ENGLISH GRAMMAR AND ENGLISH USAGE

1. Relationship to Information Theory

In terms of *Coding Theory* (a discipline closely allied to Information Theory) one can think of the allowed words (the *vocabulary*) of any natural language, together with its syntax rules (the *grammar*) and the punctuation rules, as being a code which allows for efficient human communication. This code tries to get information across compactly and with minimum ambiguity. Natural languages deliberately have plenty of redundancy (to reduce ambiguity) but they never succeed in reducing ambiguity to zero. Indeed, without ambiguity certain sorts of jokes would be impossible e.g.

> Question: What is the capital of Iceland?
>
> Answer no. 1: It's Reyjavik
>
> Answer no. 2: (In the middle of the 2008 credit crunch) It's
> about £4.50 at the moment!

Clearly we are relying here on the two meanings of the word 'capital' in English. Note that we can disambiguate (and kill the joke) by using a less efficient code and asking a longer question:

> Question: What is the capital of Iceland (in the sense of
> 'principal city')

So the reason for learning the rules of English (or any other language) is to be able to communicate effectively in that 'code'. In well-defined, but restricted, situations it is possible to simplify this code to help non-native speakers of a language. An example of this is Seaspeak, a 5000-word subset of English used for ship-to-ship communication (and a similar language, Airspeak, used by aircraft and air traffic control). Speakers of linguistically-related but non-identical languages often agree a common subset of simple words and phrases to aid communication (e.g. between Scandinavian countries and 'Portuñol' between Spanish and Portuguese speakers)

The remainder of this document concentrates on some important issues in Standard English (and in some places makes clear the differences between UK and US usage).

2. Recommended texts

Highly Recommended

- *Effective Communication for Science and Technology* by Joan van Emden (paperback pub. Palgrave)
- *Rediscover Grammar* by David Crystal (Paperback pub. Longmans)
- *Eats Shoots and Leaves* by Lynne Truss (Profile Books)

Recommended (for those interested in relationship of natural languages to AI)

- *The Language Instinct* by Steven Pinker (Penguin)

Background

- Fowler's *Modern English Usage*
  (ed. Burchfield; OUP)
- *The King's English* by Kingsley Amis (Harper-Collins)
- *Mother Tongue* by Bill Bryson (Penguin)

NOTE: A person who specializes in linguistic analysis and grammars is called a linguistician (the term "linguist" is reserved for someone who speaks lots of languages)
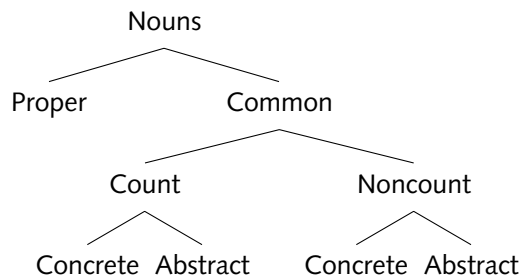
3. PARTS OF SPEECH

There are seven of these in English.

Part of speech	Examples
NOUNS	butter, eggs, John
PRONOUNS	me, you, his, hers
ADJECTIVES	big, small, red
VERBS	run, walk, go, write
ADVERBS	slowly, quickly, gently
PREPOSITIONS	at, to, by
CONJUNCTIONS	and, but, as

Let's analyse these one by one:

3.1. Nouns

```
                       Nouns
                      /     \
                 Proper      Common
                            /      \
                       Count        Noncount
                      /    \         /     \
              Concrete  Abstract  Concrete  Abstract
```

The above is a good example of what all computer scientists love dearly i.e. a *tree structure*
NOTE: The 'root' of the tree is at the top rather than the bottom.

3.2. Usage Note No. 1: 'fewer' vs. 'less'

When talking about items we use 'fewer' with count nouns and 'less' with noncount. Many people/newspapers/supermarkets get this wrong! Examples:

- My answer had $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{less} \\ \text{fewer} \end{array} \right\}$ mistakes.

- This checkout: 10 items or less (Sainsbury's)

  This checkout: 12 items or fewer (Safeways)

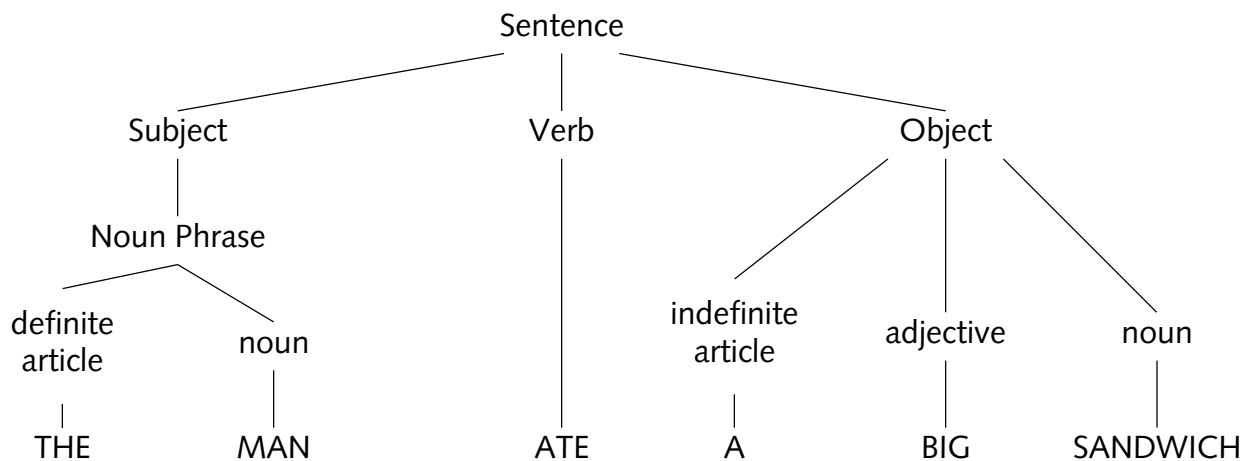- She ate $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{less} \\ \text{fewer} \end{array} \right\}$ butter than me.

- I would like $\left\{\begin{array}{c} \text{less} \\ \text{fewer} \end{array}\right\}$ sugar, please.

- John has $\left\{\begin{array}{c} \text{less} \\ \text{fewer} \end{array}\right\}$ grains of sugar than me.

3.3. Language evolves

All languages are in a constant state of evolution. We now find pre-Chaucerian English almost incomprehensible. Eighteenth century English from the time of Dr Johnson is understandable and beautiful but now seems 'old fashioned'. However, if you're going to break the rules of grammar to create an effect then that's fine in a novel (e.g James Joyce's *Ulysses*) but not in a formal report. Thus we do need to have some working knowledge of grammar rules for writing dissertations and essays as part of your degree course.

4. GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURE

The 'atoms' of English (e.g. nouns, verbs etc) are grouped into larger units to make sentences:

```
                              Sentence
                   /              |              \
              Subject            Verb            Object
                |                  |            /    |    \
           Noun Phrase            |      indefinite adjective noun
            /      \              |        article
       definite    noun          |          |       |        |
       article      |            |          |       |        |
          |        MAN          ATE         A      BIG   SANDWICH
         THE
```

English is a language in the Germanic family; it is predominantly subject-verb-object (SVO) ordered, as in the above example, with some remaining traces of *inflection* (see later) but not nearly as much as in Latin, Russian or Greek.

Most languages are either SVO, like English, or are SOV (e.g. German, Japanese). Most other combinations can be found in natural language but linguisticians are in contention about whether *any* existing natural language is predominantly OSV. An example of an OSV sentence in English might be:
"The captain of England, David Beckham is"

The above sounds distinctly odd, and is the sort of syntax used by 'Yoda the Jedi Master' in the *Star Wars* movies ! Perhaps Yoda's native tongue was OSV ? ☺

4.1. Inflected languages

Latin is often SOV but re-ordering can be done almost arbitrarily because the endings of words change depending on whether the word is part of the subject (nominative case) or the object (accusative case). This is typical of inflected languages (i.e. languages whose meaning is determined by variable case endings rather than by word order).
Example: *Discipuli, picturam spectate* which means "Students, look at the picture!"

Analysis:

Discipuli	picturam	spectate
Nominative Plural so must be the	Accusative Singular so must be the	Imperative form of the
SUBJECT	OBJECT	VERB

So, because case endings are what determine meaning in Latin it follows that:

- *Spectate discipuli picturam*
  and
- *Picturam discipuli spectate*
  have exactly the same meaning as *Discipuli picturam spectate*.

But now consider:-

- *Picturae discipulos spectate*

What does this mean ?!

4.2. Word order vs. case endings

Consider:

    (1)   Man bites dog

    (2)   Dog bites man

    (3)   Bites dog man

    (4)   Bites man dog

    (5)   Man dog bites

    (6)   Dog man bites

Given that English is a word-ordered and predominantly SVO language then (1) and (2) are no problem. But (3)–(6) are all ambiguous to some degree because English does not modify the word endings of 'dog' and 'man' if they move from being the subject to being the object.

The main residues of the case ending system, in English, reside in the *personal pronouns* (see later). Furthermore the use of *prepositions* can enable us to identify which part of a sentence is the object.

4.3. Prepositions

Question:
Can we re-order an English sentence and keep the same meaning? (given that we have very few case inflections to help us).

Well — it all depends:

    (1)   The man goes to town (SVO)

    (2)   Goes to town the man (VOS)

    (3)   The man to town goes (SOV)

    (4)   Goes the man to town (VSO)

    (5)   To town the man goes (OSV)

(6)   To town goes the man   (OVS)

Examples (5) and (6) occur fairly often in poetry and some prose (they use what is called the *preceding direct object*). Some feel 'unusual' but there are no no real problems. But notice that the above are only unambiguous because **PREPOSITIONS** (e.g. 'to' in the above examples) attach to the object part of the sentence (i.e. they "take the accusative" — we have inherited this from Latin!)

4.4. Personal pronouns

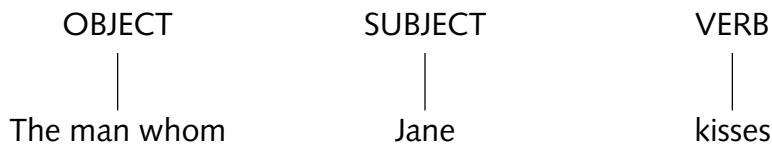| Case		
Nominative (Subject)	**Accusative (Object)**	**Genitive (Possessive)**
I	me	my
you	you	your
he	him	his
she	her	hers
we	us	our
you	you	your
they	them	their

There are also remnants of the case endings system in the *relative pronouns* e.g. who/whom. In a pure case-endings system:

- *Who* is preceded by the subject
- *Whom* is preceded by the object

Now consider:

SUBJECT	VERB	OBJECT
The man who	kisses	Jane
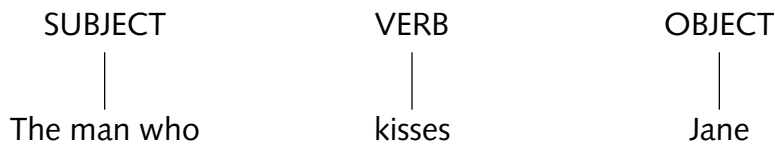
Here is another one to analyse:

| OBJECT	SUBJECT	VERB
The man whom	Jane	kisses

We have no trouble in switching the object to the front because 'whom' gives us the clue that the preceding phrase must be the object.

But what about: "The man who Jane kisses" where all we have done is swapped 'whom' for 'who'

Before we analyse this one let's look at something closely similar:

SUBJECT	OBJECT	VERB
The man who	to town	goes
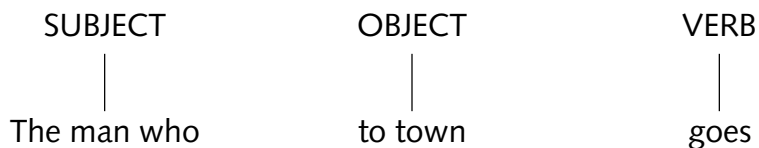
There is no problem with this? The word ordering feels weird but the 'to' is a very strong indicator that what follows is the object. But equally we have a rule that says 'whatever precedes the relative pronoun "who" is the subject' and so our analysis of "The man who Jane kisses" should be:

SUBJECT	OBJECT	VERB
The man who	Jane	kisses
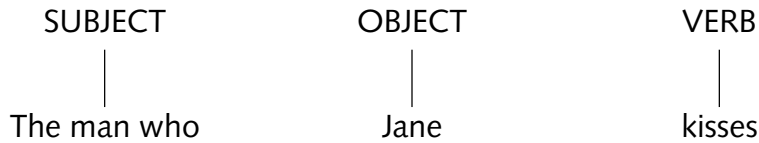
BUT just look what this means!! It means that it's the man who is doing the kissing, not the other way round! And yet I'm sure 99% of people reading this would say that it was Jane who was doing the kissing. In Dr Johnson's time (1709 – 84) this latter analysis would have earned a thunderous broadside of "Illiterates!" from the great man and a stern lecture that if this was the meaning intended then why on earth didn't we use 'whom' and make everything correct.

These kinds of consideration show the fading influence of case endings and the ever-increasing influence of word order.

5. Apostrophes and Possessives

The apostrophe has two uses in English

(i)   to denote abbreviation e.g.
John is going to town → John's going to town

(ii) to denote possession e.g.
John's PC has crashed

Often only the context tells us which of (i) or (ii) is the intended. (i.e. "John is PC has crashed" – this is nonsense so the apostrophe must denote the possessive).

5.1. Its and It's

Its is a pronoun (like, he, she, you)
So just as 'he' → 'his' (possessive)
or
'she' → 'hers' (possessive)
so also
'it' → 'its' (possessive)
NOTE: This means that "it's", is always an abbreviation for "it is" and NEVER a possessive.

5.2. Plural possessives

(i)   Where plural ends in 's' (very common) the apostrophe goes after the 's'. e.g.

The players' decision was to support the manager.
[i.e. The whole squad supports the manager]

Compare carefully with

The player's decision was ...
[Refers to just one of the players]

(ii) For plurals not ending in 's' just use apostrophe before the possessive 's' in the normal way (as if it were a singular) e.g.

The women's decision
The people's choice
The men's determination

Occasionally you will see 'super plurals' (don't know the correct linguistic term for these!) e.g.

"Consider all the peoples of the world. Undoubtedly the
peoples' choice will be for democracy"

The above is rare but on a Trades Union Building near Euston Station you can see a brass plate inscribed

TRANSPORT & SALARIED STAFFS' ASSOCIATION

This is correct. But why?

5.3. Possessives of singular items not ending in 's'

Pronouns:- these have inflected possessive forms (e.g 'its')
Nouns:- add a 's suffix as in:

- John's book

- A woman's dress

- Mary's briefcase

5.4. Possessives of singular items already ending in 's'.

These can be tricky. The *logical* convention is to use " …s's" e.g.

- Jones's book

- Banks's bitter

(This tells us the brewery was founded by Mr Banks not Mr Bank. In the latter case it would be Bank's bitter).

However, these logical constructs can be hard to say

- Professor Chesters's experiment

- Jesus's disciples

- Bayes's theorem

For this reason there is another school of thought that allows a terminal apostrophe, for singular possessives of nouns ending in 's' (this is especially common in the USA) e.g..

(a) Mr Jones' book

(b) Prof. Chesters' experiment

(c) Bayes' theorem

But the logical school doesn't like this approach! They say that (a) denotes a book belonging to all the people in the world called Mr Jones (!)

6. Can, may and might

These three auxiliary verbs are a $\begin{Bmatrix} \text{source of joy} \\ \text{total elephant trap} \end{Bmatrix}$ (please choose one of these) for lovers of the English language. The problem is that they are much used in what is called the *subjunctive mood* (this mood exists also in French, Latin, German, Russian etc.). It is a mood of a verb which indicates varying degrees of *wishing*, *uncertainty* or *doubt*.

"Can" and "could" mean 'to be capable of' in the sense of *physically possible* or *legally possible*. "May" refers to an action whose result is not known or whose outcome is in doubt. It also denotes actions where permission is being sought. "Might" refers to actions where the probabilities are in some sense discrete rather than the 'fuzzy' probability distribution of 'may'. So when entering someone's house:

$$\left.\begin{array}{l} \text{Can} \\ \text{May} \end{array}\right\rbrace \text{ I come in?}$$

Which do you think is better?

(Note: if a door-to-door salesman uses 'can' you can always try the put-down:-

> "I've no doubt you are physically capable of entering this
> house but whether you *may* enter is another matter(!)")

6.1. "May have", "Might have" and "Could have"

The above three are subtly different and very often get confused. Make sure you get it right. (For further details consult `/cs/documents/teaching/G51SCI/might.pdf` *before* you attempt the grammar question in Courseworks 1 and 2).

Compare:

(a) "If Rooney's pass had found Giggs the result *might* have been different"

(b) "If Rooney's pass had found Giggs the result *may* have been different"

(c) "If Rooney's pass had found Giggs the result *could* have been different"

Option (a) is almost certainly the one you want if writing a sports report for the local paper. The use of 'might have' denotes a choice in the past but the outcome is now known and resolved i.e. Manchester United didn't win on this occasion but everything could well have been changed if only a vital pass had got through.

Option (b) means that you *don't know* what the result of the match is but a certain vital pass (which you perhaps saw on TV just before a thunderstorm took out the power) was a pivotal moment in whatever the outcome was.

Option (c), using 'could' means "it was capable of being different" i.e the laws of Physics, Football or whatever did not rule it out.

Here's another "may have" / "might have" example:

> "I haven't seen Jones since Dunkirk in 1944. I think he
> may have been killed".
> [It's not clear whether Jones is still alive or not.]
> "Jones was very lucky at Dunkirk. The way he behaved
> he might have been killed".
> [Jones is known to be alive and well, but his reckless behaviour in
> the past could easily have led to his death.]

6.2. More about subjunctive mood of verbs

(See David Crystal's book for more details). The subjunctive is tending to fade away but still but it is still there in formal speech and writing. The subjunctive is used very often to denote *uncertainty* or *wish* for a certain outcome. Very commonly the subjunctive uses 'were' when normally you would use 'was':

- If I were you
- Were I to succeed, I should be happy indeed

- "If I were a rich man…"
  (Song from 'Fiddler on the Roof' by Lionel Bart)

But language charges, so ...
"Homeward bound I wish I was ..." Paul Simon
(OUCH!)

7. I/me/myself (also you/yourself etc. etc.)

Be enormously careful about the use of these (also he/him/himself etc.). In particular avoid using 'myself' as a get out because you're not sure whether to use 'I' or 'me' !

- Use 'I' whenever you are the subject
- Use 'me' whenever you are the object
- Use 'myself' ONLY *reflexively* and/or for emphasis.

Examples:
"I myself, feel very strongly about smoking in restaurants"
"I bought an ice-cream for myself"

The main situation for confusion is:-

$$\left.\begin{array}{l} \text{John and me} \\ \text{John and I} \end{array}\right\} \text{went to town with his sister Jane, and John bought an ice-cream for}$$

$$\left.\begin{array}{l} \text{Jane and me} \\ \text{Jane and I} \\ \text{Jane and myself} \end{array}\right\} .$$

Which is correct? (Hint: just try missing out 'John and' or 'Jane and')

8. Placement of *only*

The word *only* should be placed next to the verb or noun that it qualifies. If you get the placement wrong it can change the meaning:

> She only cycles to lectures

Here *only* qualifies the verb *cycles*. This means that the only form of transport she uses when going to lectures is a cycle. Even if she has a car or a skateboard she refuses to use them when going to lectures. Compare this with:

> She cycles only to lectures

Here *only* qualifies the noun *lectures*. This means that she reserves her cycle solely for going to lectures and thus would not use it, for example, to go to seminars or to the Union Shop.

9. Greek and Latin singulars and plurals

There is an increasing tendency to 'anglicise' plurals of Latin words:-

Singular	Latin Plural	English Plural
Atrium	Atria	Atriums or Atria
Referendum	Referenda	Referendums
Erratum	Errata	Errata

Be careful of Greek words that have been adopted into English:

Singular	Greek Plural	English Plural
Phenomenon	Phenomena	Phenomena
Criterion	Criteria	Criteria

| Lemma | Lemmata | Lemmas |
| Schema | Schemata | Schemas |

10. CONFUSION PAIRS

We now analyse some very common pairs of words, in English, that have close but distinct meanings and where it is important not to become confused.

10.1. Affect and Effect

Take great care with this and be sure you get it right!

Verb usage

affect means "to change the state of".
effect = "to cause to happen"

Both of them derive from the Latin verb *facere* meaning 'to make' or 'to do'.
Examples:

His illness $\begin{Bmatrix} \text{affected} \\ \text{effected} \end{Bmatrix}$ his results.

Their escape was $\begin{Bmatrix} \text{affected} \\ \text{effected} \end{Bmatrix}$ using explosives.

Noun usage

"Effect" can be a noun but "affect" cannot
Examples:
The effect of the strong pound on industry

The 'Clinton effect' is still strong in his home state

NOTE:- Psychologists do use the word 'affects' as a noun (e.g. " These affects will be ...") but it is a *very* technical usage.

10.2. Broach and Brooch

Broach is a verb meaning "to open up" or "to begin" whereas a "brooch *is an ornamental clasp.*

10.3. Break and Brake

These are very distinct meanings. If confused look them up in a dictionary.

10.4. Compliment and complement

Compliment is "an expression of praise or delicate flattery"

Complement means "that which completes or makes whole".
Examples:

He paid her a $\begin{Bmatrix} \text{compliment} \\ \text{complement} \end{Bmatrix}$.

The notes you take should be used to $\begin{Bmatrix} \text{compliment} \\ \text{complement} \end{Bmatrix}$ the notes you take.

10.5. Dependant and dependent

Dependant is a noun e.g.
I have five dependants to support

Dependent is an adjective verb e.g.
Your admission to this course will be dependent on your degree results

10.6. Discrete and discreet

Discrete means 'separate' or 'discontinuous'

Discreet means 'wary' 'prudent' 'circumspect'
Example:-

"When discussing in public the number of $\begin{Bmatrix} \text{discreet} \\ \text{dsicrete} \end{Bmatrix}$ offences committed by Jeffrey

Archer I would ask you to be $\begin{Bmatrix} \text{discreet} \\ \text{discrete} \end{Bmatrix}$.

10.7. Principal and principle

Principal means: 'taking the first place' or 'highest ranking' (It can also be a proper noun as in "The College Principal was angry")

Principle means 'source' 'root' 'theoretical basis'
Example:

The $\begin{Bmatrix} \text{principal} \\ \text{principle} \end{Bmatrix}$. reason for going to the NUS meeting was to object to the $\begin{Bmatrix} \text{principal} \\ \text{principle} \end{Bmatrix}$.
of top-up fees.

10.8. Stationary and stationery

Two very distinct meanings. If in doubt look them up in a dictionary.

10.9. Uninterested and disinterested

Uninterested means "not interested in"

Disinterested means "not influenced by private feelings or considerations".

10.10. Credible and credulous

Credible means "That which is capable of belief"

Credulous means "apt to believe without sufficient evidence"

10.11. Flaunt and flout

Flaunt means "to move ostentatiously", "to show off"

Flout means "to jeer", "to mock", "to disobey".

10.12. Plain and plane

Very straightforward difference — if in doubt look them up.

10.13. Infer and imply

Infer means "to deduce from a body of evidence"

Imply means *to signify*

Relating these to computer science terminology we see that 'to infer' is essentially a 'bottom-up' process of building specific evidence towards a more general conclusion. "To imply", by contrast is a 'top-down' process where one looks for the logical consequences and ramifications of a particular fact or set of happenings.

10.14. Weather and whether

Easy! Look them up.

10.15. Loose and lose

Loose means "unattached"

Lose means "to fail to keep possession of"

10.16. Council and counsel

As nouns *council* is an advisory or legislative assembly whereas *counsel* is a barrister or advocate or is the general term for "consultation, deliberation and advice"..

As a verb *counsel* means "to advise" or "to warn".

10.17. Comprehensive and comprehensible

Comprehensive means "inclusive" or "thorough"

Comprehensible means "capable of being understood"

10.18. Aggravate and irritate

Aggravate means "to make worse"

Irritate means "to excite or stimulate"

10.19. Border and boarder

Look them up.

10.20. Sight and site

Look them up

10.21. Oral and aural

Oral literally means "by mouth"

Aural literally means "by ear"

Thus for French GCSE the oral examination tests how well you can speak French; the aural examination checks how well you can listen to, and comprehend, French.

10.22. Desert and dessert

One is a barren wasteland and the other is the sweet course that you eat towards the end of a meal.

10.23. Allusion and illusion

Allusion is an indirect reference to something.

Illusion is an apparition or a deceptive appearance.

10.24. Precede and proceed

Precede means "to go before"

Proceed means "to continue"

Note; both these words derive from the same Latin root but have evolved different spellings for the final four letters.

10.25. Official and officious

Official means "done by authority"

Officious means "meddling" or "too forward in applying rules or offering unwanted services".

10.26. Hoard and horde

Hoard means "a hidden stock"

Horde means "a multitude".

10.27. Waist and waste

Easy distinction — look them up.

10.28. Moral and morale

Moral means "virtuous"
Morale means "faith in the cause being fought for"

10.29. Accept and except

Look them up!

10.30. Piece and peace

Easy distinction — look them up.

10.31. Excuse and alibi

Excuse means "a plea offered in extenuation"
Alibi means, specifically, "the fact of being elsewhere at the time of a crime".

10.32. Continual and continuous

Continuous means "non-stop and without interruption"
Continual means "persistent"

There's a subtle difference here. If a car alarm goes off then, until somebody silences it, the noise is *continuous*. However, if you say that someone's car alarm drives you to distraction because it is *continually* going off then it is persistently being triggered by

something, but there are periods of calm between the successive triggerings.

10.33. Alternate and alternative

Alternate means "first one and then the other, in turn"
Alternative means "another possibility"
[Note: American usage frequently employs 'alternate' where UK usage would use 'alternative']

10.34. Implicate and insinuate

Implicate means "to involve"
Insinuate means "to hint" or " to introduce gently or artfully"

10.35. Ingenuous and ingenious

Ingenuous means "frank and open".

Ingenious means "skilfully contrived"

10.36. Astronomy and astrology

One is the scientific study of planets, stars and the cosmos; the other purports to be able to tell your fortune via alignments of the planets

10.37. Observance and observation

Observance means "acting according to law or custom"
Observation means "the act of observing"

10.38. Marshal and martial

Marshal means "to gather together"
Martial means "warlike"

10.39. Practice and practise

(and also licence/license defence/defense etc.)
UK English uses 'c' for the noun form and 's' for the verb form. US usage is the exact opposite of this.

10.40. Lead and led

Lead is a verb meaning "to show the way". The past participle is "led". *Lead* can also be a noun signifying a leash, or a clear example, or even a heavy and poisonous metal. So:

> I asked John to lead me to the plumber's supply store because I
> wanted to buy a length of lead piping. I first met
> John when he took the lead in campaigning for a new Village Hall. His
> successful efforts led to our obtaining a Lottery grant.

10.41. As, since and because

Do not use *as* where *since* or *because* would be more appropriate. For example:

> I entered the room in slippers, as our host did not allow outdoor shoes
> inside his house.

This is WRONG! Substitute *because* or *since* for *as*.

As *Fowler* puts it so wonderfully:

> "Persistent usage tends to weaken the subordinating power of
> conjunctions: *because*, *whereas*, *while*, *since* can
> be used where *as* still betrays a careless or illiterate writer."

11. SPELLING

The following words are frequently mis-spelled. Check them out carefully.

UNTIL	SPEECH	CHARACTER
NECESSARY	FORTY	CARICATURE
ARGUMENT	BELIEVE	RHYTHM
TRAGEDY	DECEIVE	HURRIEDLY
HUMOROUS	NIECE	IMMEDIATELY
CONSCIENCE	RECEIPT	DISAPPEARANCE
QUARTER	SEIZE	BACHELOR
EXISTENCE	WEIRD	SUBTLY
SEPARATE	SURPRISE	BUSINESS
MEDICINE	DEFINITE	KNOWLEDGE
LIAISON	PERMANENT	RECONNAISSANCE
PERCEIVE	OMISSION	COMMISSION
SOVEREIGN	CONGESTION	CONSCIENTIOUS
BICYCLE	DECISION	CRITICISM
WEIRD	RAREFY	MISCHIEVOUS
FULFIL	NEIGHBOUR	BOUGH
THRESHOLD	PROFESSION	TROUGH
COMPLETELY	COUGH	SURPRISE
PLAYWRIGHT	DOUGH	FURRY
OPPORTUNITY	MANOEUVRE	HANDKERCHIEF

12. PUNCTUATION (for further details read *Eats Shoots and Leaves)*

The *full stop* is used:

1. at the end of all sentences except questions and exclamations,

2. to mark words which are abbreviated, e.g. Comp. Sci. or Eng. Lit.

The *comma* is used:

1. to separate clauses and phrases when a pause is required in reading.
   e.g. Although he has been ill for a week, he hopes to be here tonight.
   Note especially its use in marking off participial phrases.
   e.g. The Athenians, embarking on their ships, defeated the Persians.
   Believing this to be true, I gave him sixpence.

   Warning   Don't over do it. If a pause is not needed, don't use a comma.

   e.g. He saw a taxi waiting at the kerb.

2. to mark off words and phrases like: *however*, *therefore*, *of course*, *in fact*, *for instance*.
   e.g.We hope, of course, that you will succeed.
   At the same time, however, you must take all precautions.

3. to mark off words used in addressing a person. e.g.
   Young man, this will not do.
   I believe, sir, that I have made a mistake.

4. to mark off words in apposition.

e.g.Garibaldi, the founder of modem Italy, wore a red cloak.

5. to separate words or phrases used together in a series. e.g.

The ingredients of Yorkshire pudding are eggs, flour, milk and a little salt.

He is a clever, witty, amusing speaker.

One should write clearly, concisely and to the point.

They searched in the bathroom, in the cupboard and under the bed.

The semicolon is used:

1. to link two (or more) sentences which have a common thread.

e.g. The leaves were falling from the trees; the wind whipped them into irregular piles and heaps.

(The two sentences could be separated by a full stop or joined by a conjunction. They should not be joined with a comma).

2. to separate co-ordinate clauses when the conjunction *and* or *but* is omitted. (Co-ordinate clauses are clauses of equal value; that is to say, one is not subordinate to the other).

e.g. Some men enjoy lobster; others prefer crab.

The *colon* is used:

1. to separate two clauses of which the second expands or explains more fully the meaning of the first.

e.g. The situation was critical: supplies were running short, the water was contaminated, and the first signs of pestilence were beginning to show themselves.

2. before a number of items in a list. (This is a special case of l.)

e.g.   The curriculum comprises a wide variety of subjects: Latin, French, Mathematics, History, Carpentry and Cooking.

3. sometimes before quoted speech. (More often a comma will suffice.)

e.g.   Suddenly a cry was heard: "Save the women and children!". Here the quoted speech explains what the cry was.

The *hyphen* is used:

1. to form compound adjectives or adjectival phrases.

e.g. wrought-iron gate, man-eating tiger, the Norwich-Wymondham road. (Note: it is correct to write 'I read the book which was well loved by all.' If, however, you write 'It was a well-loved book', it should be hyphenated.)

2. to link compound nouns, common or proper. e.g. the lift-off, governor-general, Mr Windsor-Lewis.

3. to indicate a word broken at the end of a line.

The *em-dash* is used:

1. to mark a parenthesis, often a dramatic one.

e.g. Climbing the summit of Everest — my last and greatest ambition — I slipped and my hopes were dashed.

2. to indicate an abrupt change of thought.

e.g. Many years later the ghost appeared again — but that is another story.

3. before a repeated word.

e.g. I gave him a look — a look he will remember for a long time.

The *en-dash* is used:

1. to indicate a range e.g of page numbers
   e.g. It's in the article, on pages 77–82

2. To indicate a range of time
   e.g. The disco will run from 7p.m. – 11p.m.

Inverted commas are used:

1. to mark words quoted from Direct Speech. Note the use of Commas and Capital Letters in the following examples. The rule is, use a Capital Letter where one would occur in the Direct Speech, but not otherwise.
   e.g. I answered, "Here I am"
   "Where", I demanded, "have you hidden my trousers?"
   "That is not true," he said. "We did no such thing."
   Where a second set of of inverted commas occurs inside the original set, a *single comma* is used.
   e.g. "Someone", he said, "shouted 'Long Live the Queen!' "

2. to enclose words directly quoted from written sources.

3. to enclose words for which the writer wishes to apologise in some way, such a slang or a far-fetched metaphor.
   e.g. We flew in low and dropped our 'blockbusters'. (Single Commas)

4. to enclose the names of ships, titles of books, plays etc. (Single Commas)

An *exclamation mark* is used:

1. after exclamations and exclamatory sentences.
   e.g. God bless my soul!

2. to indicate some special tone which the writer wishes to give to his sentence and convey to the reader. This might be surprise, irony, especial emphasis etc. It should not be overdone. e.g. Aunt Agatha says she hopes I will play in the soccer First *Fifteen*!

The *question mark* is used:

1. at the end of all direct questions.

13. FINALLY

13.1. Comparatives and superlatives

The *comparative* applies to two: e.g. Of the two finalists, Federer looked the better player.

The *superlative* applies to three or more:

   Ferdinand is the best defender in the team.

13.2. Like and as

Like is an adjective; *as* is a conjunction.
Examples:
That bowler bowls like a hurricane.
He bats as if he were inspired. (Note: **NOT** 'like he was inspired' !!)

13.3. Number

Examples:
In the garage were a washing machine and a surf-board.
None of these exams is easy.

Adobe is a successful company
A line of trees was devastated by the storm.

13.4. Gender-neutral third person singular possessive pronouns.

English has a problem in that it does not have a gender-neutral third person singular possessive pronoun Example:

The user should ensure $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{his or her} \\ \text{his} \\ \text{her} \\ \text{their} \end{array} \right\}$. PC is in good condition.

In the above 'his or her' is the best choice but informal usage has started using 'their' as if it were a singular pronoun in contexts such as this. Grammarians *hate* this but it seems too late to stop it happening. The best way to keep everyone happy is to move to the plural:
Users should ensure their PCs are in good condition.

13.5. Split infinitives

It is thought by some that splitting an infinitive is awkward and wrong:
e.g. to boldly go, to realistically assess, to deliberately stop.
However. modern sentiment is now more relaxed about this and some writers feel that to dynamically split an infinitive (!) adds a certain zest to one's writing.

13.6. *Which* **and** *That*

These two words are technically called *relative pronouns*. The rule for using them is that *which* is used in non-defining clauses and *that* is used in defining clauses. For example:

> The river, which here is tidal, is dangerous.

Here we have clear idea of which river we are talking about; it has already been 'defined' in some sense. All that we are doing in this sentence is giving some further information about a certain river that we already have in mind. Hence we should use *which* But now compare:

> The river that flows through London is the Thames

Out of all the rivers we could have talked about we have defined the one we want to talk about by the phrase 'that flows through London'. Hence it is correct to use *that*. Once we have defined the item we are talking about any further information is introduced by *which*:

> The river that flows through Nottingham, which is called the Trent,
> sometimes floods badly.

A secondary rule here concerns the choice of *which* over *who*. The rule is that *which* refers to 'things' and *who* to persons. So:

> The crew, which consisted of conscripts, mutinied in the South Seas.

Here 'the crew' is treated as an impersonal grouping and hence as a 'thing'. But compare:

> The six marines, who formed the crew, were all drowned.

Here the 'six marines' are clearly 'people' and so *who* is correct.

Finally, if required to choose between *who* and *that*, the rule is that *who* applies to specific persons, *that* applies to generic persons. So:

> You, who are a media superstar, will have no trouble getting a
> table at *World Service*

But, by contrast:

> Show me a man that is never at a loss and I'll show you a man with no real
> imagination.