

Lina Betts

Instructor Johnson

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Analyzing Grammar, a Task that is Sure to Turn You into a Grinch

My freshman year of college was spent at Colorado State University in Fort Collins. I reluctantly took my first college English class with dread as it had been my least favorite course in high school. I came out of the class changing my major due to the realization that I held not only a passion for writing but a talent for it. When my professor pulled me aside after reading the paper that I am analyzing for this class, she stated her opinion that I should become a writer of some sort and rethink what I wanted to do with my future.

The context of this paper included a choice of topics that I could expand upon. All topics were controversial issues facing future employees. I chose to elaborate upon future employers basing new hires off of their Facebook pages and asking for login information to see what their possible future employee was throwing out onto the web. Half of the semester led up to the final paper with many interviews and audience analyses preceding it. As a current rodeo queen, passionate about horses and the meaning behind holding the crown, I couldn't think of anything better to write about, especially because my Facebook page had been reviewed before obtaining the title. The professor's only boundaries were using MLA formatting, following the topics, and using 3rd person (I was able to mention my tie to the topic if applicable as long as I stuck to 3rd person). This allowed me to express a great deal of creativity in my writing. I was required to use interviews and scholarly articles for citations; this proved to be a challenging task because the lifestyle of rodeo queens and queening in general is not widely known. Also, due to the lack of wisdom on this particular topic, I wanted to use a great deal of

imagery to help the audience get engaged. I did this through using a great deal of adjective clauses although I didn't realize it at the time. I even found adjective clauses upon adjective clauses.

Upon reviewing this paper after learning everything I have in advanced grammar, the first thing I was able to point out was my extenuated use of adjective clauses. Most of these clauses start with the word 'that' – meaning they are almost all restrictive clauses that are essential for the meaning of the sentence – and exist at the end of my sentences. In the second, third, and fourth paragraphs of my paper, I was able to pick out ten adjective clauses. HOLY COW! The clauses beginning with the word 'that' are the following: "The young lady proudly wears curled queen hair, slim fitting jeans, a classy western shirt, and boots **that exploit her outer country beauty.**"; "She wears an excitable smile **that is calmed by the confidence she holds within the partnership with her horse *that will carry her to the top of the competition.***"; "Her personality is bubbly with a sense of humor and kindheartedness **that warms the room.** "; "Beauty Pageants vary from state titles, rodeo queens, to local organizations **that need an ambassador.**"; "I chose to follow in the footsteps of the incredible women carrying rodeo queen titles **that have come into my life** because..."; "A large percentage of not only US citizens but people all around the world will have the ability to view posts and pictures **that an individual "posts".**"; and "...a very high standard is held towards the actions of the queen within the public eye, thus bringing me to the conclusion **that pageants should be allowed to scrutinize social media pages.**" The other sentence that contains both of the remaining adjective clause examples is the following: "Walking away with a sense of pride as the goal **she has strived for her entire life** has been rightfully earned, a crown is placed upon her cowgirl hat and a belt buckle **which bears her name and title** is handed over in a snug box." Eight out of my ten adjective clauses begin with the word "that". This is something I would have never noticed before advanced grammar. There are so many adjective clauses and single word adjectives in this section, yet the paper lacks all other adjectival structures. The rhetorical structure of my paper as well as the point it is trying to get across would not be strong without these adjective

clauses. As stated above, queening is not a well-known activity; therefore, strong details are needed to paint a picture for the audience. These clauses are creating that exact imagery. One mistake I kept making throughout the paper is present in the last example of my adjective clauses. Before advanced grammar, I was not aware of the difference between using 'that' as a restrictive relative pronouns and 'which' as a nonrestrictive relative pronoun; ergo, commas are not present before 'which'. These are all deemed as adjective clauses because they contain a subject and a verb, are introduced by a relative pronoun, and modifies the noun it follows. They also answer the questions which one? how many? and what kind?.

This section of the paper also includes a handful of adverbial structures. Unlike the adjectival structures, a wider variety of adverbials are present. The variety is composed of adverb clauses (four); simple, one-word adverbs; and adverb phrases (two). The four adverb clauses are the following: "Her inner beauty shines **when the interview and question portions of the pageant begin.**"; "**No matter what the pageant may be**, morals and obligations of a beauty queen remain consistent."; "Due to all of this hard work and dedication, great devastation would come **if her crown were to be stripped away.**"; and "**When an inappropriate picture, video or comment is made on a social media website**, it becomes an endless struggle to remove the evidence." These are also regarded as clauses because they contain a subject and a verb; however, they modify verbs, adjective and other adverbs. Phrases and simple word adverbs also modify these parts of speech, yet do not contain a subject and verb. Examples of the adverb phrases are the following: "**Due to all of this hard work and dedication**, great devastation would come..." and "**With the growing popularity of social media pages**, many cases of this have arisen." Even though my paper contained a decent amount of adverbial structures, they were harder for me to pick apart than the adjective clauses. This is the case because adverbials have always been the hardest concept for me to grasp in this class. I was able to confirm most of these with classmates when peer reviewing. I continuously had to ask myself the adverb questions, how? in what manner? under what

condition? when? and where?, as well as move the phrases and clauses around in sentences to see if it was possible for them to make sense elsewhere (in most cases that indicates it is an adverbial). The adverbials I used followed a main pattern of the question they answered: under what condition. I am fairly surprised that I punctuated each of the above correctly. If the adverb clause started the sentence, I added a comma before the main independent clause; I also did not add an 'illegal' comma before the adverb clause if it was at the end of the sentence. When we first started talking about adverb clauses and that many writers put them at the end of the paper, I had thought to myself that I put them in front of the independent clause all of the time. After reviewing this paper, I proved myself wrong. These adverbial structures help strengthen the paper's purpose in that they provide stronger verbs and descriptions.

Another main structure found in this section was a variety of nominals. These were the least common grammatical structure. Each function as a noun in the sentence and are a person, place, or thing. Examples of noun clauses are the following: "I watched **as they made impacts on many other women and men alike.**" and "When an inappropriate picture, video or comment is made on a social media website, it becomes **an endless struggle to remove the evidence.**" These are conceived as clauses because they contain subjects and verbs. Although there are only two noun clauses, the most common nominal structures used in my paper are infinitives and gerunds. Before advanced grammar, I had no idea what these were either. For this reason, I am surprised that I used such a plethora. Examples of infinitives include the following: "I chose **to follow** in the footsteps..."; "Competing for the title that I now carry as well as continuing **to strive** for other..."; and "...if her crown were **to be** stripped away." I found these in other various grammatical structures such as adverb clauses and adjective clauses. When browsing my paper for nominal structures, I wanted to pinpoint any "ing" verb as a gerund. One sentence in particular was extremely difficult to decipher what roles the different phrases and clauses were serving. When I came across this problem, I slowed myself down and went back to the

basics (pulling out prepositions and finding my subject and verb) before continuing on to the more difficult elements. The sentence that really threw me for a loop is the following: “**Competing** for the title that I now carry as well as continuing to strive for other local or state titles prove challenging tasks.” ‘Competing’ and ‘continuing’ had me second guessing myself. After pulling out all pieces of the sentence, I came to the conclusion that the only gerund in this sentence was competing (highlighted above). This happened with a few structures that were present participial phrases as well. Noun clauses and phrases were also difficult to pinpoint. Although infinitives were easy to see in my paper, for every other structure, I had to replace it with “something” or “someone”.

Despite the abundance of adjectival, adverbial, and nominal structures, free modifiers and nonrestrictive elements are rare in this paper. I speculated the paper would be full of appositives; however, I only found a minute handful. Two examples of appositives found in my writing are the following: “Amy Jo Rogers, **a former Miss Rodeo Colorado**, preaches that...” and “A role model is a leader, **one who is able to stand up for what she believes and not give into the subjects and actions she disagrees with.**” The second example embodies a sentence appositive as it illuminates the entire sentence. It was even punctuated correctly! An appositive that I did not set off by commas turned up however. That sentence is the following: “The 2008 El Paso County Fair Queen as well as the 2012 Gift of the West **Caitlin Kern** states...” As you can see, there should be commas around ‘Caitlin Kern’.” I wasn’t aware that one word appositives needed to be set off by commas before this class, yet I now see that they are nonrestrictive elements and are not essential to the sentence. On top of the few appositives I located, I incorporated some present participial phrases into the paper when I wrote it. Some examples are the following: “**Growing up around various rodeo queens**, I have seen....”; “**Being a queen** isn’t any ordinary walk in the park either.”; and “...the actions of the queen within the public eye, thus **bringing me to the conclusion** that pageants should be allowed to scrutinize social media.” The above appositives

and present participial phrases are the only free modifiers I depicted throughout the entire paper.

MORE ABOUT HOW THEY FIT INTO THE PAPER RHETORICALLY

Along with the lack of free modifiers, there is an absence of other stylistic/transformational elements within the boundaries of this paper. One interesting component that I was able to construe is the variation of word order. The one sentence I was able to find includes the following example: “These qualities are ones that a queen should be made of and display **even before thinking about entering** into a competition...”. There are many different combinations of these words that could be exercised for contrasting emphasis. The example would have an altered meaning if we were to swap the places of even and before so that it would read “display **before even thinking** about...”. ‘Even’ exemplifies ‘before’ in the first sentence (the original) but highlights ‘thinking’ in the second. This is the only stylistic element correctly used in my paper. Now that I am aware of such devices, I will begin using them in future papers.

If I would have been aware of danglers, the difference between restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses, how to punctuate one word appositives, comma splices, and run-on, my paper would not have contained the abundance of mistakes that it does. As pointed out in above examples, some of my adjective clauses lacked commas before ‘which’ and I was unaware of setting off one word appositives with commas; however, those were not my most repetitive and immense faults. After learning the complete definition of a run-on, that I cannot separate two independent clauses with a comma, and that the proper ways of separating them are with a semicolons; a comma followed by one of the FANBOYS; and a conjunctive adverb, properly separated by a semicolon and a comma, I had the ability to point out quite a few errors. A few examples of run-ons are the following: “I am currently the 2012 El Paso County Fair Queen (a rodeo **queen**) **and** I wish to live up to the...”; “Social media is living evidence of **this and** if a judge has access to this evidence, so does the rest of the world.”; “Promoting an organization is an enormous **undertaking and** one must have top-notch qualifications...”; and “A smile must always be

worn and one must be tough enough to...". These are only three examples out of five. The highlighted areas above show the words between where a comma should be placed. In addition to run-on sentences, dangling participles were the other biggest error that I found. This paper contains a few dangling verbals that are not modifying the subject. An example is the following: **"Walking away with a sense of pride as the goal she has strived for her entire life has been rightfully earned, a crown is placed upon her cowgirl hat..."**. Walking away should be modifying cowgirl, not a crown; a crown cannot physically walk. This is one of about four dangling modifiers. Other than a few mistakes that extra proofreading would have caught (wrong words, misspellings, etc.), these were my biggest grammatical errors. After taking this advanced grammar class, I know for a fact that I will watch out for these mistakes, especially when editing my own paper, and correct them. I believe these errors were made so much just because my knowledge of grammar and the English language had not evolved enough through classes to know these specific rules.

In addition to the grammatical structures, elements, and errors, I am now able to decipher between simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences after taking this class. The sentence types are now forever drilled into my mind. Within the three paragraphs that I picked to analyze my use of these sentence types, I found the following percentages: 9.5% were simple, 4.8% were compound, 76.2% were complex, and 9.5% were compound-complex. Two of the run-ons I found were within a complex and a compound sentence as I did not separate the two independent clauses legally. An example of the simple sentences is the following: "There is no excuse for misconduct." The one example of the compound sentence is the following: "Promoting an organization is an enormous undertaking, and one must have top-notch qualifications to pledge herself to as well as honorable statures to uphold." An example of the complex sentences is the following: "The title of a queen never goes away whether a crown is upon one's head or not." An example of the compound-complex sentences is the following: "A smile must always be worn, and one must be tough enough to not let little

things get under her skin.” After analyzing the types I use, I have realized that I tend to prefer sentences with one or more independent clauses and one dependent clause (complex).

Piggy backing off of the sentence types I used, I must admit that I was never aware of how a paper or book’s reading level was measured. This is yet another thing I learned in this class, the Gunning Fog. This calculation surprised me with the conclusion that my paper is at a 13.62 reading level (Gunning Fog Index). That is incredibly higher than I imagined it to be. This means that my t-units contained a lot of words and that many of them were difficult. I expected to be writing around an eighth grade level rather than a college level.

Going back through a paper written four years ago proved interesting and a little frustrating. I never realized the “type” of writer that I was and how I used specific elements to enunciate my topic. After writing this paper, I realize how much I truly have learned in this advanced grammar class. I am excited to be able to proceed in writing more intelligent papers and possibly novels in the future. I will know how to eliminate dangling participles, how to punctuate appositives, how to legally connect two independent clauses, how to classify clauses in my sentence and realize that they are clauses vs. phrases, where I can actually put clauses in a sentence, and how to write an incredible long t-unit.

Works Cited

"Gunning Fog Index." *Gunning Fog Index*. N.p., n.d. Web. 03 Dec. 2014.