
Language Review for Media Professionals

DQE Workshop/Exam
Self-Study Packet

Departmental Qualification Exam

Department of
Mass Communication and Journalism

Revised 11/15/10

Language Review for Media Professionals

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OVERVIEW

The Departmental Qualification Exam covers basic areas of grammar and word usage: spelling, punctuation, plurals and possessives, agreement, modifiers, confusing word sets, and principal verb parts. Students must pass the DQE before enrolling in any of the department's writing or editing courses — including MCJ 10 and MCJ 102W.

The exam ensures that students going into MCJ writing and editing classes are at generally the same level in understanding and using written language. Otherwise, students have trouble — not only in class but also in their professional work beyond the classroom.

Producing information for the mass media requires great precision in writing. Professionals often don't have time to think about the basics. Therefore, a solid knowledge of language is absolutely necessary for materials sent to hundreds or thousands of people.

HOW TO USE THIS PACKET

Focused observation and applied self-study are often the cornerstones to improvement in any trade. Writing, as a trade, is certainly no different. A strong grounding in fundamentals often separates professionals from amateurs, no matter what area of mass media you aspire to work in.

Each student is ultimately responsible for identifying his or her weakest areas in writing and then planning an active course of self-study — not only while at Fresno State but also throughout your working life. The fact sheets and worksheets in this packet can be excellent places to start.

The MCJ Department also recommends the following textbook for review, available both online and in the Kennel Bookstore:

Brooks, Brian S.; Pinson, James L.; and Wilson, Jean Gaddy (2010). "Working with Words: A Handbook for Media Writers and Editors," 7th edition. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.

The information in the fact sheets and worksheets are adapted from the text, with contributions from Jim Tucker, MCJ professor emeritus; Paul D. Adams, retired MCJ professor; Michael R. McCluskey, former MCJ professor; Jefferson Beavers, former administrator; and, Faith Sidlow, current administrator.

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ADDITIONAL STUDY INFORMATION

Brooks, Brian S.; Pinson, James L.; and Wilson, Jean Gaddy (2010). "Working with Words: A Handbook for Media Writers and Editors," 7th edition. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.

Basic parts of speech

Nouns
 Pronouns
 Verbs
 Adjectives and adverbs
 Conjunctions and prepositions
 Phrases and clauses

Categories of DQE

Percent of DQE

Confused and misused words <i>Misused words, words that sound the same or similar</i>	20
Verbs <i>Especially irregular tenses</i>	10
Modifiers <i>Adjectives, adverbs, comparatives</i>	10
Agreement <i>Mostly subject-verb, but also pronoun-antecedent</i>	15
Plurals and possessives <i>Words in plural forms, showing possession</i>	15
Punctuation <i>Commas, semicolons</i>	20
Spelling <i>Commonly misspelled words</i>	10

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FACT SHEET: CONFUSED AND MISUSED WORDS

Overview

Word usage involves using the right word at the right time — using the correct word in a phrase and making proper distinctions among words that are often confused.

Many people tend to associate word usage with grammar, but that's not quite the case. Word usage is more a matter of vocabulary, as well as the complicated intersection of proper vocabulary and everyday expressions. People sometimes use the wrong word in everyday speech simply because they don't really know the meaning of the word or because they're trying to use a word that seems more "educated" or smart.

Strategies

Unfortunately, there are not any "rules" that can help you remember all the words and phrases that are commonly confused and misused in writing. You have to browse the lists of confused and misused words offered on these worksheets and in the text to become familiar with what's there. The more you look them over and identify which ones you don't know, the more the points will stick. You must note the words you don't know and then concentrate on learning them, perhaps a few per day.

In the text

Confused words and word usage: misused words, words that sound the same or similar.

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WORKSHEET 1

Confused words

Circle the correct answers.

1. Getting the (role, roll) was the (brake, break) that helped her (loose, lose) her bad mood.
2. Putting the (pedal, peddle, petal) from the rose together with the fern gave the centerpiece the (flair, flare) it needed.
3. The (aid, aide) to the department chairman was not (fazed, phased) by the arrival of the truck to (toe, tow) her car.
4. Walk down the (aisle, isle, I'll) to see the display of (navel, naval) equipment, including parts of a submarine.
5. To prove your (medal, mettle, meddle, metal) and bravery, place your left hand on the hot (medal, mettle, meddle, metal) grate.
6. (Fewer, less) students enrolled in the free seminar than the (fliers, flyers) handed out suggested.
7. We figured that the school's (principle, principal) was our (principle, principal) hope.
8. We (implied, inferred) that we would enjoy the ride after looking at the smiling person in the photo.
9. The winning prize was split (between, among) Wendy and Katie.
10. To show school pride, wear (your, you're) red gear on Friday.

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WORKSHEET 2

Confused words (continued)

Circle the correct answers.

1. (Who, whom) is in charge of this restaurant?
2. When Fresno State lost (its, it's, its') game last weekend, some fans could not (accept, except) it.
3. The winner is (whoever, whomever) we choose.
4. Charles is (a, an) heir to the throne.
5. (Its, it's) hard to tell if practicing grammar will have any (affect, effect) on performance.
6. After finishing seven of the eight laps, Gene could run no (farther, further).
7. In order for tuition to (raise, rise) next year, administrators will need to share (there, their, they're) figures with the public.
8. (Who, whom) are you talking about?
9. Purchase a dictionary (that, which) explains usage as well as spelling.
10. Memorial Day often is sunny, (that, which) makes it a good day for a picnic.

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FACT SHEET: VERBS

Overview

Verbs are perhaps the most important part of speech to master in both speaking and writing. A verb expresses action or state of being and it tells what a noun or its substitute is doing or being: *runs, writes, is, seems*. Verbs also have a tense, voice, mood, person, and number.

Verbs are formed through conjugations in different tenses. A tense refers mainly to time, when the action takes place. Most people tend to think of time basically as past, present, and future. However, there are a number of ways — at least six, traditionally — to express those time frames with different nuances in both meaning and form.

Most verbs form their conjugations simply. Other verbs, however, distinguish the past from the present by using an irregular form. The irregular verb forms are the ones most frequently missed by writers.

Strategies

There are not any easy rules that can help you remember all the irregular verb forms that appear in writing. You have to browse the lists of verb examples offered on these worksheets and in the text to become familiar with what's there. The more you look them over and identify which ones you don't know, the more the points will stick. You must note the irregular verbs you don't know and then concentrate on learning them, perhaps a few per day.

In the text

Verbs: especially irregular tenses.

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WORKSHEET 3

Verbs

Circle the correct answers.

1. Interest in the TV reality shows had (gone, went) down since the network (paid, payed) the contestants in advance.
2. The American Idol contestant never had (sang, singed, sung) a Garth Brooks tune before, which (brought, brung) criticism from the judges.
3. He was (born, borne, borned) in a Volkswagen and eventually (became, become) the president of the United States.
4. Be sure to (sit, set) your completed exam on the table so it won't disappear.
5. Two boys (swam, swimmied, swum) across the river yesterday, but a third boy (drown, drowned, drowneded) not far from shore.
6. A passing motorist (dived, dove) in to save him, but the boy (sank, sinked, sunk) quickly.
7. The man quickly (grew, grown, growed) upset when he looked in the bag and saw that the last beer bottle had (burst, bust, bursted, busted).
8. After the phone (rang, ringed, rung), they (passed, past) it around so everyone could (choose, choosed, chosen) whether or not to talk.
9. He had (raise, raised, risen) his hand several times after volunteering to (set, sit, sat) the problem in motion.
10. The gun (lay, lie, laid) in the street yesterday after the police (lay, laid, layed) a round of bullets into the suspect.

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FACT SHEET: MODIFIERS

Overview

Modifiers are words that describe or limit subjects, objects, or verbs. They provide details. They consist of adjectives, adverbs, and interjections.

An adjective modifies a noun or its substitute by telling how many, what kind, which, or whose: *red* balloon, *short* dog, *superior* medicine, *good* job, etc.

An adverb typically modifies a verb, an adjective, or another adverb, generally telling how, when, where, to what degree or extent, or how much: turning *slowly*, *extremely* stupid, *quite rarely* seen, etc.

An interjection expresses an emotional outburst: *Wow!* *Darn!*

Most adjectives and adverbs have three kinds of comparisons: the *positive*, the basic form of an adjective or adverb that implies no comparison; the *comparative*, used in comparisons of two items or groups; and the *superlative*, used in comparisons involving more than two items or groups.

Strategies

When deciding which modifier to use, ask yourself what is being modified. Use the adjective form to modify nouns or pronouns. Use the adverb form to modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs. When deciding on a comparison, ask yourself if the modifier is referring to a single item or if it's a comparison between two items or more than two items.

In the text

Modifiers: adjectives, adverbs, comparatives.

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WORKSHEET 4

Modifiers

Circle the correct answers.

1. Students who get every question correct are (unique, most unique), although perfection should be the (less, least) of their concerns.
2. Gene is the (older, oldest) of the two men in the department, but he's the company's (faster, fastest, most fast, most fastest) at eating jalapenos.
3. Sip your juice (slow, slowly) for the best taste sensation.
4. After drinking the juice, she thought the tandoori chicken tasted (bad, badly).
5. Who do you think is (better, best), LeBron or Kobe?
6. One sock came out of the washer (darker, more dark) than the other.
7. Be sure to eat your lunch (careful, carefully).
8. The mother looked (proud, proudly) after her daughter Jennifer finally graduated from Fresno State, since she was the (less, least) likely of the twins to succeed.
9. The Olympian could run (real, really) fast after years of training.
10. Manuel's brother felt (sad, sadly) when he couldn't afford the (best, better) gift on the shelves.

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FACT SHEET: AGREEMENT

Overview

Each subject and its verb must agree in *number* (singular or plural). Each phrase or clause in a series must be stated in *parallel*, or similar, wording.

A pronoun must agree with its antecedent — the noun or pronoun to which it refers — in *person* (first, second, or third), *number* (singular or plural), and *gender* (masculine, feminine, or neutral).

Strategies

Agreement problems are some of the most common ways that sentences go wrong. A singular subject needs a singular verb, and a plural subject needs a plural verb. This sounds easy but some situations can be tricky. The trick is often to isolate the subject. In most cases, isolating the subject and using it as your reference point will give you the clue to what the verb or the pronoun should be.

In the text

Agreement: mostly subject-verb, but also pronoun-antecedent.

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WORKSHEET 5

Agreement

Circle the correct answers.

1. Each of them (is, are) going to flunk.
2. Only one of the five students (has, have) agreed.
3. PG&E officials said either squirrels or a stray cat (is, are) responsible for the power outage.
4. None of us (was, were) invited, even though each person (has, have) the money.
5. A rowdy crowd of journalism graduates (has, have) gathered.
6. The group filed (its, it's, their) complaint in court.
7. Several of the students (plan, plans) to return next year.
8. Pedestrians, including those on the sidewalk, (expect, expects) to be safe from drivers.
9. Among college football coaches, Pat Hill (is, are) near the top.
10. Both milk and strawberries (is, are) tasty with cereal.
11. The media (was, were) there to cover the speech.
12. Mary or her sisters (is, are) going to keep the appointment.
13. The number of convictions (is, are) increasing.
14. Statistics (is, are) a required course for business majors.

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FACT SHEET: PLURALS AND POSSESSIVES

By Jim Tucker, MCJ professor emeritus

Overview

Nouns in English change their spellings for singular vs. plural and for possessive or not. Here's a chart that lists the forms, with notes.

<u>SINGULAR</u>	<u>PLURAL</u>	<u>SINGULAR. POSS.</u>	<u>PLURAL. POSS.</u>
Mr. Smith	the Smiths	*Mr. Smith's car	the Smiths' car
Mrs. Jones	the Joneses	**Mrs. Jones' car	the Joneses' car
Mr. Lopez	the Lopezes	***Mr. Lopez's car	the Lopezes' car
Mrs. Fox	the Foxes	***Mrs. Fox's car	the Foxes' car
Mr. Bush	the Bushes	*Mr. Bush's car	the Bushes' car
Mrs. Church	the Churches	*Mrs. Church's car	the Churches' car
Mr. Alioto	the Aliotos	*Mr. Alioto's car	the Aliotos' car
Mrs. Lance	the Lances	*Mrs. Lance's car	the Lances' car
man	two men	*one man's car	the men's cars
woman	two women	*one woman's car	the women's cars
child	two children	*one child's toy	the children's toys

*For names and words not ending in s, a singular possessive is formed by adding 's.

**For names ending in s, most style guides recommend adding only the apostrophe to form the singular possessive; however, adding 's (e.g., Jones's) is accepted, and even preferred, by some authorities.

***For names ending in z or x, the most common preference, including that of the Associated Press Stylebook, is to add 's for singular possessive (e.g., Mr. Lopez's car and Mr. Fox's car) but some sources accept adding only the apostrophe (e.g., Mr. Lopez' car and Mr. Fox' car).

Additional Notes: (1) Note the consistency in the formation of plurals. Usually, just add an s, but if the name or word ends in s, z, x, sh, or soft ch, add es. Note also that some plurals, (e.g., man, woman and child) form new words and are called irregular plurals. (2) Note the consistency in the formation of plural possessives. Usually, just add the apostrophe to the plural form. Exception: Add 's if the plural form does not end in s.

In the text

Plurals and possessives: words in plural forms, showing possession.

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WORKSHEET 6

Plurals and possessives

Circle the correct answers.

1. My recording of the concert was ruined when a woman asked, “Is this bag (your’s?, yours?)”
2. When the check arrived, my cheapskate friend asked, “(who’s, whose) going to pay?”
3. There were enough (Martinez, Martinezs, Martinez’, Martinezes) there to form a full team.
4. It rained so hard that many of (Los Angeles, Los Angeles’) neighborhoods were flooded.
5. My boss took away one (day, day’s, days, days’) vacation.
6. The starving cat ate two (week, week’s, weeks, weeks’) worth of kibble in just a few hours.
7. Who are you going to believe, the (renters, renter’s, renters’) or the landlord?
8. My neighborhood must have our (towns, town’s, towns’) oldest sidewalks.
9. During his shift Saturday, the security guard found seven (shoppers, shopper’s, shoppers’) children lost in the store.
10. When I think about Tom Cruise, I’d have to say “Mission: Impossible” was one of (Cruise, Cruise’s, Cruises’) better movies.
11. The (Davis’, Davises, Davises’) family trip was postponed when their two (childs’, childrens, children’s) medications were forgotten at home.
12. I’m sick of your many (joke’s, jokes) about all of (Katies, Katie’s, Katies’) problems.
13. The company sold (its, it’s, its’) fleet of gas-guzzling (SUVs, SUV’s, SUVs’).

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FACT SHEET: SPELLING

Overview

Professional writers and media practitioners are expected to be able to spell words correctly. Relying heavily on the spell-checker on your computer only makes spelling even more important because people assume that you now have no excuse for mistakes.

But even though spell-checkers can be great for catching most typos, they have their flaws. If you rely too heavily on a spell-checker, you will miss important mistakes in word usage, style, and consistency. It is therefore crucial for writers to perfect their spelling skills.

Strategies

Unfortunately, there are not many “rules” that can help you remember all the words that are commonly misspelled. You have to browse the lists of frequently misspelled words offered on these worksheets and in the text to become familiar with what’s there. The more you look them over and identify which ones you don’t know, the more the points will stick. You must note the words you don’t know and then concentrate on learning them, perhaps a few per day. Flash cards work great for memorizing spelling words.

In the text

Spelling: commonly misspelled words.

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WORKSHEET 7

Spelling

In the space after each of the following words, write "OK" if the word is correct. Or, write the correct spelling if the word is incorrect.

1. accommodate	19. lieutenant
2. anonymous	20. mideval
3. apparent	21. miniscule
4. calender	22. mischievious
5. cemetary	23. momento
6. compatible	24. occassion
7. concensus	25. occured
8. definatly	26. omitted
9. efficient	27. prejudice
10. embarass	28. reccommend
11. exaggerate	29. restaurant
12. existence	30. scissors
13. fulfill	31. seperate
14. guage	32. sieze
15. harass	33. superintendant
16. inocuous	34. vaccum
17. homicide	35. weird
18. judgment	36. yield

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FACT SHEET: PUNCTUATION

Overview

Punctuation is *not* just determined by “voice pauses.” It has its grounding in grammar. Even though punctuation rules are generally considered matters of style, they can most easily be learned and consistently applied if you learn the most common grammatical mistakes related to commas and semicolons.

Strategies

There are three important points to remember about punctuation that come up most frequently:

1. Interruptions in thought must be set off by commas. One of the most common writing oversights in punctuation is that of forgetting to close the interruption.
2. Most introductory expressions and most afterthoughts should be set off by commas.
3. Semicolons have two main uses: to unscramble items of a series that contain internal commas and to separate *complete sentences* that are very closely related.

In the text

Punctuation: commas and semicolons.

Language Review for Media Professionals

WORKSHEET 8

Punctuation

If the punctuation is correct, write “OK” in the space to the left. If the sentence is not correct, then make the necessary changes so that it is correct.

	1. Witnesses said the gunman, carjacked a car, and authorities were searching for a green Honda Accord.
	2. Another deputy was later killed outside the courthouse.
	3. The people in the courtroom were there for routine civil matters; Nichols was being brought there for the planned resumption of his trial.
	4. Bob Mars was a sixth-grade teacher at the middle school and assistant football coach, at Kiona-Benton High School.
	5. As the Central Valley awaits the worst drought since 1977 precipitation is at or near record lows.
	6. Police say they are still trying to determine why the man, Kurt Struebing, 39, drove off the bridge.
	7. Even Kevin Garnett, the superstar forward for the Celtics could not help look forward to the championship series.
	8. Honestly I don't know how to learn grammar.
	9. The police chief said the investigation was ongoing.

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WORKSHEET 9

Punctuation (continued)

	1. The district has struggled financially for at least two years, overestimating enrollment and overspending on personnel has led to questionable hires.
	2. It's often that way with the Rogue Fresno's nonjuried festival of independent performance and art that continues through Saturday.
	3. A Dutch cafeteria owner, used piping hot french fries, to fend off a gun-wielding would-be robber.
	4. Rodriguez, however, could not turn the double play.
	5. Hernando and Homero met in Madison, Wis., at Vilas Hall.
	6. May 18, 2005 is the 26th anniversary of the Mount St. Helens eruption.
	7. The House approved the measure, and so did the Senate.
	8. Swimming, is good exercise.
	9. Because it was so cloudy it was hard to believe it was noon.
	10. Brandy, could you come here?

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ANSWER KEYS

Worksheet 1

1. role, break, lose. 2. petal, flair. 3. aide, faded, tow. 4. aisle, naval. 5. mettle, metal.
6. fewer, fliers. 7. principal, principle. 8. inferred. 9. between. 10. your.

Worksheet 2

1. who. 2. its, accept. 3. whomever. 4. an. 5. it's, effect. 6. farther. 7. rise, their.
8. whom. 9. that. 10. which.

Worksheet 3

1. gone, paid. 2. sung, brought. 3. born, became. 4. set. 5. swam, drowned. 6. dived, sank.
7. grew, burst. 8. rang, passed, choose. 9. raised, set. 10. lay, laid.

Worksheet 4

1. unique, least. 2. older, fastest. 3. slowly. 4. bad. 5. better. 6. darker. 7. carefully.
8. proud, less. 9. really. 10. sad, best.

changed #8 to less likely because 2 not 3 or more

Worksheet 5

1. is. 2. has. 3. is. 4. was, has. 5. has. 6. its. 7. plan. 8. expect. 9. is. 10. are. 11. were.
12. are. 13. is. 14. is.

Worksheet 6

1. yours. 2. who's. 3. Martinezes. 4. Los Angeles'. 5. day's. 6. weeks'. 7. renters. 8. town's.
9. shoppers'. 10. Cruise's. 11. Davises', children's. 12. jokes, Katie's. 13. its, SUVs.

Worksheet 7

1. OK. 2. OK. 3. OK. 4. calendar. 5. cemetery. 6. OK. 7. consensus. 8. definitely. 9. OK.
10. embarrass. 11. OK. 12. OK. 13. OK. 14. gauge. 15. OK. 16. innocuous. 17. homicide.
18. OK. 19. lieutenant. 20. medieval. 21. OK. 22. mischievous. 23. memento. 24. occasion.
25. occurred. 26. OK. 27. OK. 28. recommend. 29. OK. 30. OK. 31. separate. 32. seize.
33. superintendent. 34. vacuum. 35. OK. 36. OK.

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ANSWER KEYS

Worksheet 8

2, 3, 6 and 9 are OK.

1. Witnesses said the gunman carjacked the car; authorities were searching for a green Honda Accord.
4. Bob Mars was a sixth-grade teacher at the middle school and assistant football coach at Kiona-Benton High School.
5. As the Central Valley awaits the worst drought since 1977, precipitation is at or near record lows.
7. Even Kevin Garnett, the superstar forward for the Celtics, could not help look forward to the championship series.
8. Honestly, I don't know how to learn grammar.

Worksheet 9

4, 5 and 10 are OK.

1. The district has struggled financially for at least two years; overestimating enrollment and overspending on personnel has led to questionable hires.
2. It's often that way with the Rogue, Fresno's nonjuried festival of independent performance and art that continues through Saturday.
3. A Dutch cafeteria owner used piping hot french fries to fend off a gun-wielding, would-be robber.
6. May 18, 2005, is the 26th anniversary of the Mount St. Helens eruption.
7. The House approved the measure and so did the Senate.
8. Swimming is a good exercise.
9. Because it was so cloudy, it was hard to believe it was noon.