WRITING TIP # 11

Mixed Constructions

Mixed constructions are parts of a sentence that do not fit together sensibly. They are commonly classified as mismatches of grammar or logic.

Rule 1 UNTANGLE GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURE.

Do not begin a sentence with one grammatical plan and switch plans within that same sentence.

UNCLEAR: For most drivers who have a blood alcohol content of .05 percent double their risk of causing an accident is doubled. (“For most drivers” (prepositional phrase) cannot be the subject of the verb “double.”)

REVISED: For most drivers who have a blood alcohol content of .05 percent, the risk of causing an accident is doubled.

Rule 2 STRAIGHTEN OUT THE LOGICAL CONNECTIONS.

A sentence’s subject and verb should make sense grammatically and logically.

ILLOGICAL: The court decided Tiffany’s welfare would not be safe living with her mother. (“Tiffany’s welfare” is not living with her mother; “Tiffany” is living with her mother.)

LOGICAL: The court decided Tiffany would not be safe living with her mother.

ILLOGICAL: The corporate lawyer, a very lucrative field requires intelligence, patience, and attention to legal detail. (A “lawyer” is not a “field”; the “law” is a “field.”)

LOGICAL: Corporate law, a very lucrative field, requires intelligence, patience, and attention to legal detail.

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1 These Writing Tips are adapted in part from Laurel Currie Oates and Ann Enquist, The Legal Writing Handbook (5th ed. 2010); Diana Hacker, The Bedford Handbook (8th ed. 2009); and Gertrude Block, Effective Legal Writing (5th ed. 1999).
RULE 3  **AVOID “REASON . . . IS BECAUSE” CONSTRUCTIONS.**

Once you say “the reason,” adding “is because” mixes up two different parts of speech that say the same thing, therefore creating a grammatically mixed and redundant sentence. So say either “the reason . . . is that . . .” or eliminate “the reason” and use “because.”

**MIXED:** The reason I missed the exam is because my motorcycle broke down.

**BETTER:** The reason I missed the exam is that my motorcycle broke down.

**BEST:** I missed the exam because my motorcycle broke down.

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