

The answers:

1. **She is older than he.** What you are really saying is "She is older than he *is*." Because *he* is the subject of the clause *he is* it has to be in the subjective case. *Him* is objective. You wouldn't say, "*She is older than him is*."

2. **Researchers have detected the presence of a nonlethal bacterium at the Army base.** Bacterium is singular; bacteria is plural. That's Latin for you. Chances are the researchers found more than a single bacterium, but to take away the indefinite article and say, "*Researchers have detected the presence of nonlethal bacteria*" creates confusion, because it could mean more than one strain of bacteria.

3. **Aspirin has no effect on viruses.** Remember that most of the time *effect* will be a noun and *affect* will be a verb.

4. **No data have been lost.** Another pesky Latin word. *Data* is plural. *Datum* is singular. Increasingly, though, *data* is being used with singular verbs.

5. **The new building will be located at this site.** *Sight* is the ability to see. *Cite* is to call to someone's attention or to recognize formally. *Site* is a location.

6. **Her questions were intended to elicit useful answers.** *Illicit* means unlawful or not permitted. *Elicit* means to bring forth.

7. **Had someone else said it, everyone would have laughed and gone on with life.** You're really saying, "Everyone would have laughed and *would have gone on ...*," so *gone* is correct here.

8. **We cannot succumb to threats; however, we can let every voice be heard.** In the first case, independent clauses have to be separated by a comma and a conjunction or by a semicolon; a comma alone won't do it. In the second case, you need a comma to avoid confusion. Without the comma, we're saying we can let every voice be heard in whatever way possible.

9. **The editor had trouble deciding which course of action to take.** *Course* refers to an option or path; *coarse* is a texture.

10. **Mary chose to forgo the offer of legal counsel.** Let's take these two backwards: First, *counsel* is advice; *council* is a body that meets to deliberate. Second, if you chose *forgo*, good for you. Practically nobody recognizes that *forego* means to go before; *forgo* means to do without. Note: Some dictionaries now allow *forego* as an alternative spelling of *forgo*, but that just confuses things, doesn't it?

11. **The water was treated with chlorine and smelled bad.** A lot of people choose "badly" because *bad* is often used ungrammatically ("We played bad," Coach Hockenmeister said.) But in this case we need *bad*, the adjective, because it modifies *water*, the noun, not *smelled*, the

verb. If we say the water smelled *badly*, we mean that the water has a poorly developed sense of smell — impossible.

12. **The organizers were disappointed at the small number of supporters.** Use *number* with things you can count (like people); use *amount* with things you measure (like rain). Generally, leave the word “quantity” out of journalistic writing. It’s stilted.

13. **The school’s president announced his imminent retirement.** *Eminent* means distinguished; *imminent* means about to happen.

14. **When the train wrecked, rescuers sprang into action.** *Sprang* is the simple past tense of “spring”; *sprung* is the past participle: *had sprung*.

15. **The media have not served their audiences well.** You need subject-verb agreement: *Media* is a plural noun; it should be a hanging offense to misuse it. Because it is plural, it must take both the plural verb *have* and the plural pronoun *their*.

16. **Mother went camping with Ruth, Maynard and me.** This one should not be a problem when you think that we’re really saying “. . . *with Ruth, with Maynard, and with me.*”

17. **Everyone who has an interest in cultivating roses in his garden will be fascinated.** You can also say “. . . *cultivating roses in her garden . . .*”, but then you run into the sexist assumption that all gardeners are women. Because use of the male pronoun as the generic singular sounds so hidebound and archaic, and the use of *his or her* is so clumsy, we are tempted to use the plural pronoun *their* as a substitute. But *everyone* is singular; it can’t take the plural pronoun *their*. Try this as a solution: “*Everyone who has an interest in cultivating roses will be fascinated,*” or “*People who have an interest in cultivating roses will be fascinated.*” (And remember, when you’re tied in knots grammatically, the best solution could be just to cut the string. Rewrite the sentence.)

18. **She is the one who’s coming to dinner.** *Whose* is a possessive pronoun; *who’s* is a contraction of *who is*.

19. **I usually lie on the sofa to watch baseball.** *Lay* is a transitive verb; it takes a direct object: “*Watch the chicken lay an egg.*” *Lie* is intransitive; it takes no object: “*I like to lie in bed every morning.*” Where it gets confusing is that *lay* is also the simple past tense of *lie*: “*I lay down for an hour before dinner.*” Hey, if it was easy anybody could do it.

20. **His message appeals to people who see the world in simple terms.** *Who* is a personal pronoun; personal implies that it has to do with people. *That* is an impersonal pronoun; it refers to things: The train *that* derailed.

21. **She said she had lain there for an hour before anyone found her.** More fun with the *lie/lay* business. You already know that you need the intransitive verb *lie*. But in this case

you need not the present tense *lie* nor the simple past tense *lay*; the presence of the verb *had* means you need the past participle: *lain*.

22. **The Southern Military Academy library has far fewer books than the Harvard library.** As with *number* and *amount*, you use *fewer* with things you count, *less* with things you measure.

23. **That lawyer gave the newspaper wise counsel in its libel suit.** One at a time: As you saw in question 10, *counsel* refers to advice. Next, *libel* is a legal term meaning to harm someone's reputation by a false statement; *liable* means likely or inclined to. And a newspaper is a singular noun, not collective, so it takes the singular pronoun *its*. (Note: remember that *its* is the possessive form of *it*. We don't use an apostrophe here because *it's* is a contraction of *it is*.)

24. **Food is in short supply because there are so many people.** *People* is a plural noun, so you need the plural subject and verb *there are*. *They're* is a contraction of *they are*.

25. **Neither Jim nor Martha likes crab cakes.** The *neither/nor* construction tells us we are considering Jim and Martha as separate subjects. So each singular subject must take the singular verb *likes*.

26. **Meagan LeBlanc jumped from the cliff to save the child.** *Off of* is redundant; *off* is acceptable, but it could imply that Meagan was already off the cliff when she jumped. *From* clears up the ambiguity.

27. **A leader can do many things to try to buffer negative consequences.** The intended meaning is that the leader will make *an attempt to buffer*. To say a leader can try and buffer gives the sentence compound verbs: The leader *will try* and *will buffer*.

28. **Was the family's privacy invaded?** Because privacy is a right belonging to the family, *family* must take the possessive, indicated by the apostrophe. Had we intended to refer to the privacy of more than one family, we would need *families' privacy*.

29. **He was charged with drunk driving after swerving and hitting a car coming toward him.** The preposition *toward* is singular. Interestingly, in British English it ordinarily is plural: *towards*.

30. **Hunter was living with his girlfriend, Topping, who was also injured in the accident.** When used as internal punctuation, commas come in pairs, one before, one after. The use of commas here says Hunter has one girlfriend, and her name is Topping. Without the commas we would be saying that he had more than one girlfriend, so the name Topping would become essential to the meaning of the sentence and would not be set off by commas.

31. **He had to choose among four alternatives.** Use *between* when you have two options; use *among* when there are three or more.

32. **The death of the Queen Mother affected her deeply.** Again, in most cases *affect* is a verb and *effect* is a noun.

33. **Then they found the other girls, who were in their beds sleeping.** Again, using the comma means that we are talking about only one set of other girls, and that they happened to be in their beds. Without the comma, the sentence means that there were two batches of girls in bed. For the second choice we want the plural possessive pronoun *their*.

34. **His arraignment has been set for tomorrow morning, at which time he could lose his freedom.** Set off the second clause with a comma because it is incidental to the primary idea in the sentence, the time of his arraignment. For some reason, *loose* and *lose* are often confused. They shouldn't be; one means not tight; the other means to forfeit or misplace.

35. **He was charged with selling drugs to a minor.** Let's take the strictly grammatical problem first. A *minor* is someone younger than legal age; a *miner* is someone who removes valuable elements from the earth. We use *charged with* instead of *arrested for* because of the implications involved. *Arrested for* implies that he committed the crime, so he was arrested. But in our legal system we value the presumption of innocence; a defendant is presumed not guilty until guilt is admitted or proven in court. We should stick with what we know to be true: that he was *charged with* a crime, not that he committed it.

36. **This needs to be resolved by you, me and him.** All three pronouns are objects of the preposition *by*, so all three must be in the objective case. We wouldn't say *by you, by I and by he*.

37. **Was it she whom he was referring to?** If you turn the structure of the two clauses in this sentence around, it becomes clear that the first pronoun needs to be subjective, the second objective: *It was she* (she is identical to and renames the subject *it*) and *he was referring to whom* (*whom* is the object of the preposition *to*). By the way, it is usually okay to end a sentence with a preposition.

38. **Just as I lay down, the chicken started clucking because she had laid an egg.** Okay, one more time and we can lay this one to rest. *Lay* in this usage is the simple past tense of the intransitive verb *lie*, and *laid* is the past perfect of the transitive verb *lay*.

39. **When the hotel dining room caught fire, the guests were evacuated to the parking lot without injury.** We risk a misplaced modifier here, the prepositional phrase *without injury*. If we put it before *to the parking lot* it means the parking lot wasn't injured. That's probably not what we mean.

40. **A dromedary is different from a Bactrian camel.** Different almost always takes the preposition *from* rather than *than*.

41. **It's pretty clear that the organization wants nothing to stand in its way.** In the first instance, *it's* is the appropriate contraction for *it is*. In the second, *organization* is not a collective noun, so it takes a singular pronoun. Remember that the possessive form of *it* is *its*.

42. **She said she would go if it doesn't rain.** The issue here is called sequence of tenses, and it's something practically everybody screws up. When the second verb depends on the main verb (she *would go* is what she *said*), it must obey the tense of the principal verb. But because *if it doesn't rain* does not depend on *she said* (it will rain or not despite what she said), it does not have to follow the tense of the main verb.

43. **The first time I did my laundry in college I shrank all my jeans.** I don't care how many movies you have seen that talk about what somebody shrunk. Getting the tense wrong for this verb is goofy. *Shrank* is the simple past tense of *shrink*.

44. **She said after the accident that she was feeling all right.** There is no such word as *alright*.

45. **According to the police report, the prisoner sneaked out of the van when the driver stopped for gas.** There is no such word as *snuck*.

46. **He stops for an ice cream cone on the way home almost every day.** Practically everyone is abusing this one lately. In this usage, it must be two words because *every* is an adjective modifying the noun *day*. *Everyday* is one word only when it acts as a single adjective: Thunderstorms became an *everyday* occurrence that July. In that case, *everyday* is one adjective modifying the noun *occurrence*.

47. **The stalker dived into the bushes when he saw a campus security guard.** *Dove* is not the accepted past tense of *dive*.

48. **At one minute past midnight, the police spokesman said, the convicted murderer was executed.** Because the execution happened at one minute pastmidnight, we need to set the attribution off by commas. If we had meant that the police spokesman made the statement at one minute pastmidnight, we would not need commas.

49. **The senator said he hoped a budget would be passed soon.** Everybody seems to be using *hopefully* to mean *I hope, we hope, he hopes*, and so forth. But *hopefully* is an adverb; it cannot substitute for a subject and a verb.

50. **If McNab had thrown the ball a yard farther, that play would have gone for a touchdown.** "*If McNab throws . . . that play goes . . .*" has come into common usage because sports broadcasters are incapable of handling anything more complex than the present tense. But because we are describing an event that might have happened, we need the conditional tense both times. You need "farther" because we're dealing with distance. Use "further" when you're talking about degree: *He couldn't take his argument any further.*