What’s a Complete Sentence?

Subject-Verb-Object (The actor does something to the object.)

\[ S \quad V \quad O \]

The dog bit the professor who gave me a bad grade.
Consistent Use of Tenses

• *News is past tense.*

• *Feature writing can be present tense. Ask your professor.*

• *Descriptive writing in scripts (called direction) is present tense.*
Subject-Verb Agreement: Singular subjects need singular verbs.

- The box of blocks was scattered across the playroom. (Disregard the prepositional phrase “of blocks.”)
- Wrong: The University of Texas published their honor code years ago.
- Right: The University of Texas published its honor code years ago.
- Everyone, each, everything and everybody sound plural, but they take singular verbs.
- Wrong: The coach told everyone on the men’s basketball team to try their hardest.
- Right: The coach told everyone on the men’s basketball team to try his hardest.
- Or: The coach told all of them to try their hardest.
It’s vs. Its and other errors in apostrophe usage

• “Its” is the possessive and “it’s” is a contraction.
• It’s difficult to teach a dog to return its ball.
• *The hogs are in their place when they’re in that barn over there.*
Your/You’re

• You’re not going to go far professionally if you don’t watch your grammar.
Misplaced Modifiers

- Witnesses reported that the woman dashed across the street with curly red hair.
- Huh? Now we have hairy streets?
- Improved: Witnesses reported that the woman with curly red hair dashed across the street.
Who, whom/he, him

• Quick trick: If you use the word “he,” you should use “who.” If you use the word “him,” you should use “whom.”
• *Who or Whom* baked the mud pies made out of cow shit? It would be “Who baked the mud pies made out of cow shit?”
• “He baked the mud pies out of cow shit” sounds MUCH better than “Him baked the mud pies made out of cow shit.”

Who/whom did you invite to this FABULOUS Slip ‘n Slide ‘n Mayonnaise party?

I invited *he*. I invited *him*.

Once again, *him* sounds better, so we should stick with *whom* in this example.
Affect/effect

For the most part, affect is the verb and effect is the noun.

A $5,000 tuition increase affects the money every student has left over for Tiff’s Treats.

We never know the effect that tuition increases will have on students’ cookie money.
Clarity in Pronouns: Who are THEY?

• Wrong: After making margaritas with his roommates, Bronson poured them down the drain. (Yikes! That man will never get anyone else to live with him.)

• Right: After making margaritas with his roommates, Bronson poured the drinks down the drain. (What a waste, but the sentence is correct.)
That/Which

• Boil it down to this: Use “that” before a restrictive clause and “which” before everything else.
• That means the phrase following “that” MUST remain in the sentence for it to retain its meaning.
• “Which precedes a detail that’s not necessary to meaning but, perhaps, just nice to know.
• The cap and gown that Walter Cronkite wore are going to be worn by the best broadcast graduate. (This is not just any old cap and gown, my friends.)
• The cap and gown, which are made out of cheap plastic, must be worn at graduation. (You have to wear the blasted things whether we know they’re made out of cheap plastic or not.)
Lay/Lie

- Lay means “to place” and takes a direct object. Lie means “to recline” and has no direct object.
- *I laid the style book on the desk.*
- *Diana lay on the beach.*
Passive Voice

- Eliminate it! If you can add “by zombies” after the verb, it’s passive.
- Passive: *The ball was thrown by the quarterback.* (by zombies)
- Active: *The quarterback threw the ball.*
Good/Well

**GOOD IS AN ADJECTIVE THAT MODIFIES A NOUN:**

*PIPPA IS A GOOD DOG.*

**WELL IS AN ADVERB THAT MODIFIES A VERB**

*PIPPA'S FRIENDS BEHAVE WELL ON THE LEASH.*
Usage

- When you misspell these words you misuse them!

Always leave a space here.

Remember, there's a lot of space in outer space.

A lot is not a word.
You don't write
alittle, abunch, acantaloupe, aporkchop
So don't write alot.