



PROOFREADING

San Diego County Probation





REMEMBER GRAMMAR LESSONS?

San Diego County Probation

Why Care About Grammar?

- Three types of people

1. Purists/Prescriptivists

People who cannot distinguish between good and bad language, or who regard the distinction as unimportant, are unlikely to think carefully about anything else. — B. R. Myers

Do not be surprised when those who ignore the rules of grammar also ignore the law. After all, the law is just so much grammar.

— Robert Brault

Why Care About Grammar?

- Three types of people

2. Rebels/Descriptivists

Sometimes with The New Yorker,
they have grammar rules that just
don't feel right in my mouth. —
David Sedaris

People don't talk like
this, they talk like this.
— Bill Bryson

Why Care About Grammar?

- Three types of people

3. Don't-know-don't-care

I don't know the rules of grammar... If you're trying to persuade people to do something, or buy something, it seems to me you should use their language, the language they use every day, the language in which they think. – David Ogilvy

I can't spell or do grammar, but I'm smarter and more serious than people think. – Cher

Why Care About Grammar?

- The nature of our profession
 - Court reports
 - Public, for posterity
 - Consequential



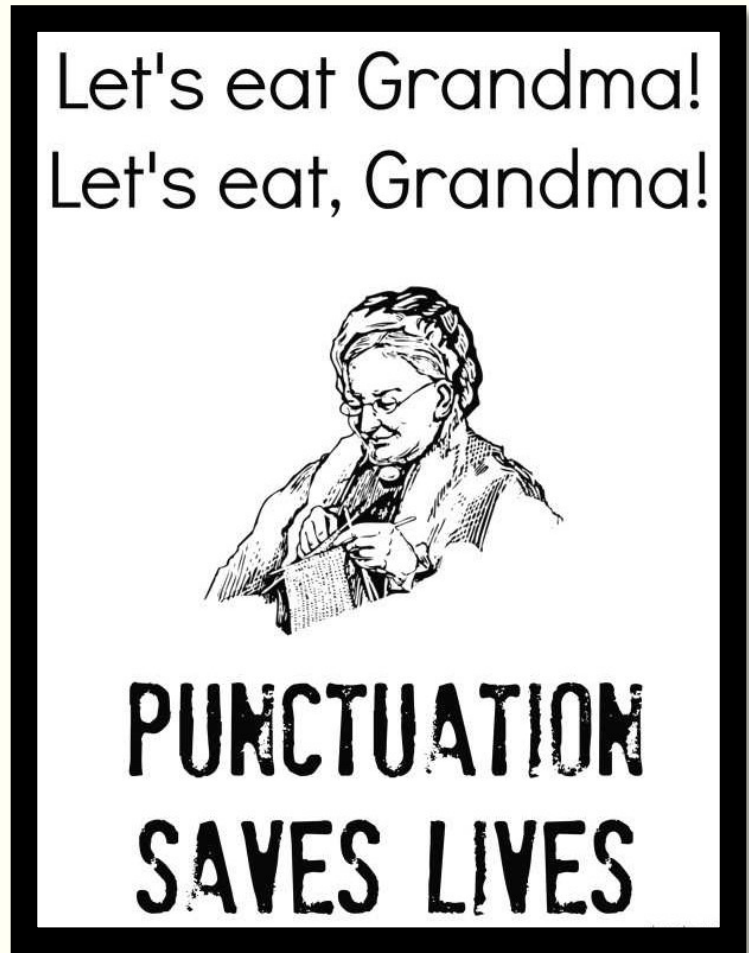
Class Objectives

Review errors commonly found in law enforcement writing and learn techniques you can use to proofread and revise your work for:

- Errors in writing mechanics (punctuation, capitalization, spelling)
- Errors in content (grammar, factual accuracy, lack of clarity)



Writing Mechanics: Commas



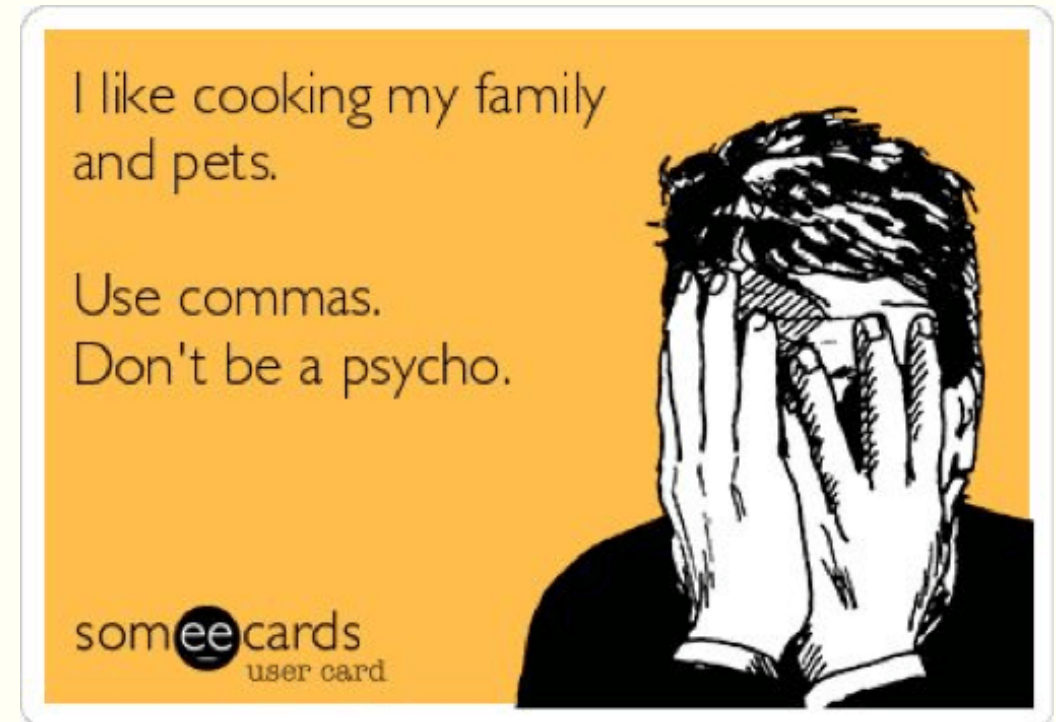
Use commas . . .

- before coordinating conjunctions (FANBOYS) linking clauses
 - The officer activated his emergency lights and siren, **but** the suspect vehicle accelerated away.
 - ✗ The defendant reached into his pocket, and removed a small plastic baggie.
- after an introductory adverb or dependent clause at the beginning of a sentence
 - After she was sentenced, the defendant checked in at the Probation office with her court orders.
 - The defendant checked in at the Probation office with her court orders after she was sentenced.
 - ✗ However she left before meeting with an officer.

Writing Mechanics: Commas

Use commas . . .

- to separate items in a list
 - Officers located a spoon, a burnt piece of foil, and a bindle containing 0.14 grams of heroin on the nightstand.
- When attributing quotations
 - The defendant pleaded, “Those aren’t my pants!”
 - ✗ “I borrowed them from my roommate” he continued.



Writing Mechanics: Commas

Use commas . . .

- to set off an appositive (a restating of something)
 - The defendant stated that “benzos,” sedatives in the class of benzodiazepines, are his drugs of choice.
- in addresses and dates
 - He entered the treatment program on Wednesday, October 30, 2019, but left the next day.
 - ✗ She moved to Chula Vista from Chicago, Illinois when she was 13.

Writing Mechanics: Hyphens

Hyphen	-
En dash	–
Em dash	—

Use hyphens . . .

- for numbers and some compound words
 - twenty-six, two-thirds, on-site, well-being, self-expression, ex-girlfriend
- for compound adjectives *before* nouns
 - a two-year-old child, a high-risk caseload, a five-inch blade, a high-speed chase

Do not use hyphens . . .

- after an –ly word or when a compound adjective comes *after* the noun.
 - a newly hired employee, a child who is two years old, a blade five inches long

Writing Mechanics: Apostrophes

Apostrophes should be used for two purposes:

- for contractions
 - do not → don't
 - they are → they're
- for possessives
 - John's house
 - the officers' badges



Writing Mechanics: Apostrophes



Do NOT use apostrophes to make words plural.

- ✗ PO's
- ✗ the 1990's
- ✗ The officer's exited their vehicle.

Exception for clarity when writing about plural letters:

- There are two i's in "skiing."
- She earned all A's on her report card.

Writing Mechanics: Quotation Marks

In American English, commas and periods always go inside quotation marks.

- It was Yogi Berra who said, “It’s like *déjà vu* all over again.”
- He calls her his “aunt,” but she is not actually related to him.
- ✗ The defendant stated he is “ready to change because I have a son now”.

Semicolons, colons, question marks, and exclamation marks can survive outside of the quotation marks if they aren’t part of the quotation.

- Was it Maya Angelou who said, “Try to be a rainbow in someone’s cloud”?
- He was initially classified as “high-risk”; however, he was moved to a less intensive supervision level after one year of compliance.

Writing Mechanics: Spelling

The most commonly misspelled words :

Publicly (not public~~a~~lly)

Until (not untill)

Definitely (not defin~~a~~tely)

Receive (not recie~~v~~ve)

Government (not gove~~r~~ment)

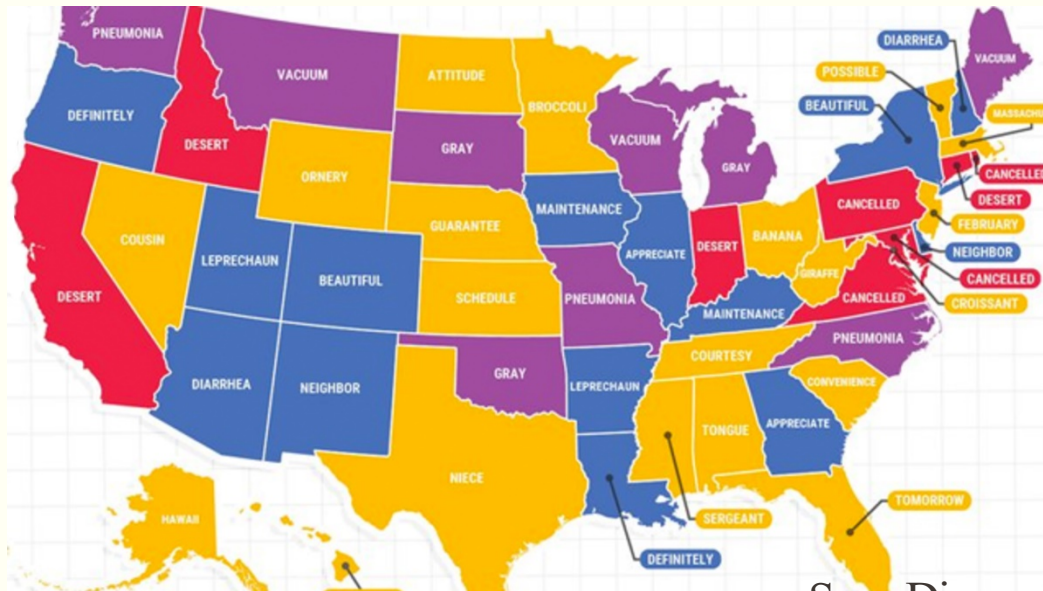
Which (not ~~w~~ich)

Separate (not sepe~~r~~ate)

Accommodate (not

Occurred (not occu~~r~~ed)

accom~~m~~odate)



Know the difference between these words:

- your, you're
- there, their, they're
- it's, its
- accept, except
- capital, capitol
- affect, effect
- ensure, insure
- then, than
- lie, lay
- principal, principle

← Most frequent "How to spell . . ." Google searches by state

Proofreading Strategies

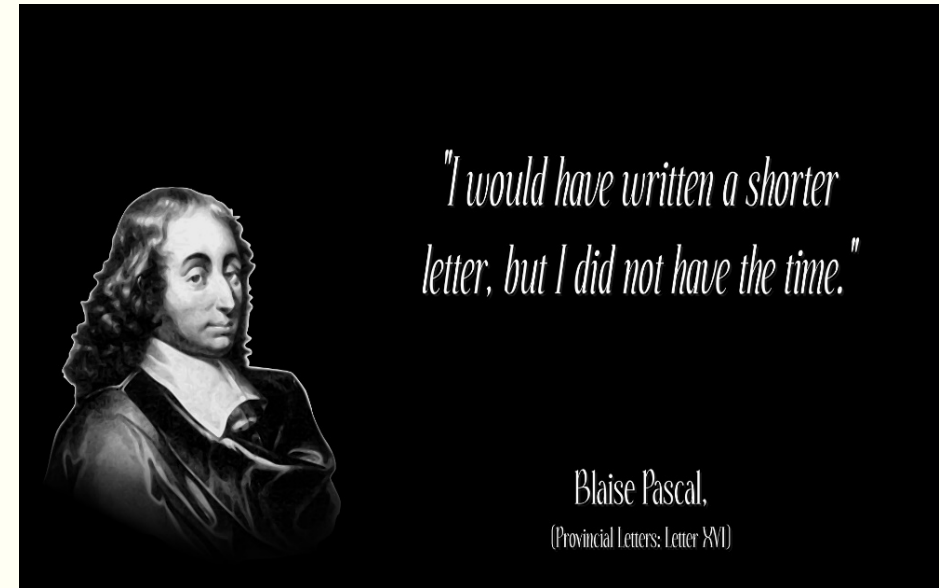
- **Print out your paper.**
- **Work on a different task** for a while and come back with fresh eyes.
- **Speak the words quietly** to yourself.
- **Read once only for writing mechanics** and once for content.
- **Exchange papers** with a colleague.
- Pay attention to **Word's suggestions**.
- **Be careful about homophones** (e.g. wright and right) because Word won't catch them.



Content Errors: Redundancy

Avoid redundant phrases.

Instead of this	Write this
his past history	his history
return back <i>or</i> revert back	return <i>or</i> revert
the end result the final outcome	the result the outcome
give advance warning	warn
self-confessed	confessed



Don't use jargon.

[https:// www.plainlanguage.gov/](https://www.plainlanguage.gov/)

Content Errors: Verbosity



Use plain, simple language, short words and brief sentences. That is the way to write English--it is the modern way and the best way. Stick to it; don't let fluff and flowers and verbosity creep in.

Mark Twain

- www.writerswrite.co.za

Be concise.

Instead of this	Write this
at the present time at this point in time	currently <i>or</i> now
during the course of	during
until such time as	until
in order to for the purpose of	to
small in size fewer in number	small fewer
due to the fact that	since <i>or</i> because
made a determination that	determined
including but not limited to	including

Content Errors: Offense Section

The offense section of a report should focus on . . .

- the who, what, when, where, why, and how
- facts that aggravate or mitigate the crime (or violation)
- information that could be useful for supervision
- the defendant's roll in the offense

Avoid including . . .

- factors used to support probable cause
- information about officers' training or experience
- duplicative statements by multiple witnesses
- irrelevant details about a vehicle or building

Double check . . .

- names
- quantities
- dates
- pronouns
- locations

Content Errors: Discussion

Key elements include . . .

- why the client is before the Court
- noteworthy aspects of the client's history
- The impact to victims and the client's remorse
- client's ability to comply with conditions
- assessment results regarding the client's risk level and needs
- your *analysis* of the information and *justification* for your recommendation

Do not . . .

- introduce any new information not already presented in the report
- fail to state the nexus for any non-standard conditions you recommend
- neglect to explain why alternate recommendations were rejected
- fail to inform the Court of any conditions required by law

Key Points

- No matter our individual opinions about grammar, we must be aware of and follow the rules due to the nature of our profession.
- Proper use of commas and hyphens helps provide clarity.
- Misspellings and incorrect use of apostrophes and other punctuation marks can decrease our readers' confidence in our work.
- Avoiding redundancy and verbosity makes your writing more effective.
- When composing an offense section or discussion, always keep in mind who your audience is, what you want to communicate, and how the information will be used.
- Take pride in your work! It has your name on it and will be circulating long after your badge is retired.

The End

Thank you.
Be safe
(and accurate)!

