Grammar Review

What is grammar?

Grammar are the set of rules governing how the words in a language may be joined to make sense.

Hey, isn't there something wrong with that sentence?

Good catch. The noun "Grammar" is singular while the verb "are" is plural. According to the rules of English grammar, the sentence is ungrammatical. It should have been written:

> *Grammar is the set of rules governing how the words in a language may be joined to make sense.*

We may understand the grammar of a sentence, without understanding what the sentence means. For example:

> *The porturbs in the bigger torms have tanted the maret's rotment brokly.*

Without knowing what this sentence means, or many of the words in it, you should be able to pick out the **subject and predicate** (verb) in the sentence (Subject: *porturbs.* What have they done? They have *tanted.).* If you can do this, it means you have grasped much of the grammar of the sentence. You understand how the words are put together, even if you don't understand the words.

Next, consider the following "sentence," composed of perfectly legitimate English words:

> *If running successful cars bagels fans would have a standard enough doughnuts dripping killer watches.*

In this "sentence," even though you know the meaning of the words, it is difficult to grasp the role they play. What is the subject? What is the predicate?

Of course, neither of the last two "sentences" is meaningful. In the first example, although we can discern a grammar, the words are nonsense. In the second example, the words are recognizable, but they are not properly linked. In order for our sentences to be meaningful we have to have the right words linked in the right manner.

This workshop explores these basic elements of English grammar:
- Sentences (complete, run-on, and fragments)
- Tenses
- Pronouns
- Possessives
- Commas

An understanding and application of these fundamental elements of grammar will help you unleash the awesome power of the English language.

Sentences

What is a sentence?
A sentence is a group of words, with a definite subject and verb-predicate, that expresses a **complete** thought.

> *Jack is talking.* This is an example of a proper English sentence. There is a definite subject, *Jack,* and a definite predicate, *is talking.* Together these parts form a complete thought.

> *If Jack is talking* is not a proper English sentence. This fragment does not represent a complete thought. We wonder what will happen "If Jack is talking?"

Sentence fragments
If Jack is talking is a s**entence fragment.** A sentence fragment either has no clear subject or predicate, or does not state a complete thought, or both. Thus, **it can not stand alone as a sentence.** We often use sentence fragments in

conversation or informal writing. In these situations we can usually figure out what the fragment means by the **context** in which it is used. In formal writing, however, we don't want our readers to have to "figure out" what we've written. In these situations we should try to make our writing as clear as possible.

Let's turn this fragment into a proper English sentence that states a complete thought:
> *If Jack is talking, you should listen.*

Some other examples of sentence fragments:
> Although, you were sleeping.
> If you come over.
> The food, the drink, the silverware, the table.
> Because he went out.

How could you turn these sentence fragments into complete sentences?

Run-on sentences

Two or more **independent clauses** (clauses that can stand alone as sentences) improperly joined make a **run-on sentence.** There are two basic categories of run-on sentences:
- Comma splices (two independent clauses joined by a comma)
- Fused sentences (two independent clauses joined by no punctuation at all)

Examples:
> Comma splice: *I went to the store, I bought some milk.*
> Fused sentence: *I went to the store I bought some milk.*

There are a number of ways you can correct a run-on sentence:
- Create two separate sentences.
- Link the independent clauses with a semicolon.
- Combine the independent clauses with a comma and a coordinating conjunction.
- Subordinate one of the independent clauses by using a subordinating conjunction.

There is no one right method for all circumstances. Which method you choose will depend on what you intend to say with your sentence.

Some examples:
> Separate sentences: *I went to the store. I bought some milk.*
> Semicolon: *Aliens landed; they took me hostage.*
> Comma followed by coordinating conjunction: *Becky became a rock star when she was 17, but she never graduated from high school.*
>> Note: The **coordinating conjunctions are But,**

Since this passage describes actions that occurred the night before, it calls for the simple past. Only one of the verbs, "seemed," is in the correct tense. As you can see, the variety of tenses makes this passage very difficult to follow.

How could you correct this passage?

Pronouns

Pronouns are words that stand in place of nouns. There are eight types of pronouns in English.

Type	Function	Examples
Personal pronouns	Refer to people or things	I, you, he, she, it, we, they, me, my, his, hers, hers, this, these, that, those
Demonstrative pronouns	Point to specific things	this, these, that, those
Indefinite pronouns	Point to general things; do not specify a particular person or object	another, everybody, anybody, nobody, nothing, several, few, both
Relative pronouns	Introduce clauses that modify nouns	who, whom, whose, whoever, whomever, which, whichever, that
Interrogative pronouns	Begin questions	who, what, which, whoever, whomever, whatever, whichever
Reflexive pronouns	Refer to nouns or pronouns – the subject of a clause	myself, yourself, himself, herself, itself, ourselves, yourselves, themselves
Intensive pronouns	Stress the noun or pronoun referred to earlier in the sentence	I *myself* am going (in place of someone else)
Reciprocal pronouns	Express mutual relationships	each other, one another

As you will notice, many of the pronouns, such as *who, whoever, myself,* fall into more than one category. What role these words play in any given sentence is determined by their use in that sentence.

Pick out the **pronouns** in the following sentences:
> They're playing our song.
> I get a kick out of you.
> You do something to me.
> Everybody's got something to hide except for me and my monkey.

Pronoun use: Make sure that each pronoun you use has a clear antecedent. An antecedent is the noun that the pronoun stands for. You must also make sure that each pronoun agrees in person, number, and gender with its antecedent.

Pronoun/antecedent clarity: You may know what the pronoun you're using stands for, but if your reader doesn't, then you have failed to adequately communicate. You don't want to leave your reader guessing which pronoun goes with which noun.

Some examples of pronoun/antecedent confusion:

Marilyn told her mother that her pills were on the dresser.
> Whose pills are on the dresser, Marilyn's or her mother's? We don't know, because we don't know whether *her* refers to *Marilyn* or Marilyn's *mother.*
> We could clarify this sentence in either of the following ways (which way is correct depends on whose pills they are):
> *Marilyn told her mother, "Your pills are on the dresser."*
> Or
> *Marilyn told her mother, "My pills are on the dresser."*

Take a look at this sentence:
> *Jesse and Frank told one funny story after another at the party last night. He kills me.*
> Which brother does "he" refer to? Jesse or Frank? We don't know. How could you correct this sentence to eliminate the confusion?

Pronoun/antecedent agreement: Along with making sure that we have a clear reference for our pronouns, we must also take care to have the pronoun agree in **person, number, and gender** with its antecedent. For instance, in the following passage, the pronoun is plural, while the noun to which it refers is singular:
> *The V- 12 Jaguar E-type is a great car. They are my favorite automobile.*
> "They" is **plural,** but only **one** type of car is spoken of. Thus, the pronoun does not agree in number with the noun.
> Corrected:
> *The V-12 Jaguar E-type is a great car. It is my favorite automobile.*
> Note: we also have to change the verb following the pronoun in the second sentence, from "are" (plural) to "is" (singular).

Mistakes of number, such as these, are the most common type of pronoun problem in English.

Let's look at another example:
> *Many words in our language can claim television as its birthplace.*
> What's wrong with this sentence? How can you correct it?

Gender agreement: Traditionally, abstract nouns relating to people have taken the male pronoun. For instance:
> *A student should do **his** work if **he** wants to pass the course.*

> Although this construction is grammatically correct, there is an implied sexism in the generic use of the masculine pronoun. The solution, to use **he or she** in the place of **he**, yields the following:

> *A student should do **his** or **her** work if **he** or **she** wants to pass the course.*

> This is grammatically correct, but it's wordy and leads to clunky sentences.

> A more elegant solution is to change the singular nouns to plurals, as in:
> ***Students** should do **their** work if **they** want to pass the course.*

Possessives

1. Most English nouns form their possessives with an apostrophe s ('s) if they are singular, and an s apostrophe (s') if they are plural.
    Singular possessive: The **car's** hood.
    Plural possessive: The **cars'**

Its

Grammar Slammer
http://englishplus.com/grammar/index.htm