



Grammar Quiz by Laura King, MA, ELS

Directions: Identify and correct the grammar problems in the following sentences based on the information outlined in chapter 7 of the *AMA Manual of Style*. For further explanation of the correct answers, refer to the cited section of the online or print version of the *AMA Manual of Style*.

1. Using the χ^2 test for categorical variables and analysis of variance for continuous variables, differences by ethnicity were tested.

ANSWER:

Using the χ^2 test for categorical variables and analysis of variance for continuous variables, we tested for differences by ethnicity.

Editor's Note: Verb phrase dangler (§7.4.2, Verbal Phrase Dangers, pp 323-324 in print). A dangling participle implies an actor but fails to indicate who or what that actor is. In this example, it is unclear who used the χ^2 test to test for differences by ethnicity. By adding *we* (or *the authors*, *the investigators*, or something similar), the problem is solved.

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2. Study variables included age, sex, length of illness, and responding to the survey questions.

ANSWER:

Study variables included age, sex, length of illness, and responses to the survey questions.

Editor’s Note: Nonparallel construction (§[7.7.3](#), Series or Comparisons, pp 326-327 in print). All elements of the series should be parallel structures (eg, nouns with nouns).

3. In the United States, journals may receive either a subpoena for confidential information or they may receive a “request” from a federal agency.

ANSWER:

In the United States, journals may receive either a subpoena for confidential information or a “request” from a federal agency.

Editor’s Note: Nonparallel construction (§[7.7.1](#), Correlative Conjunctions, pp 325-236 in print). All elements of the parallelism that appear on one side of the coordinating conjunction should match corresponding elements on the other side.

4. The study examined postradiotherapy prostate cancer biochemical failure.

ANSWER:

The study examined biochemical failure in patients with prostate cancer after radiotherapy.

Editor’s Note: Overuse of noun modifiers (noun strings) (§[7.1.1](#), Modifiers [Noun Strings], p 316 in print). Rephrase excessive noun strings.



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5. We performed a quantitative overview of randomized trials which tested β -blockers in myocardial infarction, heart failure, and hypertension.

ANSWER:

We performed a quantitative overview of randomized trials that tested β -blockers in myocardial infarction, heart failure, and hypertension.

Editor's Note: Incorrect use of relative pronoun (*which* vs *that*) (§7.2.2, Relative Pronouns, pp 317-319 in print). *That* introduces a phrase that is essential to the meaning of the sentence, and *which* introduces a phrase that adds more information but is not essential to the meaning. *Which* should always be preceded by a comma. Another example: "He visited the new hospital, which had been built last year" is correct. However, if there were 2 hospitals and only 1 had been built last year, the sentence would read, "He visited the new hospital that had been built last year."

6. Of all the fields of study, genetics are the most challenging.

ANSWER:

Of all the fields of study, genetics is the most challenging.

Editor's Note: False plural (§7.8.3, False Plurals, p 328 in print). Remember that the following words are plurals and take the plural verb: *criteria*, *phenomena*, *memoranda*, *data*, and *media*. (Singular forms are *criterion*, *phenomenon*, *memorandum*, *datum*, and *medium*.) For example, "The data were inconclusive." The following words are singular and take the singular verb: *measles*, *mumps*, *mathematics*, and *genetics*. (See also, §7.8.2, False Singulars, p 328 in print.)



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7. The surgeon general told the secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services that he was responsible for the unflattering news story.

ANSWER:

When talking with the secretary of Health and Human Services, the surgeon general took responsibility for the unflattering news story.

Or

The surgeon general blamed the secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services for the unflattering news story.

Editor's Note: Unclear pronoun reference (§7.2, Pronouns, p 317 in print). Who is the *he* in the above sentence? The surgeon general or the secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services?

8. Stillborn fetuses were not included in this study nor many previously published studies.

ANSWER:

Stillborn fetuses were not included in this or many previously published studies.

Editor's Note: Unparallel construction in a series (§7.7.3, Series or Comparisons, pp 326-327 in print). Avoid the use of *nor* when the first negative is expressed by *not* or *no*.

9. In the recent study by Hobbs et al, the author found that noncancerous tonsil specimens demonstrated a heightened proliferation response to human papillomavirus 16 antigen, suggesting prior exposure to the virus.

ANSWER:

In the recent study by Hobbs et al, the authors found that noncancerous tonsil specimens demonstrated a heightened proliferation response to human papillomavirus 16 antigen, suggesting prior exposure to the virus.

Editor's Note: Subject-complement disagreement (§7.1.3, Subject-Complement Agreement, pp 316-317 in print). The phrase *et al* means “and others”; therefore, the singular *author* should be changed to *authors*.



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10. Fifty-six percent of respondents said that they would find another physician if they thought that their physician was HIV positive.

ANSWER:

Fifty-six percent of respondents said that they would find another physician if they thought that their physician were HIV positive.

Editor's Note: Incorrect mood (§7.3.2, Mood, p 320 in print). Subjunctive verbs should be used for expressing a wish (I wish it were possible), a supposition (If I were to accept the position ...), or a condition that is uncertain or contrary to fact (If that were true ...).

11. Biopsy specimens were taken from an adjacent muscle and reveal a neural infiltration by Sézary cells with secondary muscular atrophy.

ANSWER:

Biopsy specimens were taken from an adjacent muscle and revealed a neural infiltration by Sézary cells with secondary muscular atrophy.

Editor's Note: Inconsistent use of tense (§7.3.3, Tense, pp 320-321 in print). In general, tense must be used consistently. In a biomedical article the past tense is usually used to refer to the methods and results of the study being described.

12. The findings of the medical examination were not inconsistent with a diagnosis of necrobiosis lipoidica diabetorum.

ANSWER:

The findings of the medical examination were consistent with a diagnosis of necrobiosis lipoidica diabetorum.

Editor's Note: Double negative (§7.3.4, Double Negatives, p 322 in print). Although the use of a double negative to express a positive is acceptable, a double negative is best avoided in scientific writing because it often forces the reader to go back and reread the sentence to make sure of the meaning.

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13. A woman is more likely to have a child by the age of 25 years than a man.

ANSWER:

A woman is more likely than a man to have a child by the age of 25 years.

Editor's Note: Incorrect elliptical comparison (§7.7.2, Elliptical Comparison, p 326 in print). Correct placement of *than* is important to avoid ambiguity. The original sentence leaves the reader wondering whether a woman is more likely to have a child or a man by the age of 25 years.

14. The patient with disseminated granuloma annulare, as well as the 2 patients with ulcerative necrobiosis lipoidica diabetorum, were given a dose of 5 mg/kg of infliximab.

ANSWER:

The patient with disseminated granuloma annulare, as well as the 2 patients with ulcerative necrobiosis lipoidica diabetorum, was given a dose of 5 mg/kg of infliximab.

Editor's Note: Subject-verb disagreement (§7.8.1, Intervening Phrase, pp 327-328 in print). If the intervening phrase is introduced by *with*, *together with*, *as well as*, *along with*, *in addition to*, or similar constructions, the singular verb is preferred if the subject is singular because the intervening phrase does not affect the singularity of the subject.

15. The couple were seeking care from the specialist for fertility issues.

ANSWER:

The couple was seeking care from the specialist for fertility issues.

Editor's Note: Collective noun subject-verb disagreement (§7.8.5, Collective Nouns, p 329 in print). A collective noun is one that names more than 1 person, place, or thing. When the group is regarded as a unit, as is the case with *couple* in this example, the singular verb is appropriate. When the individual members of the pair or group are emphasized, rather than the group as a whole, the plural verb is correct.

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