

Correct and Preferred Usage Quiz

by Laura King, MA, ELS

ANSWER KEY

Directions: The following sentences all contain 1 usage error each. Identify the errors and reword the sentences appropriately based on your reading of section §11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases of the *AMA Manual of Style*.

1. Individuals with latent *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* infection may benefit from chemoprevention, which militates the risk of subsequent active tuberculosis development.

ANSWER: Individuals with latent *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* infection may benefit from chemoprevention, which mitigates the risk of subsequent active tuberculosis development.

Editor's Note: The words *militate* and *mitigate* are not synonymous. *Militate* means to have weight or effect and is usually used with *against*. *Mitigate* means to moderate, abate, or alleviate (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

2. A lymphomatous leptomenigeal involvement was ruled out by negative cerebral, spinal, and cranial magnetic resonance imaging.

ANSWER: A lymphomatous leptomenigeal involvement was ruled out by negative findings from cerebral, spinal, and cranial magnetic resonance imaging.

Editor's Note: Examinations and laboratory tests and studies are not in themselves abnormal, normal, negative, or positive. These adjectives apply to observations, results, or findings (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

3. Pericarditis has been reported as a rare side effect in patients treated with low doses of methotrexate for various benign conditions but not with high doses in aggressive lymphomas.

ANSWER: Pericarditis has been reported as a rare adverse effect in patients treated with low doses of methotrexate for various benign conditions but not with high doses in aggressive lymphomas.

Editor's Note: *Side effect* is the secondary consequence of implementing an agent (usually a drug). The term is often used incorrectly when *adverse effect*, *adverse event*, or *adverse reaction* is intended. Because a side effect can be either beneficial or harmful, a specific term should be used (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

4. The partial remission persisted for 10 months under maintenance therapy without hematologic, hepatic, or renal toxicity.

ANSWER: The partial remission persisted for 10 months under maintenance therapy without hematologic, hepatic, or renal toxic effects.

Editor's Note: *Toxic* means pertaining to or caused by a poison or toxin. *Toxicity* is the quality, state, or degree of being poisonous. A patient experiences toxic effects, not toxicity (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

5. The patient died from a pericardial effusion.

ANSWER: The patient died of a pericardial effusion.

Editor's Note: Persons die *of*, not *from*, specific diseases or disorders (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

6. Shortly after week 2, most of the smaller ulcers were almost completely reepithelialized, and fewer than 50% of the larger ulcers remained.

ANSWER: Shortly after week 2, most of the smaller ulcers were almost completely reepithelialized, and less than 50% of the larger ulcers remained.

Editor's Note: Use *fewer* for number (individual persons or things) and *less* for volume or mass (indicating degree or value). Percentages and money conventionally use *less* rather than *fewer* (eg, less than 50%, less than \$1000) (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

7. The wounds remained open and inflamed despite 4 months of this treatment regime.

ANSWER: The wounds remained open and inflamed despite 4 months of this treatment regimen.

Editor's Note: A *regime* is a form of government, a social system, or a period of rule. A *regimen* is a systematic schedule (involving, for example, diet, exercise, or medication) designed to improve or maintain the health of a patient (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

8. Doctors play an important role in counseling patients on smoking cessation and weight loss.

ANSWER: Physicians play an important role in counseling patients on smoking cessation and weight loss.

Editor's Note: *Doctor* is a more general term than *physician* because it includes persons who hold such degrees as PhD, DDS, EdD, DVM, and PharmD. Thus, the term *physician* should be used when referring specifically to a doctor of medicine or osteopathy, ie, a person with an MD or a DO degree (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

9. The 2 slices obtained during magnetic resonance imaging showed widespread atrophy.

ANSWER: The 2 sections obtained during magnetic resonance imaging showed widespread atrophy.

Editor's Note: Use *section* to refer to a radiological image; use *slice* to refer to a slice of tissue (eg, for histologic examination) (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

10. Both congenital hypothyroidism and acquired hypothyroidism are common in cases with Down syndrome.

ANSWER: Both congenital hypothyroidism and acquired hypothyroidism are common in patients with Down syndrome.

Editor's Note: In clinical research, a *case* is a particular instance of a disease. A *patient* is a particular person under medical care. Do not refer to *patients* as *cases* unless describing a case-control study (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

11. A man in his early 40s underwent surgical evaluation for recent left-sided chest discomfort and longstanding dyspnea on exertion.

ANSWER: A man in his early 40s underwent surgical evaluation for recent left-sided chest discomfort and longstanding dyspnea on exertion.

Editor's Note: *Discomfit*, although occasionally still used in the sense of “to frustrate or thwart,” is currently most often used to indicate mental, rather than physical, states, specifically in the sense of one’s being perplexed or embarrassed (ie, *disconcerted*). *Discomfort* is most often used to indicate one’s feeling physically or emotionally uncomfortable, resulting from the efforts of others, from personal excess, or from a condition or disease state. *Disconcert*, indicating perplexity or disturbed composure, is still occasionally used as a verb but currently is used much more frequently as an adjective. (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

12. Study participants were selected from a birth cohort study of individuals younger than 21 years of age.

ANSWER: Study participants were selected from a birth cohort study of individuals younger than 21 years.

Editor's Note: It is unnecessary and redundant to add *of age* in this example. When the terms *older* and *younger* are used, age is implied (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

13. The test signal was comprised of filtered white noise with a center frequency of 7 kHz, a bandwidth of 5.5 to 8.5 kHz, and a slope of 48 dB per octave.

ANSWER: The test signal comprised filtered white noise with a center frequency of 7 kHz, a bandwidth of 5.5 to 8.5 kHz, and a slope of 48 dB per octave. OR The test signal was composed of filtered white noise with a center frequency of 7 kHz, a bandwidth of 5.5 to 8.5 kHz, and a slope of 48 dB per octave.

Editor's Note: *Comprise* means to be composed of or to include. *Compose* means to make up or be a constituent of. The phrase *comprised of* is never correct (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

14. The patient with hypertension was put on hydrochlorothiazide and metoprolol.

ANSWER: The patient with hypertension was prescribed hydrochlorothiazide and metoprolol.

Editor's Note: The phrase “to put [or to place] a patient on a drug” is jargon and should be avoided. Medications are prescribed or patients are given medications; therapy or therapeutic agents are started, administered, maintained, stopped, or discontinued (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

15. Because of the motor vehicle accident, the patient experienced the following adverse effects: pain in his left leg, dizziness, and nausea.

ANSWER: Because of the motor vehicle crash, the patient experienced the following adverse effects: pain in his left leg, dizziness, and nausea.

Editor's Note: The term *accident* (and *accidental*) is considered by the public health community to be imprecise. The injury-causing event can be described with such terms as *crash*, *shooting*, *drowning*, *collision*, *poisoning*, or *suffocation* (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

16. The study examined the treatment of pneumococcal meningitis with the utilization of penicillin alone compared penicillin and streptomycin with and without hydrocortisone.

ANSWER: The study examined the treatment of pneumococcal meningitis with the use of penicillin alone compared penicillin and streptomycin with and without hydrocortisone.

Editor's Note: *Use* is almost always preferable to *utilize*, which has the specific meaning “to find a profitable or practical use for,” suggesting the discovery of a new use for something. However, even where this meaning is intended, *use* would be acceptable (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

17. Of 10 000 heart transplantation candidates on the transplant waiting list, 1544 (15.4%) underwent heart transplantations.

ANSWER: Of 10 000 heart transplant candidates on the transplant waiting list, 1544 (15.4%) underwent heart transplants.

Editor's Note: *Transplant* is both a noun (typically meaning the surgical operation itself but also increasingly referring to the overall field) and a transitive verb. Use *graft* (or *allograft*, *autograft*, *xenograft*, and so on, depending on the level of precision needed) as the general noun for the organ or tissue that is transplanted, or specify which organ or tissue (eg, liver, skin), rather than use the noun *transplant* in this context. *Transplantation* is traditionally the noun used to describe the overall field. Never use the plural *transplantations* (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

18. In this randomized clinical trial of 271 women victims of intimate partner violence, the between-group difference in telomerase activity after 22 weeks was not statistically significant.

ANSWER: In this randomized clinical trial of 271 women survivors of intimate partner violence, the between-group difference in telomerase activity after 22 weeks was not statistically significant.

Editor's Note: In scientific publications, avoid the use of the word *victim* when describing persons who experienced physical, domestic, sexual, or psychological violence, bullying, or a natural disaster. Similarly, avoid labeling (and thus equating) people with a disability or disease as victims (eg, AIDS victim, stroke victim; see 11.12.6, Terms for Persons With Diseases, Disorders, or Disabilities). The term *victimization* should likewise be avoided; instead, a term or phrase that describes the specific exposure should be used (eg, exposure to violence, experienced trauma, bullying, being bullied) (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

19. Although heroin abuse is an urgent concern in the US, little is known about the course of heroin abuse, heroin abuse disorder, and associated factors.

ANSWER: Although heroin use is an urgent concern in the US, little is known about the course of heroin use, heroin use disorder, and associated factors.

Editor's Note: Never use the term *substance abuse*. Many consider it to be pejorative, but it is a clarity and accuracy issue as well. If what is meant is “use” (“The patient used heroin”), then “use” is sufficient. There is no difference between heroin “use” and heroin “abuse,” so “abuse” adds no information. If what is meant is “The patient had depression and substance use disorder” (eg, both are medical illnesses), then saying “The patient had substance abuse” would be unclear and inaccurate (unless specifically referring to meeting the *DSM-IV* substance abuse definition). Use “substance use disorder” to mean uncontrolled use of a substance with recurrent consequences. Use “substance use” to mean the action of taking a substance without any conclusions about whether it has harmed the person or whether they have control over its use (“The patient used marijuana last night”) (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).

20. In a cohort study of 130 colorectal cancer surgeries, higher habitual dietary fiber intake in patients before surgery was associated with a lower risk of postoperative surgical complications.

ANSWER: In a cohort study of 130 colorectal cancer operations, higher habitual dietary fiber intake in patients before surgery was associated with a lower risk of postoperative surgical complications.

Editor's Note: *Surgery* is what a surgeon practices or a particular medical specialty. An *operation* is what a surgeon performs. In this context, there is no such word as *surgeries*. In the United Kingdom, *surgeries* are treatment rooms (§11.1, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases).