



## COPYEDITING FICTION 101

Instructor: Rachel E. Bradley

### LESSON #3

#### First Things First!

PRAY. We aren't going to start one lesson without inviting our God and King to have his way in every lesson. So I ask you to quiet your soul and willingly set aside your agenda and your plans for how this will go and what it will look like. Jesus said in John 10 that his sheep hear his voice and follow him, for they know his voice. And they will not follow a stranger but will *flee* from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers. You are his sheep, my dear brothers and sisters. You can be confident that today you hear his voice, and you will surely follow it because you know him and are known by him. What a privilege that is!

Dear Shepherd,

Today is yours; this lesson is yours. You love me. You have brought me here, and you have planned this divine moment for what is now happening. You give me your faith. You give me your love. You give me your strength. You give me your peace. You give me your joy. Wow! These gifts humble my heart and fill it with love for you. I submit what I want and my plan to you. I take your hand. Let's do this thing together. Your way. In Jesus I ask. Amen.

I'm excited for the skills Holy Spirit is going to begin working through you in this lesson. Let's plunge ahead with great anticipation of the work he is doing in us!

#### Learn to Read Sloooooooooooooooooooooow

The key to skillful copyediting is reading super slow. This is where we get to stop at every tree and see how thick the bark is and watch the ants climb up it and the sap schlep along. This is where we bend down and look at every pebble, twig, and blade of grass. Some people like to run through the forest, but not we copyeditors. We savor every minute detail.

One cool thing about our personalities is that our brain releases feel-good endorphins anytime we see a detail that's compliant with the set standard, and when we find something off-kilter and

have the privilege of setting it right, we get double endorphins! At least that's my theory. (And you should trust me, 'cause it really sounds like I know what I'm talking about.)

So make a habit of looking at every single letter, every single punctuation mark (or lack thereof), every capitalization (or not), every single word—for spelling as well as usage, and every sentence for proper grammar and structure. At the same time, pay attention to the messages and ideas being conveyed for clarity, consistency, and pacing, as we mentioned in Lesson 2. Is that a lot? Yes. And it takes skill and patience and sensitivity to God's voice to execute it well. That's why copyediting can cost your clients a *lot* of money. Excellent copyediting takes time.

Now it's possible that the more you do it, the less time it will take. As you look up words and rules over and over again, eventually, they stick in your brain pretty well and you start to trust your memory. A word of caution here: sometimes you are wrong. This is where it becomes crucial to listen to Holy Spirit's still, small voice. So many times he has told me, "Take a look at that again, Rachel." Or he'll say, "Something's off. That doesn't quite feel right." Sometimes I argue with him and try to assure myself it's correct as is. But he's been good about niggling at me till I look it up. You'll be surprised how often your memory missed it. But then there will be a lot of times you just aren't quite sure, and you look it up to discover you were right on! These are fun times for me because it confirms that I know what I'm doing. The whole process is just really enjoyable.

So have fun, and read SLOW.

## Paragraph and Sentence Structure

Wait. Didn't we learn this in elementary school? Well, I hope so. But now that you're looking at English on a whole 'nother level, you've got to step it up a notch. People are paying you, you see. And they, too, went to elementary school.

There are two other courses The PEN Institute offers that cover in depth what I touch on in this lesson. They are [Grammar 101](#) and [Sentence Diagramming 101](#). I recommend both of these for the aspiring copyeditor. A strong understanding of the fundamentals of the English language is vital.

What I'm mainly going to focus on here is how to use paragraphing and sentence structure to enhance the reader experience. I refer to two kinds of text within a fiction MS: narrative and dialogue. When I say *narrative*, I mean the text that is written in the POV character's voice and includes descriptions of what others are doing, what the setting is like, what the POV character is doing or thinking, and anything observed by the POV character. Dialogue is the text that records what is being spoken by the characters out loud. Dialogue is unique to the character that is speaking, and we are going to learn a whole lot about copyediting it in Lesson 4.

### Paragraphs

Paragraphing serves several purposes in fiction. First, it breaks up the text and makes it more visually pleasing to readers. If a reader sees a long block of unbroken text, it feels mentally overwhelming and exhausting. When you break up the text, however, it creates white space. For

whatever reason, this white space gives our brains mental breathing room and makes reading much more relaxing. So watch out for paragraphs that run more than half a page in length.

Second, paragraphs serve to corral a common idea. All the sentences in a single paragraph should be addressing the same topic and supporting one another in creating the image the author wants to convey. So if you're looking for a place to break up a block of text, look for the sentences that go together. At the same time, pay attention to sentence order. The sequence of events should be chronological. The reaction should *follow* the action, not the other way around. The following paragraphs contain action that is out of order.

Then whoosh! A huge green truck passed by, the driver laying on the horn.

“Look out, Red!” he yelled through a partially rolled down window. I caught my breath for a second then turned around, stunned by the fact that someone had grabbed my arm jerking me back to the curb just in time.

The author describes someone jerking her back to the curb *after* the reader sees the green truck pass by. Here's how it looks after being copyedited.

“Look out!”

I felt a tight grip on my arm, and I was jerked back to the curb as a huge green truck passed by, the driver laying on the horn. I caught my breath for a second then turned.<sup>1</sup>

Third, paragraphs signal a change in the speaker. When you are editing a portion of dialogue, anytime the speaker shifts, start a new paragraph. We are going to go over the specific type of narrative text attached to dialogue (beats, speaker attributions, author explanations) when we get to Lesson 4, but right now, suffice it to say, when the narrative is focused on the one who is speaking, that narrative will stay with the dialogue.

Fourth, paragraphing can be used to add tension and set the pace. In real life, when a high-tension event occurs, words and actions are clipped and to the point. Time races by as one thing leads to another. This type of experience can be captured by frequent paragraphing. Shorter paragraphs cause the eyes to move more quickly down the page, increasing the reading pace. Longer, more detailed paragraphs slow down how quickly the reader progresses and require more thought. I've often read a high-tension scene with frequent paragraphing in which I was too interested in what happened next to slow myself down and comprehend every word. Those types of scenes are a lot of fun to read.

Fifth, paragraphs can be used to add emphasis and focus attention on an important detail. You'll often find in fiction writing that it's completely acceptable and even desirable to have a single sentence serve as an entire paragraph, just to emphasize what it says and add to the drama. See an example below from *Avenged* by A. R. Chandler.

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1. Pamela Black, *Held* ([linkedin.com/in/pamela-black-07840759](https://www.linkedin.com/in/pamela-black-07840759)), not yet published, used by permission.

Two minutes later, he heard the screeching sound of brakes as the first vehicle rounded the turn at the far end of the canyon, just before the roadblock of boulders and dislodged stones. One by one each vehicle squealed to a stop, several of them rear-ending each other until they came to a dead standstill.

The mujahideen waited.

Gradually men from the convoy began to cautiously get out of their vehicles. There were sounds of doors creaking open and slamming followed by a lot of shouting back and forth in Farsi. Jonathan wished he knew what they were saying, but he could guess.<sup>2</sup>

### *Sentences*

When it comes to sentence structure, some of the main things to keep in mind are active versus passive constructions and the chronological sequence of events within the sentence.

Passive construction is created when the subject of the sentence is acted upon by something else and is portrayed as being at the mercy of outside influences. Sometimes this something else isn't identified, but even if it is, it leaves the subject of the sentence somewhat of a "victim." It makes for weak writing and a less-than-ideal experience for readers.

Anger was sparked. Brewer's fist swung at me, but it was grabbed mid-swing from behind. He was palmed in the lower back and yanked away from me. He stumbled backwards.

Active construction is created when the subject of the sentence is performing the action. This makes for a strong, vibrant narrative and should be the way most of the sentences in the manuscript are constructed.

Brewer pushed past her and swung his fist at me. Cinder grabbed his arm mid-swing, palmed him in the lower back, and yanked him away from me. He stumbled backwards.<sup>3</sup>

There is a time and place for passive construction. If the emphasis needs to be on the one receiving the action, or if you want to make a point that the actor is an unknown force, passive is the way to go. But its use needs to be intentional. Look at the deliberate use of passive construction in the following excerpt.

With a cry of pain, Brewer leaped up, fists ready to pummel her. Cinder's ready stance didn't flinch.

Brewer growled. "You —"

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2. A. R. Chandler, *Avenged* (Tulsa: River Oak Publishing, 2002), 176.

3. Ivan Colon, *The Cores of Ember*, work in Progress, used by permission.

His whole body was snatched by the collar out the door by a monstrously muscular arm. I took a position to peak from behind Cinder who had moved to the door to watch.

Judd tossed Brewer into the yard like a bag of trash. “I thought Memorians had better manners,” he said. “Don’t come back here. Ever again.”<sup>4</sup>

The sentence in bold emphasizes what’s happening to Brewer’s body. At this point, Judd can’t be seen by the POV character, so the passive construction is effectively used.

Sometimes you’ll find authors describing what happens in the first part of the sentence and then backtracking to explain the catalyst of the action. Watch out for this. Just like our guideline for paragraphs, the reaction should *follow* the action, not the other way around. Look at this example, subtle, but out of sequence nonetheless.

Tilnon felt a jolt of both dread and excitement sear through him as that chill gaze shifted and found him, however briefly.<sup>5</sup>

In this sentence, readers are experiencing the reaction—a jolt of both dread and excitement—before they see what is causing it—that chill gaze shifted and found him. Here it is as copyedited:

That chill gaze shifted and found Tilnon. A jolt of dread and excitement seared through him.

Notice that besides putting the events in the right order, the tension and pace have increased due to the shorter sentences, just like we discussed with shorter paragraphs. If a sentence is long and complex, it requires the reader to pay more attention and to slow down to comprehend it. If the sentence is short, the reading pace increases.

Also, the second sentence is now written with greater strength. We’ve removed “Tilnon felt” and made the *action* of the jolt the subject of the sentence. This gives the sentence a more active voice, which we will talk about more in Lesson 4.

## Capitalization

The normal rules of capitalization generally apply to fiction. Capitalize the first word following terminal punctuation (ending period, exclamation point, question mark). Sometimes you’ll capitalize the first word following a colon. Capitalize the first word in dialogue, proper nouns, titles (such as Mr. Jones, Mrs. Smith, Doctor Compton, places and regions, etc.) Follow the rules in *CMOS* for these normal guidelines.

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4. Colon, *The Cores of Ember*.

5. Danelle Duran, “The Trial of Tilnon,” not yet published, used by permission.

Specific to Christian fiction, *The Christian Writer's Manual of Style (CWMS)* has a handy list starting on page 101 of the capitalization of religious terms. Keep this near your workstation, and mark the page so you can open right to it.

Here are some issues you may frequently run into when editing fiction. Nicknames and endearments are common. Should these be capitalized? Interestingly, the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> editions of *CMOS* don't address this question. But in the online Q&A section, the *CMOS* editors tell us that it was addressed in the fifteenth edition, section 8.39. Chicago's preference is to lowercase pet names. But if your author insists on capitalizing them, just make sure it's consistent throughout.

If a descriptive word or phrase is added to a character's name, this is called an *epithet* and is capitalized. If *the* is used as part of the name, it is not capitalized. You can reference *CMOS* 8.34 for the list of examples there. The following fictional examples come from C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

King Peter the Magnificent  
Queen Susan the Gentle  
King Edmond the Just  
Queen Lucy the Valiant

Watch out for fantasy words invented just for that story. Use the same rules of capitalization. For instance, one of my clients had made-up names for all the animals in his fantasy world. He was capitalizing all of them because they weren't known words for the readers. I had to explain to him that if you wouldn't capitalize *bear* or *cat* or *dog*, you didn't need made-up animal names capitalized either. This applies to invented titles and places and regions as well. Unless the author specifically has a reason to lowercase it (perhaps the rules of grammar are different in this imaginary world), conform to the standard rules of capitalization. If the author wants to make an exception, simply add it to the style sheet and keep it consistent throughout your editing.

Now for the issue of all caps, I have seen more and more fiction writing containing all caps to indicate shouting. This is no doubt popularized in part because of the conventions of text messaging. But it is weak writing. An accomplished writer will depend on the strength of the words on the page, proper punctuation, and the occasional italic type to express intensity. Advocate for this with your clients.

There are rare instances where all caps is appropriate, such as the POV character's reading a sign or a headline in which the original is in all caps. I love one of the examples given in *The Creative Writer's Style Guide*:

I saw another example in a story presented in a workshop. The protagonist received a note "written in the heavy black scrawl of a magic marker: HELP ME!"

The text in the note was, like the headline, printed in capital letters.

Later in the story, as the hero retells all the problems he's facing, this appears once again:

Where was all this headed? Girlfriends who didn't sympathize and people dying like flies and militia drills down by the creek and unknown people demanding that he HELP them? What was he supposed to do?

All caps works in this specific case, though it isn't required. The presence of HELP, however, specifically reminds us of the note in a way lowercase would not, and it makes the passage funnier. Even though this is a paraphrase of the protagonist's thoughts, that HELP indicates to us precisely how he "hears" the word in his head.<sup>6</sup>

## Punctuation

I want to touch on a couple of things here about punctuation. Some authors tend to use a question mark followed by an exclamation point to emphasize disbelief. Why do authors do that?! While *CMOS* recommends this practice be eliminated from formal prose (*CMOS* 6.126), it's not acceptable to have it in "informal" fiction either. The better solution is to use only an exclamation point, as recommended in *CMOS* 6.72.

How dare she say such a thing!

Other punctuation marks I want to point out are the hyphen, the en dash, and the em dash. One of the first things I remember from my early days of editing is wondering what on earth em dashes and en dashes were. I'd come across the words on occasion, and it was finally time to get to the bottom of this mystery. If you've already been editing for a while, you no doubt know exactly what these are. But if you're just getting into editing, you need to know their distinctions. When I finally found the answer in *CMOS* 6.75, it left me with a statement forever impressed on my mind: "correct use of the different types is a sign of editorial precision and care."

### Hyphens (-)

The hyphen character has a dedicated key on most keyboards. It's usually located next to the "0" key. Hyphens are used as a separator for compound words and names. They are also used between numbers that don't signify a range and numbers that represent an individual date.

well-known  
David Martyn Lloyd-Jones  
978-0-226-10420-1  
2016-02-01

### En Dashes (–)

What an odd name! Why would you call this character an en dash? The answer is quite logical. An en dash measures the width of an *n*, hence, en dash. En dashes can be created by holding the

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<sup>6</sup> Christopher T. Leland, *The Creative Writer's Style Guide* (Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 2002), 76. NOTE: This is not an authoritative style guide.

Ctrl key and pressing the minus key on your numeric keypad. En dashes are used as connectors. They signify *up to and including* (or *through*). They are used for ranges of various kinds.

The year 2000–2016  
John 3:16–18  
Chapters 6–9  
8:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

### **Em Dashes (—)**

Like en dashes, em dashes have a reasonable explanation for their funny-sounding name. Have you guessed it? Em dashes measure the width of an *m* (at least at some point, some *m* must’ve measured that wide). So there you go. Em dashes can be created by holding the Ctrl and Alt keys and pressing the minus key on the numeric keypad. Em dashes are used in place of commas, parentheses, or colons. They are especially useful when an abrupt break in thought is needed. They are also used to set off a noun preceding a pronoun that introduces the main clause.

Since she hadn’t retrieved the receipt from her purse—let alone listed the expense in her ledger—her records were not current.

The song—which I remembered from last night—blared through the speakers.

“I’m not sure I—”

Galatians—that was her favorite book at the moment.

The thing you need to watch out for in fiction editing is the overuse of the em dash. I don’t know why, but some authors just get em-dash happy. When the em dash is used in dialogue to signify interruption (more on this in Lesson 4), its use is usually appropriate, even if frequent. But when the author is using it for effect—to give that “hard break” feeling—it needs to be used sparingly. How sparingly? Well, that’s up to your judgment and what works and how the MS reads.

### **Quotation Marks**

To review all the guidelines for using quotation marks, start in *CMOS* 6.114. I’m not going to repeat the rules here, but below are some of the examples used by *CMOS* to give you a quick reference of how quotation marks are properly used.

He described what he heard as a “short, sharp shock.”

“Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,” she replied.

Take, for example, the first line of “Filling Station”: “Oh, but it is dirty!”

I can’t believe you don’t know “Filling Station”!

I was invited to recite the lyrics to “Sympathy for the Devil”; instead, I read from the op-ed page of the *New York Times*.

Which of Shakespeare’s characters said, “All the world’s a stage”?

“Timber!”

“What’s the rush?” she wondered.

“Admit it,” she said. “You haven’t read ‘The Simple Art of Murder.’ ”

“Someday he’s going to hit one of those long shots, and”—his voice turned huffy—“I won’t be there to see it.”

## Plurals and Possessives

One grammar aspect that you need to know well is how to form possessives. Does the apostrophe go before the *s* or after the *s*? What if a word is plural but doesn’t end in *s*? If we have two nouns joined by *and*, do they both take an apostrophe? There are so many fun rules to know! Let’s examine the following paragraph:

The Scripture stirred something within Emerald’s heart. It meant that every believer was a child of God. She was God’s child! She had heard this so many times before and it hadn’t fazed her. But now . . . Jesus was God’s son. He said that the works he did were the works she would be doing. In John, it said that as Jesus is, so are we. As God’s daughter, Emerald held the same relationship with the Father that Jesus had as a son. His children’s lives were supposed to look like their respective versions of Jesus’s life. But what exactly did believers’ authority look like in the 2020s?

In this paragraph, there are several forms of possession: *Emerald’s/God’s/Jesus’s, of God, children’s/believers’*.

The first form, *Emerald’s/God’s/Jesus’s*, follows the general rule of simply adding an apostrophe and an *s* to a singular noun. This is true even when the noun already ends in *s*; is the name of a person, like *Jesus*; or has a silent *s* at the end, like *Descartes*. Hence our earlier use of *God’s* and *Jesus’s*.

The second form, *of God*, is called the “of”-genitive. Genitive is the same as possessive but has a broader connotation. The choice to use an “of”-genitive instead of an apostrophe is one of style. Would you like to be known as a friend of God or God’s friend? It’s the same thing but one has a nice ring to it, doesn’t it? You’ll watch for this in the character’s voice. If the character would choose more frequently to use the “of”-genitive to form possessives than the standard way, then this is part of that character’s diction.

The third form, *children’s/believers’*, follows the general rule for plural nouns, which is to add only the apostrophe at the end of the word if it ends in *s* (e.g., angels’ wings, cats’ paws, stars’ light). But if it doesn’t end in *s*, as with *children’s*, add both the apostrophe and the *s*.

In the case that you have two subjects who both have ownership, how you form the possessive depends on whether the object of ownership belongs to both of them jointly or each of them separately. Think about Peter and Andrew, the two brothers in Matthew 4 who were casting their net into the sea. Whose net was it? It was Peter and Andrew’s net. Since the net belonged to both of them, you would only add the apostrophe and *s* to the second subject; in this case, it is

Andrew. But imagine they each had their own net. Let's say Peter was on one side of the boat with one net and Andrew was on the other side with a second net. Then you would say they were Peter's and Andrew's nets.

Expressing correctly what belongs to whom helps readers form a proper identity for the thing possessed. If readers see, "Jane's parent's car," they will picture only one of Jane's parents owning the car. Or if you say, "Bob and Joe's term paper," readers will imagine a joint assignment.

## Parts of Speech

You probably remember this from grade school, but it's worth a short review here. There are only eight parts of speech, and every single word in the English language (as well as many phrases and clauses) belongs to one of these. They are nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections. I find it wonderfully delightful that something so simple can be as intricate and complicated as it is. These building blocks are used to create so many different combinations that *CMOS* spans 137 pages to talk about all the rules related to using them (not to mention additional rules throughout the rest of the book).

We aren't going to go over all those rules right now, but understanding the parts of speech will help you know how to find rules in *CMOS* as you need them. This is especially useful in trying to figure out whether commas are needed. I'll let you read all those rules at your leisure and as you edit and constantly look them up. But here I'm going to summarize a few particularities that you'll frequently run into in fiction.

### *Gerunds and Participles*

Often, gerunds and participles are used incorrectly, so I think they warrant a special mention here.

Gerunds are fun little words that are formed from verbs but act as nouns. How do they disguise themselves as such? With a clever little costume that consists of *-ing*. Because they perform as nouns, they can fill any of the noun roles: subject, direct object, object of the preposition, predicate noun, etc.

**Running** (subject) was fun. But Sarah really preferred **jumping** (direct object) out of airplanes. **Flying** (compound subject) through the air under her canopy and **landing** (compound subject) safely were empowering (adjective) experiences.

You'll notice I didn't put *empowering* in boldface. That's because it's not functioning as a noun, which means it's not a gerund. Instead, it's a participle.

Participles are also formed from verbs, but instead of acting as nouns, they act as modifiers (most often adjectives) and as parts of verb phrases (*was running*). But their disguises are a bit more clever. They not only can end in *-ing* but also can end in *-d*, *-t*, or *-n*. That's because they can be formed from present- or past-tense verbs, resulting in present and past participles.

Through the **cracked** (adjective) window, the **distorted** (adjective) silhouette of that **flea-bitten** (adjective) dog taunted her. He **was pacing** (verb phrase) from one end of the yard to the other.

Now, just because the English language can't be easy, you also need to note that a gerund is *technically* a present participle being used as a noun. But we call them gerunds, and *CMOS* even distinguishes them from each other, so you need to know the difference.

Okay, okay, so how are these important to fiction editing? It's important because you're going to run into these cute little guys dangling for their lives, and it's up to you to save them. When a participle or a gerund dangles, it doesn't have a proper relationship with the subject of the sentence. This results in misattributions or nonsense. To the untrained eye, and especially to your author who knows what he meant, these might seem like no big deal. But as a professional, it's your job to make sure the grammar is proper and sophisticated. After all, the author wants to sell this book, and if people will be paying her money for an entertaining experience, they want her book to be professional.

So here are some examples of dangling participles and how to fix them:

The Dangle: Walking through the zoo, the new baby elephant was the most popular feature. [This makes it sound like the baby elephant was walking through the zoo.]

The Fix: As visitors walked through the zoo, the new baby elephant was the most popular feature.

The Dangle: Throwing rocks into the water, fish darted out of the way. [This makes it sound like the fish were throwing the rocks, but it makes the sentence nonsense.]

The Fix: When the rocks hit the water, fish darted out of the way.

The Dangle: Following her inside, the house was an absolute wreck. [This makes it sound like the house was following her inside.]

The Fix: He followed her inside. The house was an absolute wreck.

Dangling gerunds are most often found following a preposition. Here are some examples of dangling gerunds and how to fix them:

The Dangle: After running behind the building, my heart was pounding. [Ooooo, this is a bit subtle isn't it? But what this is saying is that my heart was the one doing the running.]

The Fix: I ran behind the building, my heart pounding.

The Dangle: Upon hearing he was free, the taste of liberty was bittersweet.  
[Again, these look so innocent. But here, the taste of liberty is the one doing the hearing.]

The Fix: He was free! But the taste of liberty was bittersweet.

The Dangle: While searching the grounds, a piece of torn cloth indicated she had been abducted. [The torn cloth was searching the grounds.]

The Fix: “We searched the grounds and found this.” He held up a few inches of red t-shirt material. “We’re sorry, ma’am. This indicates she’s been abducted.”

Something else to watch out for while you’re editing is the use of possessives with gerunds. When a noun is followed by a gerund, “Susie’s playing piano always soothes my spirits,” it may take the possessive form, but not always. It depends on which part is emphasized as the subject—the main noun or the gerund itself. If the gerund is the subject, then precede it with a possessive noun.

Here are the examples presented in *CMOS* 7.28.

Fathers’ assuming the care of children has changed the traditional household economy.

We all agreed that Jerod’s running away from the tigers had been the right thing to do.

Our finding a solution depends on the nature of the problem.

Eleanor’s revealing her secret (*or* Eleanor’s revelation) resulted in a lawsuit.

*but*

Fathers assuming the care of children often need to consult mothers for advice.

Also important to note: When the noun or pronoun *follows* a preposition, the possessive is usually optional. Since the possessive is optional, leave it the way the author has it. Just make sure they stay consistent throughout. Here are some more examples from *CMOS* 7.28.

She was worried about her daughter (*or* daughter’s) going there alone.

I won’t stand for him (*or* his) being denigrated.

The problem of authors (*or* authors’) finding the right publisher can be solved.

### **Clause vs. Phrase**

As I mentioned before, knowing the parts of speech will assist you in knowing how to look up rules and what to look for if something is in question. Another thing that will help you is knowing if you are dealing with a clause or a phrase.

A clause is a group of words that has a subject and a verb. It's either dependent (can't stand on its own) or independent (can stand on its own).

A phrase is a group of words that all together form a single part of speech. Within the phrase, each word performs its own function. So you can have verb phrases, prepositional phrases, gerund phrases, participial phrases, infinitive phrases, appositive phrases, etc.

Being aware of clauses and phrases and how they function can be especially helpful in figuring out where commas go.

### ***Sit vs. Set***

These are words I find myself explaining to authors regularly.

#### *Sit/Sat/Sitting*

*Sit* means to rest on your rear end or haunches, as in *sit in a chair*. It is frequently used with *down*. This is an intransitive verb, which means it does not have a direct object.

#### *Set/Set/Setting*

*Set* means to cause to sit. It's used when an object is placed in or on a resting place. This is a transitive verb, which means its usage requires a direct object.

When trying to decide which one is proper for the sentence you are editing, ask yourself, Is the subject of the verb the one who is sitting, or is the subject of the verb putting something somewhere?

If the subject is performing the action itself, use *sit* for present action, *sat* for a past action, and *sitting* for a present participle.

Please sit here. Mary sat. Joe is sitting.

If the subject is performing the action upon an object, use *set* for present action, *set* for a past action, and *setting* for a present participle.

Please set the book on the shelf. Mary set her purse on the counter. Joe is setting the table.

### ***Lie vs. Lay***

Determining whether to use *lay* or *lie* is very similar to determining whether to use *set* or *sit*.

#### *Lie/Lay/Lain/Lying*

*Lie* is an intransitive verb, no direct object. It is used if the subject is the one performing the action. Use *lie* for present action, *lay* for a past action, *lain* for a past participle, and *lying* for a present participle.

Lie down over there. He lay across the steaming sand. The horse had lain in the pasture all night. It was lying right over there.

### *Lay/Laid/Laying*

*Lay* is a transitive verb, taking a direct object. It's used if the subject of the sentence is putting something somewhere. Use *lay* for present action, *laid* for a past action, and *laying* for a present participle.

Lay the money on the counter. She laid the baby on the doorstep. I'm laying your pajamas on your bed.

### *That vs. Which*

Both *that* and *which* are relative pronouns. But *that* is used to introduce a clause or phrase that is restrictive, meaning the sentence requires it to make sense. *Which* should be used for sentences that are nonrestrictive. It adds a little extra about something but isn't required to be there. According to *CMOS* 6.27, *that* "may occasionally be omitted (but need not be) if the sentence is just as clear without [it]."

He filled his pockets with the berries that Ann had picked for him.  
He filled his pockets with Ann's berries, which he ate along the way.

Watch out for *which* because it always is preceded by a comma.

### *Who vs. Whom*

These pronouns are determined by their function. *Who* is used in the nominative (subject) case. *Whom* is used in the objective case (direct object or object of a preposition). If you have trouble with these, read about them in more detail in *CMOS* 5.66. But here's a trick that I find pretty helpful. If you replace the *who* pronoun with *he* and reword the sentence, it usually becomes immediately apparent if the proper word should be *he* (nominative) or *him* (objective). And that will tell you whether to use *who* or *whom*.

Whom should I tell him is asking?  
Reword it and use *he*. I should tell him **he** is asking. It's the nominative case, so use *who*.

Tell him it's the girl with whom you were talking.  
You were talking with **him**. It's the objective case, so *whom* is correct.

## Exceptions

### *Sentence Fragments*

In fiction, it is perfectly acceptable to use sentence fragments for emphasis or author voice. A lot of the narrative is done in the POV character's head, and sometimes we don't think in complete sentences or correct grammar. Same for dialogue. Honestly, my rule of thumb for determining if it "works" or not is to simply determine if it annoys me as a reader. If there are too many sentence fragments, and it's starting to distract from the story, get rid of them. One of the main goals of copyediting is to render the text somewhat invisible, so all that's left is the story.

### *Periods and Capitalization*

Sometimes an author will use periods and capitalization for emphasis, especially in young adult fiction or new adult fiction.

I was pretty sure all five thousand students on our campus had decided to walk by this very spot at this very moment and stare Right. At. Me.<sup>7</sup>

These words are technically part of the same sentence, and while effective, I can't lie and say they don't make my copyediting skin writhe a bit. But as a reader, I have no problem with this technique. Weird how that works, isn't it?

When it comes to exceptions, as *I mentioned before, the test is, Does it work? Don't be afraid to let the author do something new if it works.* Consider this interesting deviation from the standard found in *The Stars at Oktober Bend* by Glenda Millard. It was short-listed for the 2017 Carnegie Medal. Imagine how different it might have been if the copyeditor had insisted upon proper grammar here. This is how the book begins:

i am the girl manny loves. the girl who writes our story in the book of flying. i am alice.

they sewed me up when i was twelve. mended my broken head with fishbone stitches. tucked my frayed edges in. tucked everything in. things meant to be and things not. do it quick. stem the flow. stop life leaking out of alice. that's all that they wanted. so gram said.

By the way, that paragraph was a nightmare to reproduce with autocorrect on! (Why didn't I turn it off? Why, Rachel?)

### *Subjunctive Mood*

Subjunctive mood deserves a special mention because it serves a very important role. Modern fiction, however, tends to omit its use, quite to my chagrin. As editors, we are responsible for informing our clients of proper grammar, but if they choose to ignore this one because it reads uncomfortably for them, they can, unfortunately, get away with it these days.

Subjunctive mood applies to verbs, and it is used when you want to express something as an idea but not an actual reality. In the following paragraph, the sentence in bold properly utilizes the subjunctive mood.

The voice of reason raised its alarm. Why trade one kind of slavery for another? Now that she was free, why not throw off all constraints and find her own happiness instead of submitting to the agenda of another? Yet in spite of all reason, the thought of serving this man brought her an inexplicable sense of freedom, of elation—elation that could not be dampened even by the looming shadow of Gronthus, whom she knew would be watching for her on every road and in every inn. **It was as if her life were no longer her own.** It had been

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7. Michele Israel Harper, *Ghostly Vendetta* (Indianapolis: Love2ReadLove2Write Publishing, 2020), 20.

purchased by another, and somehow the thought of giving it back to him did not seem like slavery but freedom.<sup>8</sup>

You may have an author who finds this awkward and would prefer to rewrite it as “It was as if her life was no longer her own.” Your job as the copyeditor is to explain the grammatical rules and let the author decide. (Sidenote: in my contract with my clients, they agree to ask permission before acknowledging me in their book as their editor. When I explain that I’m happy to edit the book according to whatever rules they want to apply but if it doesn’t meet industry standards, I don’t want it publicized that I was the editor, they have all agreed to comply with the standard guidelines.)

## Font Attributes

When we’re talking about font attributes, this includes the name, the style (regular, bold, italic, underlined), the size, and the case. In fiction, font attributes are used to flag different types of text.

Generally, the entire working manuscript will be in the same font, Times New Roman. But there are exceptions to this. If the character is reading a text message, an email, a letter, or something similar, sometimes this will be set in a different font. If two stories are being told, one in the past and one in the present, the fonts could be different to tip the readers off to the change. Generally, if the font changes, there needs to be a good reason for it, and it needs to work. If it doesn’t work, figure out why and communicate that to the author. Make sure any font changes are noted on the style sheet, and let the author know to notify the formatter or publisher of the intentional use of more than one font.

Font style will most often be set in regular type. But italic type is used for direct thoughts. (We’ll talk about direct versus indirect thoughts in Lesson 4.) Sometimes italic type is also used for dreams or visions. But the thing to keep in mind about italic type is that it is *physically* more difficult for the eye to read. It causes greater eye strain, and long blocks of it can exhaust a reader. So if your author has a big block of italic text, see if you can come up with another solution that works other than using italic type.

Italic type is also used for *emphasis* within a sentence. (Ha! See how I did that? I emphasized the word *emphasis* with italic type!) But if your author is using it frequently for emphasis, you need to edit it out. It’s better to use strong sentence construction with well-chosen verbs and descriptors than to use frequent italic type.

Italic type is also used for words used as words (see the parenthetical sentence in the preceding paragraph) and phrases as phrases. And of course, other general uses, like book titles and such, will remain the same. So if one of the characters mentions the title of a book they’re reading, it should be italicized. You can find all the general rules for use of italic type in *CMOS*.

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8. Thomas Williams, *The Devil’s Mouth* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2001), 177.

One more common use of italic type in fiction is sound words. Many sound words are listed in the dictionary, like *thunk* and *whoosh*. If the word is in the dictionary, leave it in regular Roman type. But if authors make up words to describe a sound, put it in italic type.

Underlining is rarely used in fiction writing. I would go so far as to say you should rarely, if ever, use it. The one exception I know of is if the POV character is looking at a handwritten note in which words are underlined. Then you'd want to reproduce it as accurately as possible.

The only acceptable purpose I can think of for using boldface is for chapter numbers and titles. If your author uses bold for any other reason, make sure it has a good purpose and that it works for something more than emphasis.

It's not wrong to do things that aren't normally done or have never been done before, but there's usually a pretty good reason things aren't done that way, so keep that in mind. Like I mentioned earlier, the goal is to make the text seem to disappear and leave only the story. Underlining and boldface bring attention to the text and work against this purpose.

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## Lesson #3 Assignments

Well, I think that’s probably enough for one lesson, don’t you? This concludes Lesson 3. Thank you for hanging in there with me this far.

*To receive a Certificate of Completion, you must complete at least two of the following assignments. But if you want to complete all of them, you’ll get that much more out of this course.*

### Assignment #1

Read *CMOS* 5.217–5.228 on sentence structures, sentence patterns, and clauses for a deeper understanding. Note anything new that you learn and share it with the class. If you don’t learn anything new, share the guideline of most interest to you with the class and share why you find it enjoyable.

### Assignment #2

Look at the sample paragraph under “Subjunctive Mood” in this lesson. Find the sentence containing *whom*. Reword the sentence and tell us what case it is in and whether *whom* is the correct usage.

### Assignment #3

Copyedit the following paragraphs:<sup>9</sup>

One house down, Tracy stood on the porch. A young man was just leaving. Grinning at her and waving goodbye, she blushed at his attention. Then my watchful stare was caught, and my gaze flew back to the road.

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They began to sightsee crossing into the grounds for the big party. Brightening up of theirs came to be, when sorting out all the wonderful sights, sounds, and scents the festival offered. The farther in those two went, the more extravagant the food scents became—and clashed. They set on a bench next to a vendor’s tent—the Hunting Grounds—to get their barings. The aroma of rare Acro meat which was imported from Jagos filled the air above the other scents. A toned, middle aged couple stood in the food line. Cinder did a double-take. on the both of them. They reminded her of a three-tail sly Strife engulfing someone whole—its sleek crimson pelt intertwined with their skin almost.

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Running out onto the stage, his lithe muscles were that of a disciplined dancer. Tone Galan’s tight covering swirled with greens and browns and hugged his body. All twelve dancers took their places. Before stepping off the stage, the announcer said, “This dance is inspired by the Jagos Republic’s weather phenomenon that strikes its jungles without

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9. Adapted from Ivan Colon, *The Cores of Ember*, work in progress, used by permission.

warning.”