

Statistics, Headlines and Cutlines

(plus some other stuff you really need
to know about)

One good source

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EditTeach.org

"Harmony seldom makes a headline." - Silas Bent

SPECIAL PROJECTS



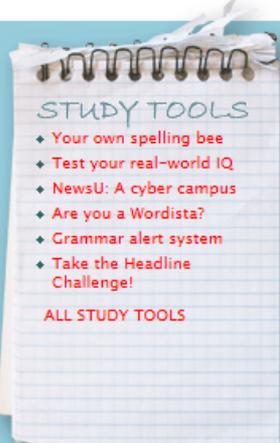
TRY THE HEADLINE CHALLENGE!
Want to write better heads? Key words and active verbs help, but the best tactic is to practice. Try your hand at stories published in papers across the country - and then get the inside story from the original editors on how they wrote their heads. To get the story on the "Sticks" head above, go to the last item on the [Study Tools](#) page.



TAKE A DOW JONES DRY RUN
Help your students prepare for the Dow Jones Newspaper Fund editing test by letting them practice on actual exams from previous years. You can also use the tests as classroom exercises. Answer keys included, as well as information on how the tests are graded.



COACHING FOR COPY EDITORS
Working with reporters isn't the sole province of the city desk. When it's late, or busy, copy editors can find themselves working one-on-one with a reporter. Watch as writing coach [Don Fry](#) demonstrates how coaching techniques can help copy editors produce a



STUDY TOOLS

- ◆ Your own spelling bee
- ◆ Test your real-world IQ
- ◆ NewsU: A cyber campus
- ◆ Are you a Wordista?
- ◆ Grammar alert system
- ◆ Take the Headline Challenge!

[ALL STUDY TOOLS](#)

Tools of the Trade

IMPROVING CONTENT

- Writing
- Accuracy
- Headlines
- Cutlines
- Design & visuals
- Editing tip gallery

LANGUAGE SKILLS

- AP & other styles
- Grammar & usage
- Punctuation
- Words: Spelling/etymology/slang

PROFESSIONAL LIFE

- Diversity
- Working with people
- Law, First Amendment & ethics
- Organizations & news sources
- Journalism blogs & columns
- Internships, jobs & salaries
- Training
- Online journalism
- What copy editors do

Another source

<http://www.copydesk.org>



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Headline contest

The headline contest for 2014 will be open Jan. 15, with a deadline of 11:55 p.m. CST Jan. 31, 2015. Headlines published between Jan. 1 and Dec. 31, 2014, are eligible for this year's headline contest."

[SUBMIT 2014 INDIVIDUAL ENTRIES HERE](#), or

[SUBMIT 2014 STAFF ENTRIES HERE](#)

ACES' premier contest aims to reward good headline writing in newspapers, nonnewspaper publications, websites, and now even Twitter.

Statistical essentials

Rates: Per person (or per capita): Death rates, crime rates, etc.

There were 80,000 crimes in Pittsburgh out of a population of 2.5 million. There were 60,000 crimes in Tucson out of a city of 700,000.

o *Therefore:* The crime rate of Tucson is more than 2 1/2 times that of Pittsburgh.

The math: Divide 80,000 / 2.5 million = .032; divide 60,000 / 700,000 = .0857. Convert to like numbers by rounding and move the decimal point to get rates of 80 per 1,000 and 86 per 1,000, then divide 86 / 80 = 2.687 to compare the rates.

Note that crime rates are normally expressed per 100,000, but we're looking for the difference here, so you can skip the step to convert it to the larger number.

Percents: What percentage of your city's residents are Pacific Islanders.

Percentage Change: The city is slashing its Public Library budget from \$1.450 million last year to \$1.135 million this year.

What is the percentage change?

The math: Subtract 1.135 from 1.450 = .315, then convert to millions = 315,000 million difference. Divide 315,000 by 1.450 to get the percentage change, which is 21.7 percent.

Inflation: The library's budget was \$500,000 three years ago. It will be \$450,000 this year. The Consumer Price Index was 166.6 three years ago and was 179.9 this year. What should the book budget have been this year to keep up with inflation?

The math: Subtract 166.6 from 179.9 = 13.3 to get the difference, then divide 13.3 into 166.6, which is .079 (the percentage increase in the CPI over three years would be .079 x 100, which is 7.9 percent). To get the budget number, multiply .079 x 500,000 = \$39,915, which is the additional funds necessary to keep up with inflation. Add that number to the original budget and you get a library budget of \$539,915 (\$39,915 + \$500,000).

More statistical essentials

Understanding averages and ranges:

- Mean = the total of all numbers, divided by the number of entries (you probably think of it as the average; can be skewed by one very high or very low exception in the range)
- Median = the exact midpoint of a range of numbers (location in a list at which half are above and half are below)
- Mode = the most frequently occurring numbers

Incidence rates: How common is the occurrence of a new case?

Prevalence: What proportion of people in a population have a given condition *at any given time*?

Response Rate: The response to a survey...

Statistical significance: How likely is it that findings reflect more than chance association? (random variation; Pvalues / probability values)

- For many reporters, this is the key concept to understand.

TIMES INVESTIGATION LAPD MISCLASSIFIED NEARLY 1,200 VIOLENT CRIMES AS MINOR OFFENSES

By **BEN POSTON, JOEL RUBIN**

AUGUST 9, 2014, 6:04 PM

Once police had Nathan Hunter in handcuffs, they tended to his wife.

She was covered in blood. She told the officers Hunter flew into a rage that night in February 2013 because she hadn't bought him a Valentine's Day gift. He beat and choked her before stabbing her in the face with a screwdriver and throwing her down a flight of stairs at their apartment in South L.A., according to police and court records.

Hunter, 55, was convicted of felony spousal abuse and sentenced to six years in prison.

RELATED: Records show LAPD reclassified incidents

Under FBI rules followed by police departments across the country, the beating should have been counted as an aggravated assault because Hunter used a weapon and caused serious injuries.

That's not what happened. The Los Angeles Police Department classified it as a simple assault — a minor offense not included in the city's official tally of serious crimes.

It was no isolated case. The LAPD misclassified nearly 1,200 violent crimes during a one-year span ending in September 2013, including hundreds of stabbings, beatings and robberies, a Times investigation found.

The incidents were recorded as minor offenses and as a result did not appear in the LAPD's published statistics on serious crime that officials and the public use to judge the department's performance.

Nearly all the misclassified crimes were actually aggravated assaults. If those incidents had been recorded correctly, the total aggravated assaults for the 12-month period would have been almost 14%

Headlines

1. Do no harm

- Have some empathy. Imagine that the subject of the story is your neighbor or a family member. One person's cleverness is another's ridicule. Petty-crime stories are a minefield.

2. Make sure the big type does not contradict the little type.

- The headline facts should be consistent with the story.
- The interpretation of the information should be consistent. (Don't hype the content.)
- The tone should reflect the story's approach.

Headlines

3. Use humor or cleverness to invite readers in, not drive them away

- Truly clever is great, but do not make the reader groan. Bad puns may be your personal style of humor, but readers have little patience with them.
- Be aware that many headline writers may be younger/older than the readers. Use appropriate words (and cultural references) for the target audience.

Headlines

4. Stay away from the cliché

- Sometimes, you can turn a cliché into a good headline, but those are rare.
- The L.A. Times long-ago banned “tis the season” headlines around Christmastime.

Headlines

5. Use plays on words to contribute to meaning and pique reader interest, not to show off.

- Many bad headlines result from self-indulgence.
 - Les knew a headline writer who would tell a joke about a news topic (often a pun) and then look for an opportunity to work it into print, usually stretching too far to do so.
- Word plays on people's names are generally a bad idea.
 - For example, if some guy whose name happens to be Moses wrote a book about Jeeps, don't say, "This Moses wrote the bible on Jeeps," as one headline-writer did.
- Word plays on business names seldom work. They may trivialize the news.

Stuck for a headline?

Tips from John Schlander, a former news editor at the St. Petersburg Times:

WORD ASSOCIATION: Think of key words and do some free association to develop angles.

MENTAL PICTURE: What picture comes to mind as you read the story? Use that in your headline.

PERFECT VERB: A fresh verb can really make a headline. Great example: Summer muscles its way into spring.

PERSPECTIVE: Come at the head from a different viewpoint. Instead of writing the expected perspective (*Officials consider later high school starting times*), write it from the affected person's perspective (*High schoolers, don't reset alarm yet*).

EMOTION: Go for the emotion in the story. Is there anger? Love? Frustration? Desperation? Appreciation? Respect? Elation? Shame? Embarrassment? Readers respond to emotion.

FORESHADOWING: Give readers a compelling detail that foreshadows the action and makes them wonder, but doesn't frustrate them with vagueness.

SPECIFICS: Sometimes, just making a headline more specific really helps. If you have a rather vague head, sub in specifics. *Instead of Slain woman mourned at service, try 1,500 attend funeral for slain woman.* How many people have that great a number of mourners show up for their funeral?

Headlines

About SEO



Headlines

About SEO

The New York Times

Week in Review

IDEAS & TRENDS

This Boring Headline Is Written for Google

By **STEVE LOHR**

Published: April 9, 2006

JOURNALISTS over the years have assumed they were writing their headlines and articles for two audiences — fickle readers and nitpicking editors. Today, there is a third important arbiter of their work: the software programs that scour the Web, analyzing and ranking online news articles on behalf of Internet search engines like Google, Yahoo and MSN.

The search-engine "bots" that crawl the Web are increasingly influential, delivering 30 percent or more of the traffic on some newspaper, magazine or television news Web sites. And traffic means readers and advertisers, at a time when the mainstream media is desperately trying to make a living on the Web.

SIGN IN TO E-MAIL
THIS

 PRINT

 SINGLE PAGE

 REPRINTS

 SAVE

Headlines

About SEO

Quartz, the mobile-focused news site set up by Atlantic Media, has a strong reputation for its editorial style. Quartz tries to avoid simple clickbait and has no single headline strategy. Senior editor Zach Seward, a former Wall Street Journal digital guru, says:

- “Click-bait is optimizing for the click, which is cheap and easy, and therefore tends to over-promise what the story actually delivers. For us, if there is a single goal, it is writing something that will be shared. That’s a higher bar, but more effective.”
- The headline writing team does not want all Quartz headlines to look and sound alike but a couple of approaches have worked well:
 - Those that start with “*Why*” and “*How*” are better headlines, flagging stories that are more informative or will give the reader a strong signal that they are going to learn something interesting or important.
 - “*The thing*” is another approach, being a type of headline that focuses on one “atomic bit of information in the article.”
 - One headline that did well was ‘59% of America’s ‘tuna’ isn’t actually tuna’ about food mislabeling in general, which used an alarming fact to lure the reader.

Cutlines

A poorly executed caption can destroy the message of a photo or the story package of which it is part. The reader/viewer expects nothing less than accurate, complete, and informative information, including captions.

- Check the facts. Be accurate!

Cutlines

- Avoid stating the obvious. “Blake Griffin smiles as he tosses a cup of water over his shoulder.”
- Always identify the main people in the photograph.
- Beware of cutlines that recapitulate information in the head or deck or summary.

Cutlines

- Avoid making judgments. “An unhappy citizen watches the protest...” Can you be sure that he is unhappy? Or is he hurting. Or just not photogenic.
- Don’t assume. Ask questions in your effort to inform and be specific. Be willing to contact and include the visual reporter.
- Avoid using generic terms like “is shown, is pictured, and looks on.”

Cutlines

- If the photograph is a historic or file photo, include the date that it was taken. Mayor David Dinkins, 1993.
- A photograph captures a moment in time. Whenever possible, use present tense. This will create a sense of immediacy and impact.
- Don't try to be humorous when the picture is not.

Cutlines

- Descriptions are very helpful for a viewer. Going beyond “left to right” to say “the person dressed in black,” “holding the water hose” or “standing to the left of the sofa” are helpful identifying factors.
- Allow for longer captions when more information will help the reader/viewer understand the story and situation.

Cutlines

- Use commas to set off directional IDs. “Kachira Irby, above,...” or “Kennetra Irby, upper left...”
- Quotes can be an effective device; be willing to use them in photo captions.
- Conversational language works best. But don’t use clichés. Write the caption as if you’re telling a family member a story.

Pull quotes

Pull quotes are short excerpts from the presented text. They pull a text passage out of the reader's flow and give it a more dominant position in a post or printed article.

- Pull quotes shouldn't be used too often.
- They shouldn't be too large.
- Don't misuse them. In most cases, one or two pull quotes is plenty, otherwise they lose their appeal and the article becomes harder to scan.
- Pull the quote from a part of the story that the reader has not yet reached.

Promos / teasers

- See advice regarding headlines and cutlines
- Catch attention, but don't exaggerate
- Focus on the most interesting element, which is usually the lead (but not always)
- Try to entice interest without giving away the full scope of the story

Condensing copy

- Write the headline first to help you identify the key news in the story
- Look at the nut graph to see if that can serve as your wrap-up point
- Read to the end to make sure you don't delete something essential (or clever)
- Stick to one topic if you can
- Eliminate every non-essential word (edit even tighter than in body text)

Summary

- Be smart about statistics
- Write headlines that catch attention but impart enough information to let readers decide whether a given story is worth their time
- Use cutlines to enhance storytelling
- Take care when selecting pull quotes or writing teasers
- Be merciless when condensing text, but don't lose sight of the essential news value

Questions?

These fact sheets involve events in Freeport. Assume Freeport is a small city in the middle of Ohio. For purposes of these stories, assume today is Monday and that these announcements and phone calls are made on Monday. Keep in mind: Local news stories are big in Freeport. You are writing for the local paper, the Freeport News, which has a lively news website. The local TV station has local newscasts at noon, 6 p.m. and 11 p.m.

Laundromat

Police report: Jerome Pardee, 20, 1874 Ogden St. in Freeport arrested and charged with public drunkenness. Found naked in a laundromat at 402 Newell St. at 11 p.m. yesterday. Pardee told police that he planned to put his clothes back on as soon as the dryer was finished with them. Police had to wait 30 minutes for the cycle to finish before they could take him in.

Write a headline for print and another for web, if appropriate, plus text and video leads.

Appendix

MATH AND STATISTIC FOR JOURNALISTS

Books you should own ...

The best:

“Numbers in the Newsroom:

Using math and statistics in news,”

by Sarah Cohen

And one or more of these:

ALL THE HELP YOU'LL EVER NEED!

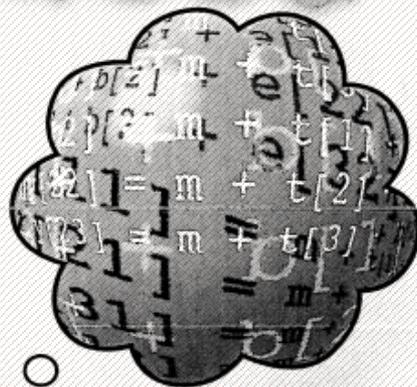
STATISTICS

for the

Utterly Confused

HOW TO
(among other things)

- Use needed statistics painlessly
- Beat statistics phobia and ace your exams
- Solve statistics problems in any subject
- Get special test-taking tips for higher grades



Lloyd
Jaisingh, Ph.D.

HOW TO LIE WITH STATISTICS

Darrell Huff
Illustrated by Irving Geis



Over Half a Million Copies Sold—
An Honest-to-Goodness Bestseller

NATIONAL BESTSELLER

The

WITH A NEW
AFTERWORD BY
THE AUTHOR

TIPPING POINT

*How Little Things Can
Make a Big Difference*



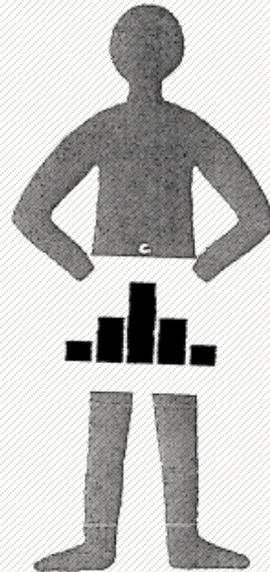
MALCOLM

GLADWELL

*"A fascinating book that makes you see the world
in a different way." —FORTUNE*

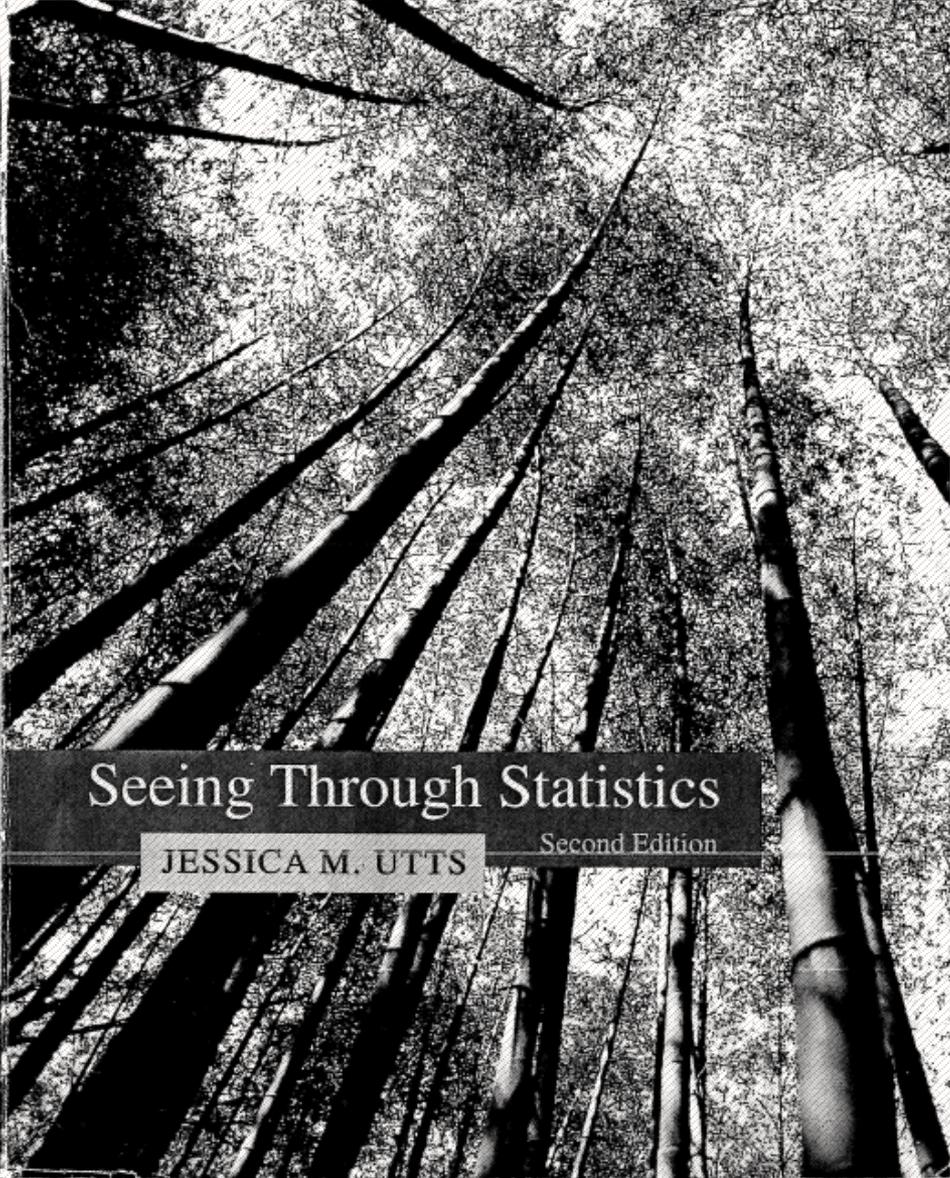
naked statistics

STRIPPING THE DREAD FROM THE DATA



charles wheelan

BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF NAKED ECONOMICS



Seeing Through Statistics

JESSICA M. UTTS

Second Edition

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HOW TO MEASURE ANYTHING

FINDING THE VALUE OF
"INTANGIBLES" IN BUSINESS

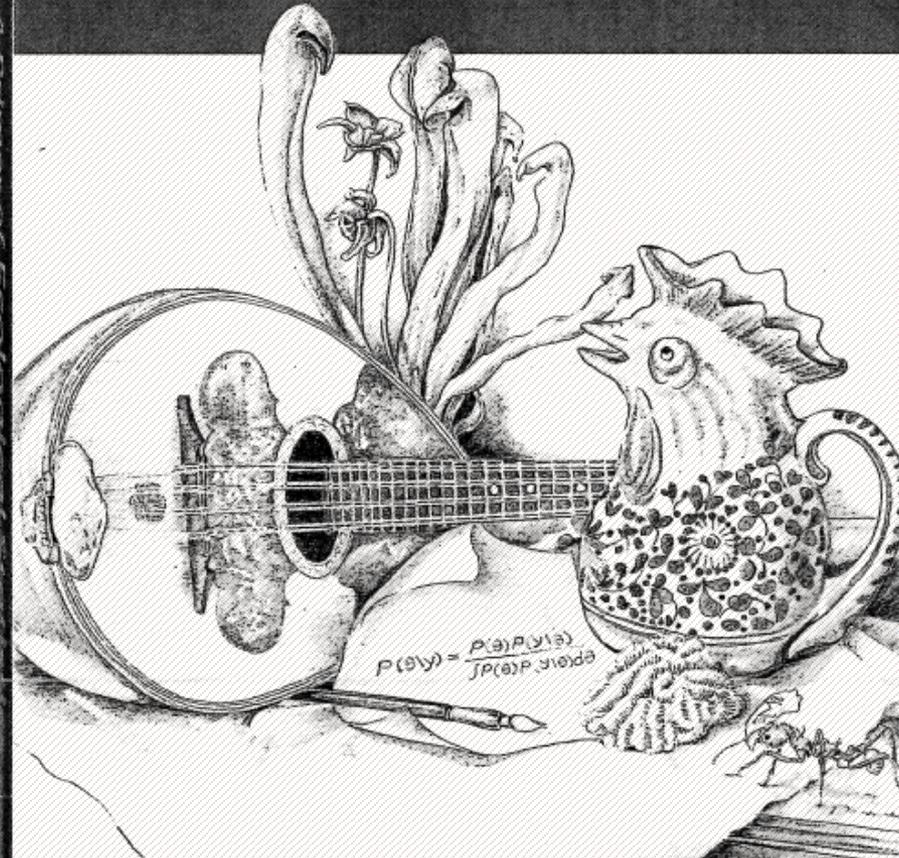
2nd
Edition

REVISED,
EXPANDED &
SIMPLIFIED



DOUGLAS W. HUBBARD

A Primer of
Ecological Statistics



NICHOLAS J. GOTELLI • AARON M. ELLISON

Beware of Scientific Misconduct

Science is fraught with fraud....

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_misconduct#Exposure_of_fraudulent_data

- *Fabrication* is **making up results and recording or reporting them.** This is sometimes referred to as "drylabbing". A more minor form of fabrication is where references are included to give arguments the appearance of widespread acceptance, but are actually fake, and/or do not support the argument.
- *Falsification* is **manipulating research materials, equipment, or processes or changing or omitting data or results such that the research is not accurately represented in the research record.**
- *Plagiarism* is **the appropriation of another person's ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit.** One form is the appropriation of the ideas and results of others, and publishing as to make it appear the author had performed all the work under which the data was obtained.

Grammar etc Is Essential

That/Which
Who/Whom
Lie/Lay/Lain/Lay/Laid
Subject/Verb Agreement

Why important? Readers care.

Professional writers have an obligation to communicate accurately and concisely.

Plus: Avoid tons of nasty e-mails and phone calls from the audience when you screw this up.

This is not a grammar lesson!

It's me. It is I. The first is OK for speech. But writing is more precise and should adhere to grammatical rules that casual speech does not.

Spelling and punctuation must also be precise or you may change the meaning of a sentence.

These next sentences were written by students here.

Jones was hit on the head and fell into a comma.

The National Weather Service predicted a three-foot surf at beaches today.

Detective Barber remembers the child every Christmas and goes to pray at her grave.

The woman suffered multiple fractures of her arms and legs.

Now.... For something deadly serious:

Our good friends, the parts of speech...

Nouns: Subjects and Objects

(*The truth will prevail. The governor spoke the truth.*)

Pronouns: Personal (*I, you, he, she*), Indefinite (*many, most, none*), **relative** (*who/whom, that, which*)

Adjectives: Descriptive (*exhausted* students), **Limiting** (He walked *15 miles*.)

Adverbs: **Modifying verbs** (*The fire raged fiercely*.), **modifying adjectives** (*This fire is really hot*.), **modifying other adverbs**. (*He took his loss very badly*.)

Prepositions: **To create phrases** – at, by, for, in, of, on, with, etc. (*He was sentenced to prison for life*.)

More Parts of Speech

Conjunctions: Coordinating – and, but, for, while, etc. (He hates death *and* taxes.)

Verbs:

Transitive : Direct action. (He hit the ball.)

Intransitive: No recipient of action, but how or when. (*Market shares fell in heavy trading. He will file for bankruptcy.*)

Linking: Connects subject with modifier. (The company's stock is worthless.)

Plus **gerunds** (She enjoys swimming.), **participles** (Hoisting her sign, she marched on.) and **infinitives** (*He is eager to win.*).

More Treacherous Waters: lay, lie

Lay takes a direct object. Lie indicates a state of reclining on a horizontal plane.

Please lay the gun on the table. The prosecutor tried to lay the blame on him.

(Past tense: He laid the gun on the table.)

He *lies* on the beach all day. I will *lie* down.

(Past tense: He lay on the beach all day. I lay down.)

Examples drawn from pgs. 151-152 of the AP Stylebook.

Subject/Verb Agreement

Each of his stock picks *has/have* lost money.

The couple in Apartment 3G *has/have* a dog.

None of us *is/are* perfect.

Neither choice *seem/seems* attractive.

The jury reached *their/its* verdict.

A herd of 12,000 reindeer *was/were* sold.

The headquarters *was/were* across the street.

The number of Marines winning medals *grow/grows* each year.

The media *is/are* negligent about foreign news.

Who vs. Whom?

The choice can be easy if the pronoun is the *subject* or *object*:

Who ate all that pie? Whom did the jury convict today.

But it can get more complicated:

He is the only guide whom the others trust.

He would talk football with whoever would listen.

See AP Stylebook, pgs 93-94 on essential and nonessential clauses.

That vs. Which

Use *that* for essential clauses: I remember the day that we meant.

Use *which* for nonessential clauses: The team, which finished last a year ago, is in first place.

Contractions

The number of students hit its highest level in nine years.
(*Possessive*)

Students agree it's time for a break. (Contraction)

Your camera is ready. (*Possessive*)

You're going to like this camera. (Contraction)

Sam and Judy say they're ready to leave. (Contraction)

They're convinced there is no better time for their runs.

Other Usage Errors

Affect/Effect

Beside/Besides

Complement/Compliment

Continual/Continuous

Elusive/Illusive

Everyone/Every One

Imply/Infer

Pour/Pore

Principal/Principle

Rebut/Refute

Sneaked/Snuck

Stationary/Stationery

Vice/Visé

etc.