UNIT 6 : MASTERING THE LANGUAGE OF EDITING

UNIT STRUCTURE

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6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- understand the importance of vocabulary in editing language
- familiarise yourself with basic rules of grammar and sentence construction
- learn some important tips on what to keep in mind while editing language.

6.2 IMPORTANCE OF VOCABULARY

In the last unit, you learnt about copy-editing and the process of preparing a copy for publication. In this unit, you are going to learn more about the language of editing- that is rules of grammar and vocabulary.

Language is the copy editor's fundamental tool. Knowledge of correct grammar, spelling and punctuation rates as the most important skill for copy editors, followed by skills for accuracy and fact checking. News writing may be a little different from story writing or prose writing, but factors like proper word usage, correct grammar and punctuation are still important. The inverted pyramid structure of news stories differs from the traditional

narrative pattern, and paragraphs are kept shorter in news stories, but most other conventions of good writing are unchanged.

A newspaper, magazine, public relations agency or online news source cannot be casual about language usage, for precision of language sharpens the meaning of fact. In addition, improper usage damages credibility. Readers question the accuracy of information in a publication containing frequent errors in spelling or use of language.

In this unit, we shall not discuss or explain all grammar rules but shall lay the basis for an understanding of how the language is commonly used and point out some problems that are commonly seen to occur in journalistic writing.

6.3 PARTS OF SPEECH AND SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION

A professional writer or editor should always use language to enhance communication. In order to use grammar, punctuation and words correctly, journalists need to understand the parts of speech and how sentences are constructed.

In the English language, words can be considered as the smallest elements that have distinctive meanings. Based on their use and functions, words are categorized into several types or parts of speech.

The eight basic **parts of speech** are:

Noun - (Naming word)

A noun is the name of a person, place, thing or idea.

Examples of nouns: Ajay, London, table, dog, teacher, pen, city, happiness, hope

Example sentences: **Steve** lives in **Sydney**.

Mary uses **pen** and **paper** to write **letters**.

Pronoun- (Replaces a Noun)

A pronoun is used in place of a noun or noun phrase to avoid repetition.

Examples of pronouns: I, you, we, they, he, she, it, me, us, them, him, her, this, those

Example sentences: Mary is tired.

She wants to sleep.

I want **her** to dance with **me**.

Adjective - (Describing word)

An **adjective** describes, modifies or gives more information about a noun or pronoun.

Examples: big, happy, green, young, fun, crazy, three

Example sentences: The **little** girl had a **pink** hat.

The **old** man wanted to cross the road.

Verb - (Action Word)

A **verb** shows an action or state of being. A verb shows what someone or something is doing.

Examples: go, speak, run, eat, play, live, walk, have, like, are, is

Example sentences: I **like** the English language.

I **study** their charts and **play** their games.

Adverb - (Describes a verb)

An **adverb** describes/modifies a verb, an adjective or another adverb. It tells how, where, when, how often or to what extent. Many adverbs end in -LY

Examples: slowly, quietly, very, always, never, too, well, tomorrow, here

Example sentences: I am **usually** busy.

Yesterday, I ate my lunch **quickly**.

Preposition - (Shows relationship)

A **preposition** shows the relationship of a noun or pronoun to another word. They can indicate time, place, or relationship.

Examples: at, on, in, from, with, near, between, about, under

Example sentences: I left my keys **on** the table **for** you.

(We shall discuss more about the rules of usage of prepositions in the next section.)

Conjunction - (Joining word)

A **conjunction** joins two words, ideas, phrases or clauses together in a sentence and shows how they are connected.

Examples: and, or, but, because, so, yet, unless, since, if.

Example sentences: I was hot **and** exhausted **but** I still finished the marathon.

Interjection - (Expressive word)

An **interjection** is a word or phrase that expresses a strong feeling or emotion. It is a short exclamation.

Examples: Ouch! Wow! Great! Help! Oh! Hey! Hi!

Example sentences: Wow! I passed my English test. Great! – Ouch! That hurt.

Basic to any language is the **sentence**, which expresses a complete thought and consists of a subject and a predicate.

The **subject** is the star of the sentence; the person, animal, or thing that is the focus of it.

The **predicate** will tell the action that the subject is taking or tell something about the subject.

“John ran to the store” is a complete sentence; it has a subject ‘John’ and a verb ‘ran’, and it expresses a complete thought.

Some of the most important English grammar rules relate directly to sentence structure. These rules specify that:

- A singular subject needs a singular predicate.
- A sentence needs to express a complete thought.
- Another term for a sentence is an independent clause.
- Clauses, like any sentence, have a subject and predicate too. If a group of words does not have a subject and predicate, it is a phrase. For example: As fast as possible.
- If they can stand alone and make a complete thought, then they are independent and called sentences.
- If they do not express a complete thought, they are called “dependent clauses.” An example of a dependent clause, which is not a sentence, is “when I finish my work”.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q. 1. Label the words in the sentences according to its part of speech:

(i) Rahul has not eaten since Monday.

(ii)Shikha ran home as fast as possible.

(iii) My exams are starting from next month.

(iv) He lent her a copy of the document to read.

(v) He was wearing a beautiful coat.

6.4 USE OF PREPOSITION AND PUNCTUATION

Although prepositions are a part of speech, we shall discuss how to use them in this section separately, as prepositions are the most used words in the English language. In fact, the prepositions to, of, in, for, on, with, at, by, from are all in the top 25 words in English. If you can understand and correctly use prepositions, it will greatly improve your fluency. The following rules will help you understand and use prepositions correctly.

A preposition must have an object

All prepositions have objects. If a "preposition" does not have an object it is not a preposition—it's probably an adverb. A preposition always has an object. An adverb never has an object. Look at these example sentences:

They are in the kitchen. (Preposition **in** has object **the** kitchen)

Please come in. (adverb in has no object; it qualifies come).

There was a doorway **before** me. (Preposition before has object me)

I have never seen it *before*. (Adverb before has no object; it qualifies seen)

I will call **after** work. (preposition after has object work)

He called soon after. (adverb after has no object; it qualifies called)

Pre-position means place before

The name “pre-position” indicates that a preposition (usually) comes before something (its object):

I put it **in** the box.

But even when a preposition does not come before its object, it is still closely related to its object:

Who did you talk **to**? / I talked **to** Jane.

A pronoun following a preposition should be in object form

The noun or pronoun that follows a preposition forms a ‘prepositional object’. If it is a pronoun, it should therefore be in the objective form (me, her, them), not subjective form (I, she, they):

This is **from** my wife and me.

That’s **between** him and her.

Mary gave it **to** them.

Preposition forms

Prepositions have no particular form. The majority of prepositions are one-word prepositions, but some are two- or three-word phrases known as complex-prepositions:

One-word prepositions (before, into, on)

Complex prepositions (according to, but for, in spite of, on account of)

The golden preposition rule

A preposition is followed by a “noun”. It is NEVER followed by a verb.

Food is on the table.

The letter is under your blue book

Punctuation

Let us also take a look at some of the basic rules of punctuation in English grammar:

- All sentences must start with a capital, or upper case letter.
- Names of people and specific places, and titles of books, magazines,

movies, etc. are capitalized.

- Organizations and compass points are capitalized.
- Every sentence needs a punctuation mark at the end of it. These would include a period or a full stop (.), exclamation mark (!), or question mark (?).
- Colons (:) are used to separate a sentence from a list of items, between two sentences when the second one explains the first, and to introduce a long direct quote.
- Semicolons (;) are used to take the place of a conjunction and are placed before introductory words like “therefore” or “however.” They are also used to separate a list of things if there are commas within each unit.
- There are a lot of rules for commas (,). The basic ones are commas separate things in a series and go wherever there is a pause in the sentence. They surround the name of a person being addressed, separate the day of the month from the year in a date, and separate a town from the state.
- Parentheses enclose things that clarify and enclose numbers and letters that are part of a list. Apostrophes (’) are used in contractions to take the place of one or more letters and to show possession. An apostrophe and “s” is added if the noun is singular and an apostrophe alone is added if the noun is plural.

6.5 SELECTION OF RIGHT WORDS

Often, the most common mistake that an editor needs to make sure is corrected is the correct usage of words. English has a lot of commonly confused words. They either look alike, sound alike or, but have completely different meanings. Other words look and sound different but are similar in meaning, and it’s hard to determine which the correct one in a given context is.

Given below are a few pairs of such words which was commonly mistaken or used incorrectly.

Advice/Advise: *Advice* is a noun: Raj gave Rosy good advice. *Advise* is a verb: Raj advised Rosy to stay away from trouble.

Affect/Effect: *Affect* is usually a verb: Raj's humming affected Rosy's ability to concentrate. *Effect* is usually a noun: Raj was sorry for the effect his humming had. If you find yourself confused about which one to use in a sentence, try substituting the word "alter" or "result." If "alter" fits (Raj's humming altered Rosy's ability to concentrate), use *affect*. If "result" fits (Raj was sorry for the result his humming had), use *effect*.

Accept/Except: Accept is a verb which means - to receive I accepted all my birthday gifts with gratitude. Except is a conjunction which means - apart from; otherwise than; were it not true. When Susan travels, she packs everything except the kitchen sink.

Among/Amongst: *Among* is the preferred and most common variant of this word in American English. *Amongst* is more common in British English. Neither version is wrong, but *amongst* may seem fussy to American readers.

Among/Between: *Among* expresses a collective or loose relationship of several items: Raj found a letter hidden among the papers on the desk. *Between* expresses the relationship of one thing to another thing or too many other things: Rosy spent all day carrying messages between Raj and the other students. The idea that *between* can be used only when talking about two things is a myth—it's perfectly correct to use *between* if you are talking about multiple binary relationships.

Assure/Ensure/Insure: *Assure* means to tell someone that something will definitely happen or is definitely true: Rosy assured Raj that there was no problem. *Ensure* means to guarantee or make sure of something: Rosy took steps to ensure that there was no problem. *Insure* means to take out an insurance policy: Rosy was glad the marriage hall was insured against damage caused by the bullies.

Breath/Breathe: *Breath* is a noun; it's the air that goes in and out of your lungs: Raj held his breath while Rosy skateboarded down the stairs. *Breathe* is a verb; it means to exhale or inhale: After Rosy's spectacular landing, Raj had to remind himself to breathe again.

Complement/Compliment: A *complement* is something that completes something else. It's often used to describe things that go well together: Raj's lime green boots were a perfect complement to his jacket. A *compliment* is a nice thing to say: Rosy received many compliments on her purple dress.

Disinterested/Uninterested: *Disinterested* means impartial: A panel of disinterested judges who had never met the contestants before judged the singing contest. *Uninterested* means bored or not wanting to be involved with something: Rosy was uninterested in attending Raj's singing class.

Emigrate/Immigrate: *Emigrate* means to move away from a city or country to live somewhere else: Raj's grandfather emigrated from China sixty years ago. *Immigrate* means to move into a country from somewhere else: Rosy's sister immigrated to Singapore in 2004.

E.g./I.e.: These two Latin abbreviations are often mixed up, but *e.g.* means "for example," while *i.e.*means "that is."

Empathy/Sympathy: *Empathy* is the ability to understand another person's perspective or feelings. *Sympathy* is a feeling of sorrow for someone else's suffering. A *sympathizer* is someone who agrees with a particular ideal or cause.

Farther/Further: *Farther* refers to physical distance: Rosy can run farther than Raj. *Further* refers to metaphorical distance: Raj is further away from finishing his project than Rosy is.

Historic/Historical: *Historic* means famous, important, and influential: Raj visited the beach in Kitty Hawk where the Wright brothers made their historic first airplane flight. *Historical* means related to history: Rosy donned a historical bonnet for the renaissance fair.

Imply/Infer: *Imply* means to hint at something without saying it directly: Raj implied that Rosy was in trouble, but he wouldn't tell her why. *Infer* means to deduce something that hasn't been stated directly: Rosy inferred that Raj was nervous about something from the way he kept looking over his shoulder.

It's/Its: *It's* is a contraction of "it is": Rosy needs to pack for her trip because it's only two days away. *Its* is a possessive pronoun that means "belonging to it": Raj is obsessed with both the book and its author.

Lay/Lie *To lay* means to put or to place. One way to remember this is that there is an a in both *to lay* and *to place*: Rosy will lay out her outfit before she goes to bed. *To lie* means to recline. One way to remember this is that there is an e in both *to lie* and *to recline*: Raj will lie down for a nap. Be careful, though. The past tense of *to lay* is *laid*: Rosy laid out her outfit. The past tense of *to lie* is *lay*: Raj lay down for a nap over an hour ago.

Lead/Led *Lead*, when it rhymes with "bed," refers to a type of metal: Rosy wore a lead apron while the dentist X-rayed her teeth. *Led* is the past tense of the verb *to lead*, which means to guide or to be first: Raj led the way.

Learned/Learnt *Learned* is standard in American English. *Learnt* is standard in British English.

Loose/Lose ***Loose*** is usually an adjective: Rosy discovered that the cows were loose. *Lose* is always a verb. It means to misplace something or to be unvictorious in a game or contest: Raj was careful not to lose his ticket.

Principal/Principle *Principal* can be a noun or adjective. As a noun, it refers to the person in charge of a school or organization: Rosy was called into the principal's office. As an adjective, it means most important: The principal reason for this meeting is to brainstorm ideas for the theme of Raj's birthday party. A *principle* (always a noun) is a firmly held belief or ideal: Rosy doesn't like surprise parties as a matter of principle.

Inquiry/Enquiry *Inquiry* and *enquiry* both mean "a request for information." *Inquiry* is the standard American English spelling. *Enquiry* is the British spelling.

Stationary/Stationery *Stationary* means unmoving: The revolving door remained stationary because Rosy was pushing on it the wrong way. *Stationery* refers to letter writing materials and especially to high quality paper: Raj printed his résumé on his best stationery.

Than/Then *Than* is used for comparisons: Rosy runs faster than Raj. *Then* is used to indicate time or sequence: Rosy took off running, and then Raj came along and finished her breakfast.

Their/There/They're *Their* is the possessive form of "they": Raj and Rosy took their time. *There* indicates a place: It took them an hour to get there. *They're* is a contraction of "they are": Are Raj and Rosy coming? They're almost here.

To/Too ***To*** is a preposition that can indicate direction: Rosy walked to school. She said hello to Raj when she saw him. *To* is also used in the infinitive form of verbs: Raj waited until the last minute to do his homework. *Too* is used as an intensifier, and also means "also": Rosy waited too long to do her homework, too.

Toward/Towards *Toward* is standard in American English. *Towards* is standard in British English.

Who's/Whose *Who's* is a contraction of "who is": Who's calling Raj at this hour? *Whose* is a possessive pronoun that means "belonging to [someone]": Raj, whose phone hadn't stopped ringing all morning, barely ate anything for breakfast.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q. 2. What is the difference between affect and effect?

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Q. 3. What is the difference between lay and lie?

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Q. 4. What is the difference between complement and compliment?

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6.6 LET US SUM UP

- Language is the copy editor's fundamental tool. Knowledge of correct grammar, spelling and punctuation rates as the most important skill for copy editors, followed by skills for accuracy and fact checking.
- News writing may be a little different from story writing or prose writing, but factors like proper word usage, correct grammar and punctuation are still important.
- In order to use grammar, punctuation and words correctly, journalists need to understand the parts of speech and how sentences are constructed.
- In the English language, words can be considered as the smallest elements that have distinctive meanings. Based on their use and functions, words are categorized into several types or parts of speech-

noun, pronoun, adjective, preposition, verb, adverb, interjection and conjunction.



6.7 FURTHER READING

1. Brooks, Brian S., and James L. Pinson (1996). *Working with Words: A Concise Handbook for Media Writers and Editors,* 3rd ed. New York: St. Martin's Press.



6.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q. No 1 :

(i) Rahul-Proper Noun
Has- Verb
not eaten- Verb
since- Preposition
Monday- Proper Noun

(ii) Shikha: Proper Noun
Ran: Verb
Home: Noun
As: Preposition
Fast: Adverb

(iii) My : Pronoun
Exams: Noun
Are: Verb
Starting: Verb
from: Preposition
next: Adverb
month: Noun

(iv) He: Pronoun
lent : Verb
her: Pronoun
a copy: Noun
of: Preposition
the document: Noun
to: Preparation
read: Verb

(v) He : Pronoun
Was a wearing: Verb
Beautiful: Adjective
Coat: Noun

Ans to Q. No 2 : Accept is a verb which means - to receive I accepted all my birthday gifts with gratitude. Except is a conjunction which means - apart from; otherwise than; were it not true. When Susan travels, she packs everything except the kitchen sink.

Ans to Q. No 3 : *To lay* means to put or to place. One way to remember this is that there is an a in both *to lay* and *to place*: Rosy will lay out her outfit before she goes to bed. *To lie* means to recline. One way to remember this is that there is an e in both *to lie* and *to recline*: Raj will lie down for a nap. Be careful, though. The past tense of *to lay* is *laid*: Rosy laid out her outfit. The past tense of *to lie* is *lay*: Raj lay down for a nap over an hour ago.

Ans to Q. No 4 : A *complement* is something that completes something else. It's often used to describe things that go well together: Raj's lime green boots were a perfect complement to his jacket. A *compliment* is a nice thing to say: Rosy received many compliments on her purple dress.



6.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

A. Very Short Questions

Q.1 : What are the parts of speech? Explain with examples?

Q.2 : Why 'language' is said to be the copy editior's fundamental tool?

B. Short questions (Answer each question in about 150 words):

Q. 1: What are the common problems that are easeally seen in journalister writting?

Q. 2: How does the invested pyramid structure of news stories differ from the traditional pattern?

C. Long questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words):

Q. 1. Why is necessary to close the appropriote words while writing?