

# Media Writer's

FIFTH EDITION

# HANDBOOK

A GUIDE TO COMMON WRITING AND EDITING PROBLEMS

**CONFUSED AND MISUSED**—In behalf of/on behalf of, suppose to/supposed to, rather/instead—and more than 320 other examples to help you write and speak more precisely.

**HUH?**—Eliminate confusion caused by syntax errors, which plague even the most experienced writers.

**IMPATIENT?**—The first seven chapters will improve your writing immediately and dramatically by pointing out mistakes you didn't know you were making.

**HIGHLY IRREGULAR**—Swim/swam/swum, swing/swung/swung, lie/lay/lain, lay/laid/laid—and more than 140 other irregular verbs that can embarrass the unwary.

**[,;?;-!/?"]**—Simple explanations and examples that clarify how to use (and how not to use) punctuation.

**1 POTATO, 2 POTATOES**—Benefited, caffeine, colonel, grammar, occurred, pastime, picnicked—and 650 other words that can set spelling traps for students and professionals.

George T. Arnold

# CONTENTS

---

Preface xix

---

## PART 1 IMPROVING IMMEDIATELY 1

---

### 1 25 Ways to Improve Writing Immediately 2

1. Omit *On* before a Day of the Week and before a Month and Date 2
2. Avoid *Holding* Meetings/Conferences/Parties/Conventions 2
3. Don't *Invite, Urge* or *Welcome* 3
4. Avoid *Talking Inanimate Objects* 3
5. Put the *Name before the Verb* in Attribution 4
6. Be Cautious about Using *According To* 4
7. Don't Interchange *Feel, Think* and *Believe* 5
8. Don't *Read Minds* or *Make Predictions* 5
9. Don't *Give Orders* to Readers/Listeners 5
10. Put Long Titles *after* the Person's Name 6
11. Make *Quotations* Count 6
12. *Quickly Identify* the Person Being Quoted 7
13. *Doctor*—a Title, not a Profession 8
14. Don't Presume Readers/Listeners Know the *Background* 8
15. Don't Start First Sentence of Paragraph with a *Coordinating Conjunction* 8
16. Don't *Repeat Major Words* in Same Sentence or Headline 9
17. Place Relative Pronoun Immediately *after* Its Antecedent 9
18. Don't Interchange *Which* and *That* 9
19. Don't Report *Opinions* and *Accusations* as *Facts* 10
20. *Think* before Ending Words with *ize* 11
21. *Resist Using* Nouns as Verbs 11
22. Avoid Gobbledygook and Words That Are Not Self-Explanatory 11
23. *Maintain* Parallel Construction 12
24. *Think* before Splitting Infinitives 13
25. "Currently," "Now," and "Presently" Usually Obvious 14

## **2 Are These Distinctions Worth Making? 15**

Who Cares? 15

20 Examples 16

1. *Although/While* 16
2. *Among/Between* 16
3. *Amount/Number* 16
4. *Anxious/Eager* 17
5. *Because/Since* 17
6. *Can/May* 17
7. *Convince/Persuade* 18
8. *Disinterested/Uninterested* 18
9. *Dragged/Drug* 18
10. *Each Other/One Another* 18
11. *Ensure/Insure* 19
12. *Farther/Further* 19
13. *Fewer/Less* 19
14. *Hanged/Hung* 19
15. *Healthful/Healthy* 20
16. *In Behalf Of/On Behalf Of* 20
17. *Lend/Loan* 20
18. *Lie/Lay* 21
19. *Proved/Proven* 22
20. *Who/Whom* 23

## **3 Language Lapses 25**

20 Examples That May Cause You to Say "Oops" 25

1. *Try To, Not Try And* 25
2. *Take the Eye Out of Eyewitness* 25
3. *Want, Not Wish* 25
4. *Feel Bad, Not Feel Badly* 26
5. *When, Not After* 26
6. *Former Student, Not Former Graduate* 26
7. *Where Else Would Time Out Be?* 26
8. *Avoid Saying Those Interested* 27
9. *Past and Future Usually Are Obvious* 27
10. *All Mobs Are Angry; All Beatings Are Brutal* 27
11. *All Babies Are Little; All Babies Are New* 27
12. *Gift, Not Free Gift; Free, Not Free of Charge* 27
13. *The "Case" of Compound Objects* 27
14. *Drop Old before Adage, Cliche, Tradition, Habit and Maxim* 28
15. *Can't Help, Not Can't Help But* 28
16. *Center ON, Not Center AROUND* 28
17. *O Is a Letter; Zero Is a Number* 28

18. Just Because You're Repeating Doesn't Mean You Have to Use Past Tense 29
19. You're Not *Nauseous* Unless You're Sickening 29
20. Is Something *Funny* or Is It *Strange*? 29

## 4 It's Nobody's Guess 30

Rules Eliminate Guesswork 30

15 Examples 30

1. *One Word or Two?* 30
2. *One of Those Who Are/The Only One Who Is* 33
3. *None* as a Singular/*None* as a Plural 34
4. *Either/Or* as a Singular; *Either/Or* as a Plural 34
5. *Other* or *Else* in Comparisons 35
6. Commas between Adjectives 35
7. Apostrophes Showing Joint and Separate Ownership 36
8. No Colon Needed 36
9. Comma or Semicolon? 36
10. Commas and Dependent Clauses 37
11. Choosing between *It's* and *Its* and *Who's* and *Whose* 38
12. When (and When Not) to Use *self* and *selves* 38
13. When to Use *Were* or *Was* after *If* 39
14. When (and When Not) to Use *Of* after *All*, *Both*, and *Off* 40
15. When to follow *Than* with *I* or *Me*, *He* or *Him*,  
*She* or *Her*, *We* or *Us*, *They* or *Them* 41

## 5 The Trouble with "Only" 43

How the Use of *Only* Can Be Insensitive 43

How the Incorrect Placement of *Only* Can Cause  
Misunderstanding 44

The Erroneous Use of *One of the Only* 44

How to Avoid Problems in Using *Only* 45

## 6 One Potato, Two Potatoes 46

Forming Plurals and Possessives from Words Ending

in ch, sh, x, s, sis, ss, zz, y, and o 46

Forming Challenging Plurals 46

Add es to Form Plurals from Words Ending in ch,

sh, x, s, ss, and zz 46

Change the Singular sis Ending to ses for the Plural 47

If y is Preceded by a Vowel, Just Add an s 47

If Proper Nouns End in y, Just Add an s 48

If y is Preceded by a Consonant, Drop the y and Add ies 48

Add s or es to Form Plurals From Words Ending in o 48

Forming Challenging Possessives	49
<i>Proper Nouns that End in s</i>	49
<i>Common Nouns with a Variety of Endings</i>	49
Using Apostrophes to Make Plurals from Numbers	50

## **7 Excising the Excessive 51**

<i>The Don't-Even-Think-About-Using-Again List</i>	51
<i>The "Go-Away-and-Leave-Me-Alone" List</i>	52
<i>The Pick-One-You-Don't-Need-Both List</i>	52
<i>The So-Obvious-You-Don't-Need-It List</i>	53
<i>The You-Could-Be-Overlooking-These List</i>	53
<i>The There-Has-To-Be-a-Better-Way-of-Saying-This List</i>	54

## **PART 2 BUILDING SENTENCES 57**

## **8 Nouns 58**

Functions	58
<i>Nouns May Be Concrete or Abstract</i>	58
<i>Nouns May Be Proper or Common</i>	59
<i>Nouns Have Gender (Masculine, Feminine, Neuter, Common)</i>	59
<i>Nouns May Be Singular or Plural (a Quality Called Number)</i>	59
<i>Nouns Also Have a Quality Called Person</i>	61
<i>Nouns Are Classified or Grouped by Case: Nominative, Objective and Possessive</i>	62
Gerunds and Infinitives as Nouns	65

## **9 Pronouns 66**

Functions	66
<i>Personal Pronouns</i>	67
<i>Demonstrative Pronouns</i>	69
<i>Reciprocal Pronouns</i>	70
<i>Interrogative Pronouns</i>	71
<i>Reflexive and Intensive Pronouns</i>	73
<i>Indefinite Pronouns</i>	75
<i>Relative Pronouns</i>	77

## **10 Noun-Pronoun Agreement 86**

1. Making Antecedents Clear 86
2. Repeating the Noun for Clarity 87

3. Solving Problems with Indefinite Pronouns 87
4. Using Plural Forms with Singular Meanings 88
5. Simplifying the Use of *Either/Or* and *Neither/Nor* 88
6. Agreeing in Person, Number and Gender 89

## **11 Verbs and Verbals 91**

- Functions 91
- Locate the Verb 92
- Is the Spelling Regular or Irregular? 93
  - Principal Parts* 93
- Does the Verb Show Action? 94
  - Transitive Verbs* 95
  - Indirect Objects* 95
  - Intransitive Verbs* 96
  - Linking Verbs* 97
- Voice (Active and Passive) 100
- Person (First, Second and Third) 101
- Tense 103
  - Present Tense* 103
  - Past Tense* 103
  - Future Tense* 103
  - Present Perfect* 104
  - Past Perfect* 104
  - Future Perfect* 104
  - Present Progressive* 104
  - Past Progressive* 105
  - Future Progressive* 105
  - Be Careful with Tense Shifts* 105
- Mood 106
  - Indicative* 106
  - Imperative* 106
  - Subjunctive* 107
- Verbals 109
  - Gerunds* 109
  - Participles* 110
  - Infinitives* 111
    - Infinitives with To Not Expressed* 112
    - Beware of "Dangling" Verbals* 112
    - Verbals May Have Modifiers and Objects* 113

## **12 Subject-Verb Agreement 115**

- Rules Eliminate Guess Work 115
- Singular Subjects 115

Plural Subjects	115
Compound Subjects	116
<i>You</i> as the Subject	117
Nontraditional Sentence Order	117
Subjects Having Plural Form but Singular Meaning	118
Compound Subjects that Form One Unit	119
<i>Number, Variety and Majority</i> as Subjects	120
Sentences with Predicate Nouns	120
One Subject Used Affirmatively and the Other Subject Used Negatively	121
<i>Each</i> and <i>Every</i> Preceding Compound Subjects	121
<i>Either/Or</i> and <i>Neither/Nor</i> before Compound Subjects	122
Indefinite Pronoun as the Subject	123
Subject and Verb Separated by Phrases or Clauses	123
Collective Nouns as Subjects	124
Words that Can Be Singular or Plural	125
Relative Pronouns as Subjects	126
Plurals and Singulars from Other Languages	128

### **13 Adjectives 129**

Functions	129
Attributive	130
Appositive	130
Predicate	130
Helpful Questions	131
<i>Proper or Common</i>	131
Coordinate Adjectives	131
Participles and Infinitives as Adjectives	132

### **14 Adverbs 133**

Functions	133
<i>Some Clues</i>	133
<i>Finding Adverbs</i>	134
<i>Adverb Questions</i>	135
<i>Adverbial Objectives</i>	135
<i>Interrogative Adverbs</i>	136
<i>Conjunctive Adverbs</i>	136
<i>Parenthetical Adverbs</i>	137
Avoiding Confusion	137
Confusion with Adjectives	138
Infinitives as Adverbs	139

### **15 Comparison of Adjectives and Adverbs 140**

Positive Degree	140
Comparative Degree	140

Superlative Degree	141
Some Adjectives Form Comparisons Irregularly	142
Some Adjectives Cannot Be Compared	142
Use <i>Other</i> or <i>Else</i> When Comparing Like Things	143

## **16 Prepositions 144**

Functions	144
Common Prepositions	144
A Preposition Must Have a Noun or a Pronoun Object	145
A Preposition Is Not Limited to One Word	146
Don't Confuse a Preposition with an Adverb, a Conjunction or an Infinitive	146
Objects of Prepositions Are Always in the Objective Case	147
Don't Use Unnecessary Prepositions	148
Can a Preposition Ever Be the Last Word in a Sentence?	149
Formal and Informal	149

## **17 Conjunctions 151**

Functions	151
Coordinating Conjunctions	151
Subordinating Conjunctions	153
<i>Placement of Subordinating Clauses</i>	154
<i>Don't Confuse Subordinating Conjunctions with Prepositions</i>	155
Correlative Conjunctions	156
Don't Forget the Conjunctive Adverb	156

## **18 Interjections 157**

Functions	157
Interjections May Be Used within a Sentence or May Stand Alone	157
Interjections May Be Followed by Commas if They Are Mild	157

## **19 Sentences and Syntax 158**

Sentence Functions	158
<i>Declarative</i>	158
<i>Interrogative</i>	159
<i>Imperative</i>	159
<i>Exclamatory</i>	159
Sentence Structures	160



<i>Simple</i>	160
<i>Compound</i>	161
<i>Complex</i>	161
<i>Compound-Complex</i>	162
Syntax	163
<i>Misplaced Dependent Clauses</i>	164
<i>Misplaced Appositives</i>	165
<i>Dangling Verbals</i>	166
<i>Misplaced Prepositional Phrases</i>	166
<i>Split Infinitives</i>	167
<i>Split Verb Phrases</i>	167
<i>Misplaced Time Elements</i>	167
<i>"Squinting" Modifiers</i>	168
<i>Dangling Elliptical Elements</i>	168

---

## PART 3 PUNCTUATING 169

---

### 20 Periods 170

How to Use Periods	170
With Declarative Sentences	170
With Indirect Questions	170
With Imperative Sentences	170
With Rhetorical Questions	171
With Abbreviations	171
As an Ellipsis	171
To separate seconds from parts of seconds in athletic events	172
To separate dollars from cents	172
How <i>Not</i> to Use Periods	172
With Some Abbreviations	172
To Indicate Pauses	172
With Well-Known Abbreviations	172
With Acronyms	172

### 21 Question Marks 173

How to Use Question Marks	173
With Direct Questions	173
With Items Listed in a Series	173
With Parentheses	173
With Declarative Sentences That End with an Interrogative	173
Inside or Outside a Terminal Quotation Mark	174
How <i>Not</i> to Use Question Marks	174
With Indirect Questions	174

- With Rhetorical Questions 174
- With Parentheses to Indicate Sarcasm or Humor 174
- Combined with a Comma to Separate Statement from Attribution 174

## **22 Exclamation Marks 175**

- How to Use Exclamation Marks 175
  - In Declarations 175
  - In Commands 175
  - In Expressions of Disbelief 175
  - In Expressions of Surprise 175
  - With Interjections 175
  - Inside or Outside Quotation Marks 175
- How *Not* to Use Exclamation Marks 175
  - Combined with Another Exclamation Mark 175
  - Combined with a Comma to Separate Statement from Attribution 175

## **23 Commas 176**

- How to Use Commas 176
  - With Listing in a Series 176
  - After Introductory Material 177
  - Before a Coordinating Conjunction 178
  - With Explanatory Numbers and Figures 178
  - With Appositives 178
  - With Direct and Indirect Quotations 179
  - With Nonessential Dependent Clauses 179
  - With Cities and States 180
  - With Dates 180
  - With Parenthetical Words 180
  - With Numbers 181
  - To Avoid Repetition 181
  - With Identical Words Used Consecutively 181
  - After a Declarative Sentence That Turns Interrogative 181
  - With *Not* and *Never* Used to Show a Contrast 182
  - With Absolute Phrases 182
  - To Prevent a Misreading 182
- How *Not* to Use Commas 182
  - With Days of Week 182
  - Between Two Sentences 183
  - Between Month and Year 183
  - With a Coordinating Conjunction 183
  - With Titles 184
  - With *Jr.*, *Sr.*, *II* or *III* 184
  - With Restrictive Appositives 184

With Some Adjectives in a Series	185
With Essential Clauses and Phrases	185
With Relative Pronouns and Essential Dependent Clauses	185
With <i>Like</i> , <i>Such as</i> or <i>Similar to</i>	186
With <i>Self</i> Pronouns	186
With an Incomplete Direct Quotation	186
With Question or Exclamation Marks and Attribution	186

## 24 Semicolons 187

How to Use Semicolons	187
With Independent Clauses	187
With Items Listed in a Series	187
With a Conjunctive Adverb	188
Combined with a Coordinating Conjunction	188
How <i>Not</i> to Use Semicolons	188
With a Verb That Introduces a List	188
With Commas and Semicolons	189

## 25 Colons and Dashes 190

How to Use Colons	190
For Simple Tasks	190
To Relate Time	190
With a Listing or a Series	190
Before an Announcement	190
Before an Explanation	191
For Emphasis	191
With Some Appositives	191
With Some Quotations	191
To Replace Some Verbs	191
With Titles and Subtitles	191
Outside of Quotation Marks	191
How <i>Not</i> to Use Colons	191
With Some Verbs That Introduce Lists	191
After a Preposition	192
After <i>Like</i> , <i>Such As</i> , or <i>Including</i>	192
How to Use Dashes	192
With a List or a Series	192
To End a Sentence with a List or a Series	192
To Clarify or to Emphasize Appositive Material	192
Before a Name Following a Quotation	192
With an Abrupt Interruption	192
For a Surprise or a Dramatic Ending	193
Punctuation Tips	193

## **26 Parentheses and Brackets 194**

- How to Use Parentheses and Brackets 194
  - To Insert Explanations or Clarifications 194
  - To Insert Directions 195
  - To Insert Missing Information 195
  - To Insert Corrections 196
  - To Insert Parenthetical Material Inside Other Parenthetical Material 196
  - With Periods 196
- How *Not* to Use Parentheses and Brackets 197
  - Frequently 197
  - To Insert Lengthy Material 197
  - Interchangeably 197

## **27 Slashes and Hyphens 198**

- How to Use Slashes 198
  - To Show That Either Choice is Applicable 198
  - To Express a Fraction or a Date in Digits 198
  - To Show Line Breaks in Quoted Poetry 198
- How *Not* to Use Slashes 199
  - As a Substitute for a Hyphen 199
- Hyphens 199
- How to Use Hyphens 200
  - With Compound Adjectives 200
  - With Compound *Predicate* or *Linking* Adjectives 201
  - With Compound Nouns 201
  - With Compound Numbers 201
  - With Zip Codes 201
  - To Replace *To* or *Until* 201
  - In Suspended Compounds 202
  - To Divide Words by Syllables 202
  - To Avoid Confusion in Meaning 202
    - Between Prefix, Proper Noun or Number 202
    - After Prefixes *Self*, *All* and *Ex* 203
    - With Some Verbs 203
- How *Not* to Use Hyphens 203
  - With Some Compound Adjectives 203
  - After *Very* or an *ly* Ending 203
  - After Some Prefixes 203
  - With Some Ages Expressed in a Compound 203
  - With Some Suspended Compounds 204

## **28 Apostrophes 205**

- How to Use Apostrophes 205
  - Before *s* 205

After <i>s</i>	205
In Some Journalistic Uses	206
In Special Circumstances	206
With Compound Nouns	206
To Show Joint Ownership	206
To Show Separate Ownership	206
When a Possessive Follows the Word It Modifies	206
With Contractions	206
To Replace a Letter or a Figure	207
To Form Certain Plurals	207
With Words Spelled the Same in Both Singular and Plural	207
How <i>Not</i> to Use Apostrophes	207
With Possessive or Relative and Personal Pronouns	207
With Descriptive Names	208
To Form Most Common Plurals	208

## **29 Quotation Marks 209**

How to Use Quotation Marks	209
With Direct Quotations	209
With Attribution Following Quotation	210
With Attribution Preceding Quotation	210
With Attribution in the Middle of Quotation	210
With a Two-Sentence Quotation	210
With an Incomplete Quotation	210
With a Multi-Paragraph Quotation	211
With One-Speaker Quotation	211
With a Quotation Within a Quotation	211
With a Word or Words Used in a Special Way	212
With Some Titles	212
How to Use Quotation Marks with Other Punctuation	213
With Commas and Periods	213
With Question and Exclamation Marks	213
Separating a Question or a Statement from Its Attribution	214
With Commas	214
With Semicolons	214
With Complete Sentences	215
To Avoid Confusion Between Persons Being Quoted	215

## **30 Sensitivity In Language 217**

Guidelines	218
Examples	219

---

**PART 4 QUICK REFERENCE 221**

---

**Reference 1 Words Frequently Confused 223**

**Reference 2 Words Frequently Misspelled 309**

**Reference 3 Irregular Verbs 315**

**Reference 4 Wordiness and Trite Expressions 319**

**Reference 5 When to Use a Hyphen, One Word,  
or Two Words 327**

**Index I-1**