As many recent graduates know, the job market, particularly the market for jobs in the federal government, is highly competitive. Entering that market, like anyone else, I needed the ability to stand out. Also like most, I had no idea how to do so.

After numerous failed attempts to land a job, any job, I finally realized a bit of fortuitous luck. Someone at the United States Marshals Service was desperately looking for someone capable of coherently writing in the complex, backwards language of government-ese. (For anyone wondering, government-ese is English, though it is hardly recognizable to anyone with the slightest inclination towards common sense.) At some point my résumé landed on this person’s desk. He glossed over my degree history, my internships, my work history (basically everything I assumed was important) and instead focused on a brief section on my time spent at Monmouth University’s Writing Center. Though I included this section almost as an afterthought, I had unknowingly accomplished the job-seeker’s goal: I had stood out.

Following a cursory interview process and a not-so-cursory background check, I was bound for our nation’s capital. Once I arrived, being the government, my employers had very little idea how best to utilize the new kid who kept politely telling them how to fix their memos. As with many things, I should have been careful what I wished for. Once the word spread that I was willing to help anyone and everyone with their written products, I became the most popular geek this side of Glee.

Though you might never know it from the news coverage of the federal government’s inclination to spend vast sums of money, there actually are finite resources that every agency must share. As it happens, agencies claim these resources by providing written justifications to (and groveling before) Congress. So for the next several years, I wrangled with words, parsed paragraphs, and otherwise lived the dream aspired to by countless low-level cogs in the bureaucratic machine.

Eventually, someone higher up in the food chain noticed my writing, and within the time it has taken me to write this story, I was busy writing even more officious-sounding documents on even more overpriced letterhead.

Since those heady days, I have since taken another position in the Marshals Service more closely aligned with the career trajectory I originally envisioned. I am, however, constantly aware of the role my writing skill and my experience at the Writing Center played in bringing me to this point in my life. There is an unfortunate lack of skilled writers in today’s workforce, though as was my experience, this deficit can offer skilled writers the opportunity to be noticed.
I’ve been thinking a lot about sentences lately. In my relatively short time as a Writing Assistant, I have encountered sentences that are like train wrecks, so I’ve been thinking about how to help the student (and me) understand why a sentence does not make sense. But where do sentences get derailed? One fairly common way is the MIXED construction, in which the parts of a sentence do not fit together.

Mixed construction happens when a dependent clause, prepositional phrase, or independent clause is used incorrectly as the subject of a sentence:

Example 1: When the engineer fell asleep crashed the train.

Problem: A dependent clause, When the engineer fell asleep, is incorrectly used as the subject.

Possible rewrite: When the engineer fell asleep, he crashed the train.

Example 2: By going faster caused the train to arrive on time.

Problem: A prepositional phrase, By going faster, is used incorrectly as the subject.

Possible rewrite: Going faster caused the train to arrive on time.

Example 3: It arrived on time made the passengers happy.

Problem: The independent clause, It arrived on time, is used incorrectly as the subject.

Possible rewrite: Arriving on time made the passengers happy.

The more I think about them, the more I find sentences are not easy to deconstruct and explain! Next time, I want to look into words that act as the switching signals of sentence construction – did I really say that?

Words, Words, Words by Megan Jeffers

Topic: Txt Speak

Paragraph 1: hey omg what r u up to this wknd? i was thinkin of takin a trip up to nyc to see my aunt n cousin cuz they have 4 tix 2 the yankee game on sat they sed i can bring a friend if i want to lol so if ur free let me kno asap and ill call my aunt 2 get ur tix!!!! :)

Paragraph 2: Hey, what are you up to this weekend? I was thinking of taking a trip up to New York City to see my aunt and cousin because they have four tickets to the Yankees game on Saturday. They said I can bring a friend if I wanted to. So, if you’re free, let me know as soon as you can, and I will call my aunt to get your ticket.

The first paragraph may be okay in a text that you send to your friend, but do you really want to have that type of writing style in your writing pieces for school or work?

Although much research has been done, many studies have found that constant or incessant texting does not affect students’ ability to write one way or another. We still live in an age where people are predominantly grammatically correct in their writing. However, this trend of using improper grammar or abbreviations in texts due to the ability to answer faster is something that has become a habit for many of us with a phone capable of text messaging. The bottom line here is to simply be wary of typing habits like the dreaded “Txt Speak” when writing academic or professional pieces!

“The Cram Session” by Samantha Wilson

It’s 10:00 in the morning and your next student rushes into your tutoring room: “Help me, this paper is due at 11:30 and I haven’t even started it yet.” This is a problem that many of us Writing Assistants have heard and faced in our sessions. Although we are wondering why the students do not start their essays much earlier, we cannot say this; we simply have to put on brave faces and help the students as best as we can.

With such limited time and zero of the five necessary pages completed, it is important that we help the student focus on the most important aspects of the assignment. The student needs to answer the question given before syntax and grammar are altered or fixed. For example, if the prompt asks for three supporting points for a thesis, we should guide the student in focusing on what the thesis will be, as well as assist him or her with the three ideas and finding support for them. Some students may write a paragraph and ask to revise the comma usage, but at this late stage in the process, it is vital that the assignment be completed first.

It sometimes pains us to see a potentially great essay be rushed and done so nervously, but we cannot punish the student. We are here to help, and we must assist the students no matter what time limits they may have.

A Requiem for Paper Evaluation? by Alicia Guarracino

Scantron technologies have been lightening the load for math and science teachers since the 1970s, but English teachers and writing center assistants are still toiling away at manually evaluating student essays. As an English professor myself, I often feel that my field is stuck in the technological Dark Ages. I, for one, spend an exorbitant amount of time providing customized feedback on student papers, and, yes, I frequently suffer from pencil blisters. Okay, enough of this sob story. I went into this profession knowing about the papers, and I love what I do. But the fact remains—there is plenty of room for technology to expedite the paper evaluation process.

A few advancements have already breached the surface. For example, ETS has developed Criterion, a program that provides users with immediate feedback on their essays. Other programs, such as T.A. Toolbar and E-Marketing, are designed to help users address the most common errors that appear in essays, and many of these programs allow users to add their own corrections to the comment bank.

However, many colleges and writing centers are reticent to use such software, arguing that these programs may not adequately respond to the complexities of college-level writing assignments. Also, some feel that these technologies could dehumanize both the evaluation and the writing process. The humanities, in many ways, encourage students to cultivate less quantifiable skills, such as style, tone, and emotionality—all of which are very human and very much a part of the essay writing and evaluation experience.

Several questions remain: Will such software turn stylistic essays into formulaic lexicons? Should these programs supplement, rather than replace, manual paper evaluation? Will these technologies hinder students from taking rhetorical risks in their writing? Will these advancements lead to the prioritization of technical soundness over meaningful content? Will such technologies prevent students from exploring their voice? How will these technologies impact ESL programs? These questions touch on just a few of the issues that colleges and writing centers may have to grapple with in the not so distant future.
Pronoun Dilemma Solved by Debbie Peterson

As a mother, a composition instructor and a writing center tutor, I come across pronoun usage problems daily. Whether to use subjective pronouns or objective ones is a problem that can be solved simply. Before we get into it, I first need to admit that I struggle with grammatical terms myself. I have trouble remembering what a dangling modifier or a split infinitive is. I often rely on my instinct to know what is right or wrong and how to fix it. So, I don’t want to get caught up with terminology, but I do find that it sometimes helps. So, I’ll start here. What are subjective or objective pronouns?

Subjective pronouns are: I, you (singular and plural), he, she, it, we, they. They do something (action or feeling). For example: I ate a sandwich. She went to the store. They are upset.

Objective pronouns are: me, you (singular and plural), him, her, it, us, them. They receive something. For example: We gave him a sandwich. You told me not to run. Will you watch him for a while?

Pronouns can be direct objects, as in the examples above (directly receiving the action). They may also be objects of a preposition. For example: She went to the store with him ("with" is the preposition). Prepositions are locators of time, movement, or place. Some of the most common prepositions are: in, on, to, with, for, at, before, after, above, below, and between.

Now that I’ve covered some background information, here is the problem I come across. Usually it occurs when there are two or more pronoun objects:

The teacher yelled at my brother and I mercilessly. What is wrong here? Brother and I are the direct objects. They receive the action of the sentence. So, they should be OBJECTIVE (see list above): The teacher yelled at my brother and me mercilessly.

I know it’s not easy to remember subjective or objective or any other grammatical term, so let me show you an easier way.

If you question what to use (he or him, she or her), make it singular. In other words, take out the other person/people, and leave the pronoun: The teacher yelled at I/me mercilessly. Now it’s easy to see (if you are a fluent English speaker) that “me” is the proper pronoun to use.

You can use another little trick with objects of a preposition. For example: This secret is between you and me. In this example, “between” is the preposition while you and me are the objects. In using the trick, reverse the two pronouns. It just doesn’t sound right to say, This secret is between I and you*.

Here’s another example: The note on the door was for Jill and (I, me). Using the first trick, just take Jill out of the sentence and see how it sounds. The note on the door was for I. Nope. Doesn’t sound right, does it?

Try a few on your own:

1. The bird flew over the head of the teacher and (they, them).
2. Sushi is one of the best kinds of food according to our friends and (we, us).
3. For Joe, Maeve, and (she, her), this was their first time eating raw fish.

In sentence 1, OF is the preposition with THEY or THEM as the object. The correct answer must, of course, be THEM since it is the objective form of the pronoun (and because it sounds right if you took out the teacher).

In sentence 2, ACCORDING TO is called a compound preposition, and works the same way a one-word preposition does, requiring the objective form of the pronoun, US. (Again, if you took out “our friends” it wouldn’t sound correct to say “we.”)

In sentence 3, FOR is a preposition and its object is either SHE or HER. Since objects of prepositions can only be in objective case, HER is correct. (Take Joe and Maeve out of the picture and see which pronoun sounds best.)

Here are a few more to try:

1. My roommate and (I, me) went to see the movie, Twilight, last night.
2. She saved (I, me) a seat while I left to buy popcorn for (she, her) and (I, me).
3. Both (she, her) and (I, me) thought the movie was an excellent adaptation of the book.

4. When I said I was surprised that Edward saved Bella from becoming a vampire, my roommate replied, “What else did you expect from (he, him)?”

After the movie, two of our friends we saw there offered to take my roommate and (I, me) out for coffee.

*Another issue is which to use first, the “me” or the other person. When I was a child, my mother used to correct me, and I’ll always remember the correct order because of this. If I said, “She is coming with me and Tara,” my mother would say, “I didn’t know Tara was mean!” Get it? Say “me and Tara” quickly.
The Writing Center Gets Creative by Courtney Luk

Have you noticed the Writing Center getting prettier and prettier? The walls are not so white anymore! The quotes on the whiteboards and walls add a nice, “Writing Center” touch to the rooms. Also, the springtime, papered flowers and rabbits are really cute, and the yearbook-themed spread on the door is creative. These little decorations just make the Writing Center more visually appealing, so there should be more decorations that appeal to the visual sense. Students can feel more at ease when the walls are actually decorated and not looking like a college classroom. It is also more interesting for the WAs because we have to stay in one room for a while. That gets boring really fast if there are not any appointments. Some kind of distraction, like reading a quote or staring at a paper rabbit, is highly welcomed!

Engaging All Students: Drawing Out the Shy Tutee by Victoria Avon

In order for sessions at the Writing Center to be as productive as possible, both the tutee and the tutor need to be actively involved. This can be especially difficult to achieve when working with a shy student. Fortunately, there are different strategies that can be used to make the session more comfortable and successful. When first meeting with students, it is essential to smile and to introduce yourself. Afterwards, a great way to break the ice is to simply ask students how their day is going or to find some common ground, such as a similar major. Once the introductions have been made, it is important to encourage students to participate. This can include asking open-ended questions, stating positive aspects of the papers before the negative and providing praise when students develop a good strategy to improve their papers. At the end of the session, it is important to wish students well and to answer any final questions. This will help to leave them with a positive sense of the Writing Center and hopefully encourage them to come back in the future.

Grammar Gab by Kara Polhemus

**Affect and effect** can be easy to mix up, especially since both words can act as a noun or as a verb.

First, let’s look at the most common definitions and usages.

**Affect** is most often used as a verb meaning “to influence.”

For example: “Personal preferences affect one’s choice of clothing.” “A nutritious diet affects a person’s health.”

**Effect** is most often used as a noun meaning “a result,” “a consequence,” “an impression,” or “a phenomenon.” It can also be used in the phrase “personal effects,” which are personal belongings or possessions.

For example: “Adding extra sugar to the cake recipe did not have the desired effect.” “The harsh criticism had a negative effect on Sarah’s mood.” “She was wearing expensive diamond jewelry just for effect.”

Not so bad, right? Just make sure you stick with the correct usage—sometimes, people get confused because “having an effect on something” is similar in meaning to “affecting something.” But that doesn’t change the fact that in most cases, “effect” is a noun and “affect” is a verb.

Now let’s look at the less common definitions and usages.

**Affect** is also a noun meaning “feeling or emotion” or “expression of mood.” However, affect is usually used this way only in psychology and medicine.

For example: “Some patients may display a flat affect when using certain medications.”

**Effect** is also a verb meaning “to bring about or accomplish.” However, this usage doesn’t appear very frequently.

For example: “The protests effected political change.”

Here’s a tip to help you remember: “Affect” is an “action word,” which is another name for a verb.
It is perhaps a declaration made daily by students visiting The Writing Center: “I don’t get commas.” Surely we’ve all had students profess their dislike of commas or show us an almost vendetta-like refusal to maintain correct comma usage. Commas are an extreme source of frustration for many students, but experience has shown me that the biggest roadblocks in the way of a student’s comprehension of commas are not punctuation rules, but the student’s anxiety and self-doubt. Once a student begins to believe that he/she just doesn’t “get” commas, the anxiety over punctuation becomes internalized, and the student no longer believes punctuation rules to be accessible or understandable. Thus, the student unfortunately gives up.

As a Writing Assistant, I try my best to make students more comfortable with writing and stress how even the toughest punctuation and grammar issues can be overcome with the right information and a good attitude. When I sense that a student not only needs assistance with punctuation rules but also has a self-defeating attitude, I approach the situation sympathetically. Letting students know that they are not the only ones to find commas confusing makes them feel more comfortable and at ease. Simplifying comma usage to the straightforward rules on the Writing Center’s reference sheet on commas helps students feel less overwhelmed. I like to demystify dependent, independent, and nonessential clauses for the anxious student by applying the terms’ definitions to concrete and easily understood rules, like using commas when connecting two complete sentences, before and after side information within a sentence, and in a series. Students are often surprised just how easy it is to understand comma usage when it’s met with the right attitude and made approachable by a Writing Assistant.

What is this message here? A “no-show”? Oh dear!

New innovations have struck the Writing Center this semester, and one of those innovations has been the updated Tutor-Trac. As Writing Assistants, we must remember that nothing is perfect; that being said, a glitch in the new system has actually led us to a new discovery. Now, when students miss an appointment, it shows up when you log them out of a current session. The message will pop-up when you sign students out saying: what Writing Assistant they were supposed to be with, what time and the date. With this new information, as Writing Assistants we should take advantage of what we can teach students from this discovery. If you have a student who has missed a previous appointment, politely ask him or her in an informal matter, “Did you by chance accidentally miss an appointment prior to this one?” Assuming it was not on purpose, address the student about missing the appointment. Upon hearing his or her response, again very politely say, “Try not to miss another one!”
MICHELLE GILES

In September, I started working as an English adjunct professor at Ocean County College, teaching freshman composition. My first course in the fall semester was an exciting and rewarding experience. I’m finding that much of what I learned at the Writing Center is invaluable to me as a college instructor. I have no doubt that my teaching skills, lesson plans, and writing exercises are greatly enhanced by my experience at the Writing Center.

I’m also working at Georgian Court University as the communications specialist for its fundraising division. In May, I will teach a five-week memoir writing course at Georgian Court’s McAuley Institute for Lifelong Learning. In my spare time, I’m working on my creative writing, and I’m planning to apply for a fiction writing seminar at Sarah Lawrence College this summer.

I will always be grateful for my experience working at the Writing Center and studying in the English master’s program. I was lucky to have wonderful mentors in my English professors and of course, Jane and Jeanne. I also made some terrific friends. It is a time I will always cherish.

LINDSEY MELODY

I graduated magna cum laude in 2010 with a degree in Political Science and a minor in English and was a Writing Assistant for three of my four years as an undergrad. I am finishing up my first year of law school at CUA’s Columbus School of Law in Washington, D.C. and living in the Washington, D.C. area with a fellow alumna of Monmouth. This summer, I will be a legal intern with the National Association for Prosecuting Attorneys in the District and am looking forward to finishing finals, jazz and wine in the Sculpture Gardens, and not spending a single second in the law library for three months. I am currently applying for and working on a position for the fall, hopefully (very hopefully) at the Department of Justice or with a judge, as well as hoping for an invitation to Law Review and to Moot Court. I am active in a number of organizations on campus, and plan on pursuing a legal career in public interest and public service, hoping to live and practice in D.C. for a while after graduation. I continue to keep in touch with a number of former Writing Assistants and am always so glad to see how successful and happy they are after graduation. The WC is definitely one of my most missed memories from college.

Rickey Kallicharan

After earning a BS in Biology at Monmouth University, I pursued an MBA with a concentration in Healthcare Management. Upon graduation in 2008, I joined the team at Ocean Medical Center as a physician liaison. In this position, and subsequently as Manager of Physician Liaisons, I worked with the VP of Business Development to create and maintain a physician relations program with responsibilities in business planning/development, issue resolution and physician recruitment.

Since November of 2010, I have been working with Acclarent, an ENT subdivision of Johnson and Johnson. In my new market development role, I am responsible for developing relationships with physicians, ENT Key Opinion Leaders and Hospital and Accredited Surgery Center administrators. The goal is to execute a practice development plan with the main objective of driving Acclarent technology to a standard of care.

Since leaving Monmouth, I continue to maintain a close relationship with my mentor at the Writing Center. The experiences I gained as a tutor have given me a great advantage in attaining and executing the responsibilities of my various roles.
CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL OF OUR GRADUATES!!!
We are so proud of you!

We would like to wish all of our current Writing Assistants and Writing Center alumni a great summer!

Keep an eye out at the end of August for our “Welcome Back” edition of The Writing Center Wire!

THE WRITING CENTER WIRE

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