

Five Uncommonly Serious Mistakes

(excerpted from Douglas Cazort's *Under the Grammar Hammer*, pp. 25-27)

The following five mistakes are not among the most common, but they receive strong negative responses when committed. In other words, we don't make these mistakes very often, but when we do, we cause strong negative reactions.... If you don't make these mistakes, you needn't worry. If you do, takes steps to correct them.

1. Objective case pronouns used as subjects

Wrong: Her guru and her agreed that we are what we think.

Right: Her guru and she agreed that we are what we think.

2. Double negatives

Wrong: One hard lesson for many to learn is that worry *won't hardly* change the future.

Right: One hard lesson for many to learn is that worry *will hardly* change the future.

3. Failure to capitalize proper names

Wrong: roger von oech, the president of creative think, has conducted workshops on creativity for american express, proctor and gamble, and the Japanese management association.

Right: Roger von Oech, the president of Creative Think, has conducted workshops on creativity for American Express, Apple Computer, Proctor and Gamble, and the Japanese Management Association.

4. Faulty parallelism

Wrong: A good manager requires the ability to lead, the capacity to learn, and delegating.

Right: A good manager requires the ability to lead, the capacity to learn, and the willingness to delegate.

5. Subjective-case pronouns used as objects

Wrong: The senator's use of double negatives surprised my students and *I*.

Right: The senator's use of double negatives surprised my students and *me*.

Douglas Cazort's *Under the Grammar Hammer*, from which this information was drawn, is a great reference for writers. Rather than looking for every infraction of every rule in a standard handbook, with this book you can look for those errors you are most likely to have. You can find more information about this book online at www.ncte.org/teacherfest/weaverres.shtml or you can order a copy from any bookstore (Cazort, Douglas. Los Angeles: Lowell House, 1997, ISBN 1-5656-5647-4).

Proofreading Priority Guidelines

To make the best use of your time, and to learn from your mistakes, it's best to look for errors in order of importance rather than whatever order you happen to find them. First, you'll need to review the entire paper in order to get a sense of the kinds of errors you make. (A writing consultant can help with this step.) When you've identified the types of errors you tend to make, address them in this order:

1. Errors which affect readers' comprehension of the text
2. Errors which you are especially concerned about
3. Frequent occurrences of the same error
4. Errors which can be fixed by learning a rule
5. Errors which don't violate a particular rule, but rather are matters of idiom or preference

When several different errors fall into the same category, you should decide which errors to address first. Here are some points to consider as you decide:

- Which errors are you most interested in or ready to address?
- Which errors are likely to bother readers the most? (You might want to refer to sources such as Douglas Cazort's list of "Five Uncommonly Serious Mistakes." You might also want to consider starting with errors the teacher has complained about in the past.)
- Which errors are most likely to recur in future papers?
- Which errors are easiest for you to fix?