

# USAGE

Several of the usage errors in Level Three involve prepositional or infinitive phrases.

Use **afraid of** and **frightened by** rather than **frightened of**: *He was frightened by a moose and has been afraid of them ever since.*

Something is **between** two: *This secret is between you and that Visigoth.*

Something is **among** three or more: *Divide the fish among the five centurions.*

Not **could of** or **should of** but **could have** or **should have**: *I could have chased pigeons, and I should have chased pigeons.* *Of* is a preposition; it is never a helping verb. It is not that you *of* listened; it is that you *have* listened.

**Different from**, not **different than**: *The oar was different from the others.*

Use **kind of** rather than **kind of a**: *It seemed to be some kind of room.*

Use **like** to compare nouns and pronouns as a preposition that indicates similarity: *William Butler Yeats once wrote that old men had "hands like claws."*

Use **such as** to show examples: *He had enemies, such as Alaric the Visigoth.*

The phrase **relate to** is a vague colloquialism. Instead of saying that many people relate to J.D. Salinger's character Holden Caulfield, say that many people understand Holden, or they find that Holden's struggles remind them of their own struggles.

Use the infinitive construction **try to** rather than **try and**: *Please try to help.*

The issue here is largely one of knowing the difference between the customs of academic language and the customs of colloquial conversation. You acquire a feeling for these details by reading excellent nonfiction and by taking the time to study the details of good usage directly.

# GRAMMAR ERRORS

## Sentence Fragment *frag*

Advanced academic writing is made of complete sentences. Groups of words that do not make complete thoughts are called *fragments*. Many fragments are the result of punctuating phrases incorrectly. One common sentence fragment occurs when you put a period after an introductory participial phrase:

Wrong: *Catching the full force of the gale. Robert crouched.*

Right: *Catching the full force of the gale, Robert crouched.*

You might also see a sentence fragment caused by punctuating an infinitive or gerund phrase as though it were a complete sentence:

Wrong: *Training the team. Was a difficult challenge.*

Right: *Training the team was a difficult challenge.*

Wrong: *To train the team well. Was a difficult challenge.*

Right: *To train the team well was a difficult challenge.*

## Bad Appositive Construction

An appositive is an interrupting definition. It provides important information immediately, so readers do not have to read on in confusion. The danger is that appositives must be enclosed in commas—one to start the definition, and one to return to the main idea. If we forget the second comma, we can completely change the meaning of the sentence.

Wrong: *Robert, the mailman is stealing our car.*

Right: *Robert, the mailman, is stealing our car.*

Notice that in the first sentence there are two men, and we are speaking to Robert. In the second sentence there is one man, and the person being spoken to is not named. The missing appositive comma destroyed the meaning of the sentence.

## Misplaced Modifier *mm*

An introductory participial phrase must be set off by a comma and must modify the grammatical subject of the sentence. The modifier is misplaced if the intended target word is present in the sentence, but the modifier modifies the wrong word because of its placement.

Wrong: *Barking furiously at the mailman, Susan shushed Fido.*

Right: *Barking furiously at the mailman, Fido angered Susan.*

## Dangling Modifier *DGL* or *dgl*

A dangling modifier occurs when the intended target word of the modifying phrase is not even present in the sentence at all.

Wrong: *Barking furiously at the mailman, the day was off to a bad start.*

Right: *Barking furiously at the mailman, Fido woke us up.*