

THE TERRIFYING LECTURE OF THE GRAMMAR GROUCH

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The Scribes down in Scribeville were dangling their participles,
Conjuncting their adverbs and fumbling their articles.
Tenses were tangled and heads were behopped;
Typing was messy, and paragraphs flopped.

Hence the Grouch on the Grammar Hill grizzled and growled,
And swore that their punctuation must be de-fouled!

The Scribes had their house styles, with tiny things varying –
Like how many spaces ellipses were wearying;
Whether the fullstop or quote mark took press'dence,
In the event that the quote ends the sentence;
Whether Australians liked 'singles' or "doubles";
Whether an *honour* got a 'u' for its troubles.

But some rules were concrete, while others could flex;
So the Grouch took the task on: to start an index.
The irony's not lost on me: poetry takes liberties,
And Great Seuss himself made up words like *frib-flibberties*.
But just for today, let's cast that asidey-ing
And get down to the business of manuscript tidying.

The Scribes were light-en-ing their load of *to-dos*
With lightning-fast *don'ts* and dubious boo-boos.
With their metaphors mixed and excuses quite slim,
Their malapropisms rivalled yon Kath & Kim.

And the Grouch grouched her teeth every time someone cried
That most dreaded of non-words: '*prophesised*'!
Know your word families, people! They'll show you the path,
And then I won't be tempted to give your keyboard a bath.

We have many exceptions – we stole lots of lingo
And mixed up the bits into bittersweet Bingo.
Never mind that foreigners 'shined' but not shone!
No Aussie *knelt* when they 'kneeled' to that con!

Aid is so needed, when a quick Facebook scan
Reveals that some folks can't tell THEN from THAN.
But before we get miffy, let's take a deep gulp
And remember, the Grouch is only here to hulp!

SO! What about punkies? The symbols and marks
Aren't just there for headaches and teachers and larks.
You can avoid cannibalism, you see,
If you just pay attention to little ol' me.

If there are clauses that feel like a list,
Between each are spaces where a comma should exist.
If a breath must be taken, nine times out of ten,
That's a spot where a comma should leap from the pen.
Do you see nests of 'ands'? it is generally the case
That commas should be there, to swiftly replace.

And if you have started your sentence with 'Oh,'
Or 'Well,' or good manners, a comma should go
After each of those openers, before the next word –
Or your writing may look a little bit absurd.

But if there's a notion
that leads to a reveal
Put a colon between them:
it's not a big deal!
It's just like the thing 'tween your guts and your poop:
The second thing's jumped through the first thing's hoop!
'Oh, did she just go there?!' You bet your sweet tushie!
A Grouch balks at nothing, and can get very pushy!
Like minutes from hours, 'this' has come out of 'that';
And a colon should signal that something's been ~~sh~~ eliminated.

But if there's a thought and the next is a tangent,
A SEMIcolon has the chance to shine lambent.
(Yes, I know that's a stretch, but you've got to admit
It's hard to find rhymes for 'tangent' that fit.)

A semi's a corner you turn as you're writing:
Two thoughts that are neighbours (occasionally fighting).
Park the semi between them to give them some space;
This way you can differentiate 'tween each phrace.

Apostrophes! Bane of signwriter and schoolkid!
Most undertaught, underlearnt marks in the toolkit!
This might take some time, but I'll Grouchproof you yet
And show you a slideshow you'll never regret.

This is a single quote. Here is a double.
Here with its partner in crime, in a bubble.
If you start with one kind, and need to insert,
You must use the other (and no one will get hurt!)

But THIS single quote an apostrophe makes.
And it has many uses. And many mistakes.
Let's talk about handling possessive nouns –
All the whens and exceptions, and what's out of bounds.
Let's look at contractions, and stand-ins for a letter
This thing is a Wild Card, and there's nothing better!

O, the days when we prided ourselves on our knowledge
When it came to Greek plurals, and Latin, and college!
With one forum, two fora, antenna, antennae,
Hippopotami, criteria, indices – way-back-when, eh?
All gone now, my darlings, they're now mostly S-es
Best Google that stuff before giving them yeses.

IT is a pronoun, just like *HIM* or *HER*
So its things have no 'postrophes (yes, I am sure).
For, like *HIS* and *HERS*, *ITS* stands on its own
Don't mess with the formula; I will not condone.

But if *IT* has an *IS*, put a mark nice and high
For, as in *HE'S* and *SHE'S*, the mark stands for the 'i'.

These are known as contractions. They don't birth a child;
But they make a new word, and that's almost as wild.
Look at *COULD'VE*. Please note where the 'ha' could have been.
And remember that 'of' does not have a 'V-E'!
If a word-piece is missing, an apostrophe sits
In the junction where we are missing those bits.

And let's talk about plurals. In Australian Style,
Things aren't where we left them – school has been a while!
The Grouch fairly warns you: NO plural has this '
And if you put one in, you'll have earned a Grouch hiss!
So now for a brush-up on how to add S
To indicate when a noun seeks to possess.

I'd like a volunteer to help me demonstrate
Telling things apart, and setting sound-alikes straight.
Would you like to play '*Contraction or Possessive*'?
(I'll do my very best not to get aggressive.)

Just choose a tool and have some fun
And we'll all vote whether it's well done.
(Bonus points if you make a pun.)

This is Jen Jones, and this is Jen's car.
When we phrase it the long way, it's Jen Jones's *Go-Far*.
I know it looks wrong. But the *Style Guide* doth say!
So we all toe the line – for now, anyway.

These are Jen Jones, Jen Bloggs and Jen Smith.
They went off on a cruise – oh, what friends to go with!
These are the Jens, and I really must say
I'm quite envious of the Jens' holiday.
Jen, Jen and Jen's getaway was quite spesh
And they all got home safely, and feeling all fresh.

This is James Jones. This is James Jones's car.
And James's is cheaper than Jen's car by far.

The Joneses live in a nice house in the 'burb,
Though the Joneses' house sits a bit close to the kerb.
Have you been to Jen Jones and James Jones's place?
What it lacks in decor, it makes up for in space.

When a thing's owned by two of us, how should we phrase?
If we can pull out just one Scribe, them's the ways.

Another lovely assistant! It really isn't hard
Just have a go, whether you're a bumbler or the Bard.

Well, my dears, that was *Fun with Apostrophes*. Thanks
For listening well as I Grouched-in the blanks.
And speaking of those, when you're going through your paces,
Please, I beg of you, no double spaces!

Now I'll tell you a secret the Scribes know so well.
It's when to use *WHOM*, not a *WHO* – who can tell?
You can, that's who. Just imagine it's *HIM*.
If that works in the sentence, then give *WHO* an iM.
If it needs to be *HE*, then you leave the iM out,
Or you'll sound a bit pompous (bit of a lout).

And it's hard to know *practice* from *practise*, amiright?
So I counsel you, think of this pair to shed light:
You can tell a *piece of advice* from *advise*,
So you know nouns get Cs. You're ex-C-dingly wise.

Have you got a sentence? Does it got a verb?
—If nothing doing, it's bound to disturb.
Unless for effect, I will sentence you now
To read proper sentencing for the next hour!
Are your tenses consistent, with *is*, *was* and *will*?
'Cause if you get them muddled, you'll look like a dill.

Word to the waiting: we no longer mark *til*
And the boffins can't agree on one or two iL.
We no longer stick hyphens in *thank you* or *no one*;
That went out with *to-day*, so take care you don't show one.
We are lazier now than in decades gone by;
If I see you write *ice-cream*, I'll give you stink-eye.

Hyphens have fallen from fashion, I'm 'fraid,
And *NO ONE* will *THANK YOU* for those *TODAY*.
So straighten your syntax and tighten your text,
And nitpickers worldwide won't come for you next.

And your dialogue tags need to be more than *said*.
You can skip a few, 'long as we know from which head.
Chuck a pilcrow between people; help keep it straight.
Make it blindingly obvious! Don't obfuscate.
'Let your Swiftisms limit themselves to a few,'
she snarked, 'on the off-chance that you'll overdo.'

Incidentally — fun fact — there are two *dialog* words:
One with 'ue' for speech, and the other for nerds.
Get your homonyms straight and your homophones right
Look it up on the net if there's any doubt in sight!

One final chance to show the room
You've mastered homophonic doom!

Are your protags fantastic, with fantasy names?
Can I say them in my head, or must I play games?
Be kind to your readers, and let the text flow,
Without need for lexicons there on the go.

And speaking of heads, you must give us a breather
Between thoughts of each and the motives of either.
It's *one brain per scene* that the readers prefer!
And don't tell us their feelings — just let us infer.

Words adopted in everyday use from abroad
No longer get slanted like they were before.
'Voilà!' she exclaimed. 'It's the new status quo!
Get those italics out of here, now and pronto!'

Now I know that we read lots of 'Murican books
And their spelling gets more than its fair share of looks.
The way to push back with English tried and true
Is to have more Australian books built by YOU!

You're sassy and Seussy, and got what it takes!
From glory to glory, you learn from mistakes.
And you've got each other, for hugs and for tips,
For prayer and for guidance, for promos, and quips!

The pathos, gravitas, the humour and vibes,
Imaginative forays and very deep dives —
You're wonderful writers! You're witty and flash!
The Wordsmiths of Queensland, with grit and panache!

N.B. Thank you for your patience as I recreate the illustrations from scratch!