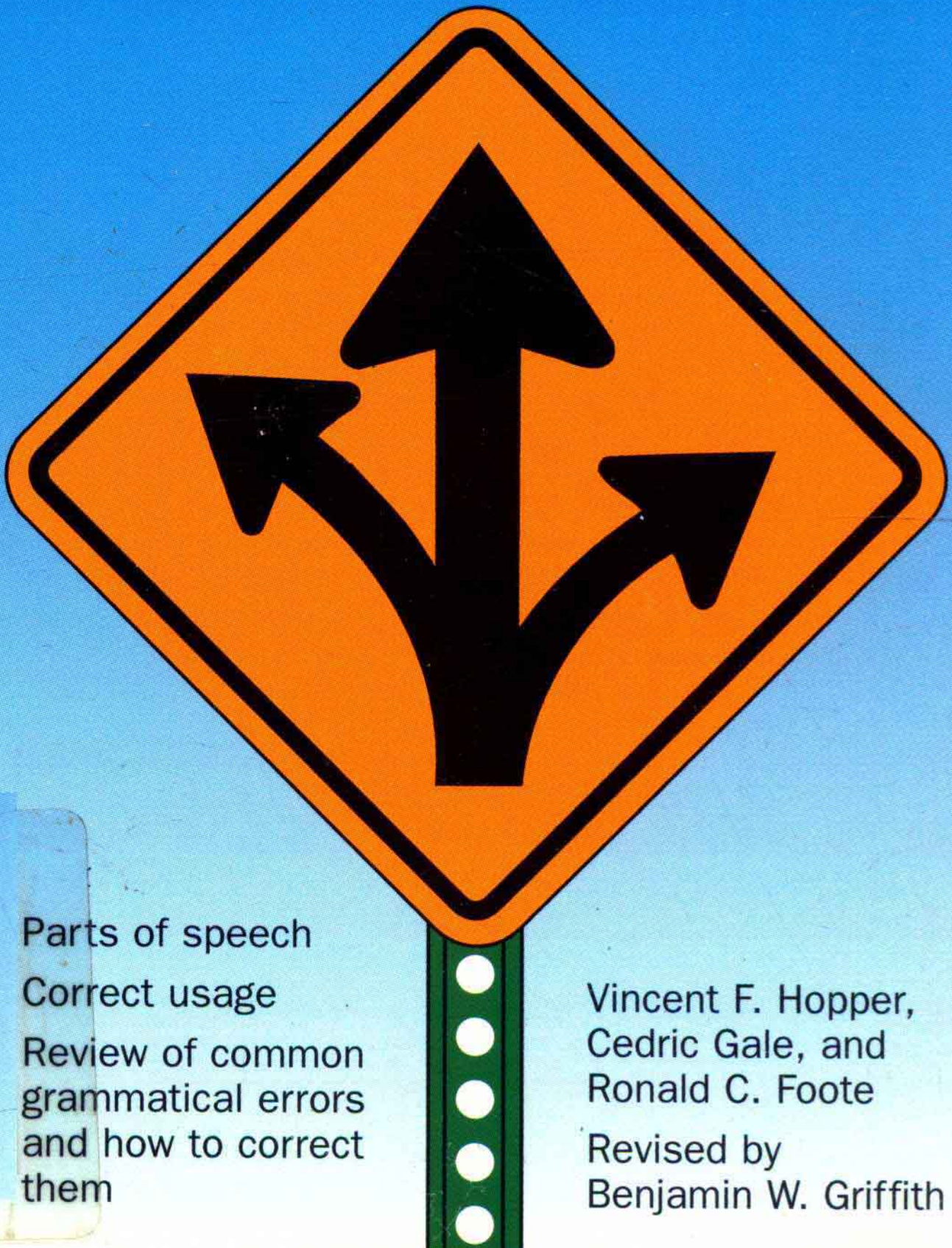
BARRON'S

A POCKET GUIDE TO

Correct Grammar

Third Edition



Parts of speech

Correct usage

Review of common grammatical errors and how to correct them

Vincent F. Hopper, Cedric Gale, and Ronald C. Foote

Revised by Benjamin W. Griffith

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PREFACE

A Pocket Guide to Correct Grammar is designed to be a handy reference tool for everyone who aspires to write and speak correct English. In this informal age some might ask, "Who worries about *correct* English?" The answer is that most success-oriented Americans are grammar-conscious Americans. Like it or not, many people judge us by our skill in using English correctly.

This pocket guide is based on traditional grammar usage. It is organized along conventional lines, with an easy-to-use table of contents. Before beginning to use the guide extensively, get acquainted with the entire book by scanning it from beginning to end. There is a great deal of information on a relatively few pages. We hope that it is clear, readily usable information and that the examples given can help you gain a thorough grasp of the technical points of grammar. In the final analysis, however, only practice and repetition can lead to a complete understanding.

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Chapter 1

The Word

Just as expert carpenters must be thoroughly acquainted with the tools of their craft and as painters must have expert knowledge of colors, so good writers must have a thorough understanding of the basic material with which they work: **words.** Thoughts and utterances, both simple and complex, require words of several kinds—for example, naming words, asserting words, connecting words, descriptive words. One of the first steps to effective writing is, therefore, a knowledge of the properties and functions of the different kinds of words. This knowledge involves what a word looks like, where it appears, and what it does within its context.

THE NOUN

The noun is a naming word. It is used to identify people, places, objects, ideas, emotions—in short, anything that can be named: *John, Chicago, committee, amplification, table, hatred, baseball.*

Recognition of Nouns

Nouns can be recognized by their form and their position in the sentence as well as by their naming function. Below are some of the things to look for when you are trying to identify the nouns in a sentence. (The principles listed here are discussed in greater detail in other sections of the book.)

- Most nouns can follow the word *the* or other determiners such as

  my, a, this: a truth, his moves, this infatuation.

- All nouns can occur before and after verbs:

  His **moves** *dazzled the* **spectators. Faith** *moves* **mountains.**

- All nouns can follow relationship words called prepositions:

  before winter, after Christmas, in his adversity.

- Most nouns can take an s or an *es* at the end of the word to express the idea of more than one:

  soup, soups; church, churches; debate, debates.

- Some nouns can take an apostrophe and an s or an apostrophe by itself to express belonging:

  the **boy's** *bicycle; the* **boys'** *room.*

- Some nouns can start with a capital letter to indicate the name or the title of some specific thing or person:

  Wilson High School, Armando, America, September, Surgeon General.

- Some nouns have endings such as *-ness, -tion, -ity,* which indicates that the word is a noun:

  reasonableness, situation, adversity.

Proper and Common Nouns

The name or title of an individual, of a person, place, or thing is usually expressed by a proper noun or nouns. They are always capitalized. When these nouns

do *not* refer to the name of a person or thing, they are common nouns and are *not* capitalized. Compare:

I will ask *Mother.*
Yesterday she became a *mother.*

I think that *Crescent City* is in Alberta.
The *city* lay on a crescent in the river.

He settled in the *West.*
He drove *west* for ten miles.

Among other things, proper nouns name people, continents, countries, provinces, states, counties, parishes, geographic regions, days of the week, months of the year, holidays, festivals (but not seasons):

Christmas, winter, December, Friday, Alberta, the Netherlands, Judge Hernandez.

Singular and Plural Nouns

Most nouns can be singular or plural in form. The usual plural form adds *s* or *es* to the end of the word: *sigh, sighs; fox, foxes; category, categories; calf, calves.* Note that the *y* and the *f* change before a plural ending. **Trys* and **skys* are incorrect forms. There is less consistency with the *f* forms. *Hoofs* is possible; **rooves* is not. It is advisable to have a dictionary at hand when dealing with some plurals.

Some nouns have irregular plural forms: *child, children; goose, geese; sheep, sheep.* Some nouns borrowed from other languages keep their original plural forms: *datum, data; cherub, cherubim; crisis, crises.* Other foreign words use either an Anglicized

*Throughout the text, an asterisk will be used to indicate an incorrect form in Standard American English.

plural or the foreign plural: *appendix, appendixes/ appendices; curriculum, curriculums/curricula; formula, formulas/formulae.* An up-to-date dictionary is helpful in determining the correct foreign plurals.

Some nouns can normally occur in the singular form only: *much dust*, but not **much dusts; more courage*, but not **more courages; less fun*, but not **less funs.* These nouns are called mass nouns or non-countable nouns. Some determiners such as *much* and *less* should be used only with non-countable nouns although recently there has been a tendency among educated speakers to use **less people* (*people* is a countable noun) rather than *fewer people.*

A few non-countable nouns can appear in the plural form if the idea of a difference of kind is stressed. *There are some new instant coffees on the market. Several wheats grow in Australia.*

The Possessive Case of Nouns

The possessive case of nouns is formed by adding an apostrophe and an *s* to words that do not end with an *s* or a *z* sound: *the boy's room, the children's school;* and by adding only the apostrophe to words which do end with an *s* or a *z* sound: *the boys' room, Dickens' novel.* If, however, the word ending in *s* or *z* is a proper noun with only one syllable, an apostrophe and an *s* are added to the word: *Keats's sonnets, Santa Claus's reindeer.*

NOTE: Some classical names and other names that would be awkward to pronounce with an added apostrophe and *s* use only the apostrophe: *Xerxes' chariot, Moses' tablets.*

Care must be taken in forming the possessive form of nouns ending with *y* because although the singular

and plural forms sound the same way, they are spelled differently.

the baby's cry
(one baby's cry)

the babies' murmurings
(the murmurings of several babies)

When possession is shared by two or more nouns, this fact is indicated by using the possessive case for the last noun in the series: *Jose, Fred, and Edward's canoe.*

When two nouns refer to the same person, the second noun is in the possessive case.

the mother of the bride's yellow dress
(The bride probably wore white. If the phrase sounds awkward, the use of two possessives does not improve it much: *the bride's mother's yellow dress.*)
Better: *The yellow dress of the bride's mother.*

The Apostrophe Possessive and the "OF" Possessive

Inanimate things do not normally "possess" anything. The possessive form using the preposition *of* is used to express an arrangement or part of inanimate things.

piles of coats **NOT** *coats' piles
the edge of the chisel **NOT** *the chisel's edge

However, writers have long made exception to this rule: *a day's work, a dollar's worth, the ship's compass.* More and more inanimate things are taking the apostrophe form of the possessive: *the razor's edge, the book's success, education's failure.* Obviously, no clear rule can be stated where *the razor's edge* is approved of and **the chisel's edge* is not.

Functions of Nouns

The noun can perform a variety of functions. The functions listed here are discussed in greater detail in other sections of the book.

➤ *The noun can work as the subject, object, or complement of a finite verb or verbal.*

Being a recent *arrival*
(complement of the verbal *being*)

from Puerto Rico, *Margarita*
(subject of the verb was)

was proud that she could speak *Spanish*
(object of the verb *speak*)

as well as English.

➤ *The noun can work as the object of a preposition.*

Margarita, who came from *Puerto Rico,*
(object of the preposition *from*)

spoke excellent Spanish in her *home*
(object of the preposition *in*)

and good English at *school.*
(object of the preposition *at*)

➤ *The noun can work after another noun as a modifier or an appositive, as it is also called.*

my brother *Charles*
his problem, a damaged *retina*

➤ *The noun can work before another noun as a modifier.*

a *problem* child a *noun* clause a *bottle* opener

➤ *The noun can work as a modifier of an adjective or a verb.*

They were *battle* weary.
(modifier of the adjective *weary*)

They arrived *yesterday.*
(modifier of the verb *arrived*)

➤ *The noun in the possessive case can work as a determiner introducing another noun.*

the *bride's mother*
(*The bride's* introduces *mother.* The article *the* belongs to *bride's,* not to *mother.*)

THE PRONOUN

Although a pronoun often takes the place of a noun in a sentence, the pronoun sometimes lacks specific meaning. Indefinite pronouns like *anyone, something, somebody* mean only that unspecified people or things are being referred to.

When pronouns replace other words, they carry the meaning of the replaced words. The replaced words are called the **antecedent** of the pronoun. The antecedent of a pronoun is usually a noun and its modifiers, if any, but sometimes the antecedent can be a whole sentence.

The dog lost *its* bone.
(*Its* replaces *the dog.*)

The old man, *who* had his car stolen, was in shock.
(*Who* replaces *the old man.*)

I have written to my younger sister, who lives in Las Piedras, to invite *her* to the wedding.
(*Her* replaces *my younger sister, who lives in Las Piedras.*)

Do you want a small cone or a large *one*?
(*One* replaces *cone*. It is a special pronoun that allows the user to replace the noun and retain its modifiers.)

Lumsden tried to calm his wife's fears. He found *this* harder than he expected.
(*This* replaces the whole sentence dealing with an attempt to calm fears.)

Personal Pronouns

The personal pronouns are distinguished by person, case, and number.

FIRST PERSON
(the person speaking or writing)

Case	Singular	Plural
Nominative	I	we
Possessive	my, mine	our, ours
Objective	me	us

SECOND PERSON
(the person addressed)

Case	Singular	Plural
Nominative	you	you
Possessive	your, yours	your, yours
Objective	you	you

In the third person, pronouns are also distinguished by gender.

THIRD PERSON
(the person, place, or thing spoken or written about)

Case	Singular			Plural
	MASCULINE	FEMININE	NEUTER	
Nominative	he	she	it	they
Possessive	his	her, hers	its	their, theirs
Objective	him	her	it	them

Relative Pronouns

When a sentence is embedded inside another sentence to function as a relative clause, a relative pronoun replaces the repeated noun in order to make the new sentence grammatical.

*Michael Jordan—Michael Jordan has all the moves—could not be stopped.

Michael Jordan, *who* has all the moves, could not be stopped.

*The tools—he bought the tools yesterday—were specked with rust.

The tools *that* he bought yesterday were specked with rust.

Who, whom, whose, and *that* refer to people; *which* and *that* refer to things. Sometimes the relative pronoun can be omitted altogether: *The tools he bought yesterday were specked with rust.*

Interrogative Pronouns

The interrogative pronouns *who, whom, whose, what,* and *which* are some of the words that introduce questions. *Who, whom,* and *whose* indicate that the expected answer will be a person; *what* indicates that the answer will be something nonhuman; *which* may be used for either persons or things.

Who was the chairman?	Answer: John
What was he carrying?	Answer: a suitcase
Which of the girls was hurt?	Answer: Justine

Demonstrative Pronouns

The demonstrative pronouns *this, these, that,* and *those* indicate nearness to or distance from the speaker, literally or figuratively. The antecedent of the pronoun usually is in another clause or sentence. Sometimes the reference is too general for there to be a specific antecedent.

> *This* is my father, Mr. Rodriguez, and *those* are my children, Juanita and Armando.
> (The antecedent *Mr. Rodriguez* is literally nearer to the speaker than are his children.)

> Marcellus would climb trees at night. *This* disturbed his mother.
> (The antecedent of *this* is the sentence about Marcellus' nocturnal tree-climbing.)

> Be gentle to *those* who stay angry.
> (*Those* has no antecedent, in the normal sense of the word. The reference is limited by the following relative clause.)

When these pronouns modify nouns they function as adjectives: *this event, these children.* This function is discussed in the section on determiners.

Indefinite Pronouns

The indefinite pronouns are so named because their antecedents are usually vague or unknown. These are such words as *each, all, either, anyone, somebody, everyone, many, several.* Some indefinite pronouns form the possessive case in the same manner as nouns: *anyone's, somebody else's.*

Intensive and Reflexive Pronouns

Personal pronouns ending with *self* or *selves* (*myself, ourselves, itself,* and so on) have two functions. The first is to repeat the noun antecedent in order to emphasize and intensify the meaning: *Mary herself was responsible.* The second function is to turn the action back on the subject antecedent.

> *I* hurt *myself.*
> (*Myself* repeats *I,* but it functions as the object while the antecedent *I* functions as the subject.)

Myself should not be used in place of *me*: *He is going to the hockey game with Michelle and *myself.* [*Me* should be used.]

Pronoun Case

Case is a form change that denotes the relation of a noun or a pronoun to other words in the sentence. In English, nouns have only one form change that could be called a case change—the apostrophe form (possessive case). The personal pronouns and the two relative pronouns *who* and *whoever* change form to indicate whether the case is subjective, objective, or possessive.

The Nominative or Subjective Case

The pronoun forms *I, we, you, it, he, she, they, who,* and *whoever* are in the nominative case. The uses of the nominative case follow:

➤ *Expressing a subject:*

> Jason and *I* are going to the pizza parlor.
> (**Me and Jason* and **Jason and me* are not acceptable in the standard English.)