

Grammar Exercises

Grammar Bee

Presented by “Grumpy Ed” Telfeyan
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1. **Which of the following formulations constitutes a complete sentence?**
 - A. **He argued.**
 - B. Being the lead attorney and yet still feeling somewhat of a novice in his first jury trial.
 - C. James, even without his three-piece suit, in the center of the courtroom.

2. **Pick the correct alternative:**
 - A. Scientists now agree that the sun moves in it’s own orbit.
 - B. Scientists now agree that the sun moves in its own orbit.
 - C. Scientists now agree that the sun moves in its’ own orbit.

3. **Which of the following sentences is punctuated correctly?**
 - A. The professor, a crusty old coot, never referred to his students by their names.
 - B. The professor, who was, a crusty old coot, never referred to his students by their names.
 - C. The professor who never referred to his students by their names, was a crusty old coot.

4. **Select the most correctly punctuated sentence.**
 - A. I can’t remember why, I used to think I was special.
 - B. I used to think I was special, but I can’t remember why.
 - C. I know that I was once special but now I can’t remember why I was.

5. **Which alternative is correct?**
 - A. Dogs like Mr. Simpson’s can be dangerous, especially when it bites without warning.
 - B. A dog can be dangerous, if, like Mr. Simpson’s, it bites without warning.
 - C. A dog, like the ones Mr. Simpson owns, can be dangerous, especially when they bite without warning.

6. **Which alternative is the preferred form of a question?**

- A. Why did you take such an action?
 - B. what, in your opinion, led to the creation of the problem?
 - C. How do you know she complained about it?
- 7. Which sentence is grammatically correct?**
- A. If the plaintiff is successful, he will have prevailed because of his counsel's arguments.
 - B. If they're points are considered, the representatives for the plaintiff will be likely to prevail.
 - C. If the plaintiff's points are stated accurately, it will lead to only one conclusion.
- 8. Which sentence best states the writer's intended meaning?**
- A. When one considers all of the factors at play, it can only lead to one conclusion.
 - B. When all of the factors are considered, there is only one logical conclusion.
 - C. Only one logical conclusion emerges from consideration of all the factors.
- 9. First challenge-back question. Choose the best sentence and indicate why the other two are not as good (two minutes)**
- A. This agreement is appropriate for the reason that the parties no longer wish to be engaged in the ongoing dispute that the agreement resolves.
 - B. This agreement appropriately memorializes the resolution of the party's dispute.
 - C. This agreement appropriately memorializes the resolution of the dispute between the parties.
- 10. Choose the sentence with the correct punctuation.**
- A. The doctrine of res judicata includes: merger, bar, and collateral estoppel.
 - B. The doctrine of res judicata includes: merger; bar; and collateral estoppel.
 - C. The doctrine of res judicata includes merger, bar, and collateral estoppel.
- 11. Select the most professionally-acceptable sentence.**
- A. The Powell and Miller/Starr references on real property law, are excellent treaties for our research problem.
 - B. One of the difficulties in researching the law of easements is the indefinite nature of this type of interest in land.
 - C. In analyzing our research problem we must focus on the applicable statutes from both the California Legislature and Congress.

- 12. Select the sentence that best expresses the thought the writer intended to convey.**
- A. Among legal scholars, disagreements are common regarding almost every issue in the law.
 - B. The lack of uniformity of perceptibility is apparent to anyone who reads any number of treatises.
 - C. Legal scholars are almost never in complete unification on any issue in the law.
- 13. Select the sentence that is the most “reader-friendly.”**
- A. The fact that she died created a widespread feeling of grief.
 - B. Her death caused widespread grief.
 - C. Grief was felt by many when her death was reported.
- 14. Choose the best alternative:**
- A. In jury trials, the trial judge may not express an opinion on the defendant’s guilt or innocence, nor may he or she respond to a question from a juror in such a way as to suggest any such opinion.
 - B. Judges have to be careful not to reveal their own opinions in jury trials.
 - C. In jury trials, judges must not state an opinion regarding the defendant’s guilt or innocence.
- 15. Which sentence is punctuated correctly?**
- A. Judges must make numerous decisions in every trial, including whether they should exclude testimony and permit expanded cross-examination.
 - B. Judges must decide whether to exclude testimony, and whether to permit expanded cross-examination.
 - C. Judges must decide whether to exclude testimony and they must also rule on objections to expanded cross-examination.
- 16. Which sentence has the best structure?**
- A. To satisfy the timeliness requirement, a response must be filed with the hearing officer within twenty days after the petition is served.
 - B. A response, to satisfy the timeliness requirement, must be filed with the hearing officer within twenty days after the petition is served.
 - C. To satisfy the timeliness requirement, a response must be filed within twenty days after the petition is served with the hearing officer.
- 17. Which sentence is constructed in the preferred manner?**
- A. A lawyer may disclose (if disclosure is necessary to prevent a crime that will result in physical harm to another) a client’s confidential information.
 - B. If disclosure is necessary to prevent a crime that will result in physical harm to another, a lawyer may disclose a client’s confidential information.
 - C. A lawyer may disclose a client’s confidential information, if disclosure is necessary to prevent a crime that will result in physical harm to another.

- 18. Choose the most correctly constructed sentences.**
- A. The sequestered jury was eager to quickly, though with great deliberation, reach a unanimous verdict. This required a strong leader.
 - B. After reviewing the parties' revised briefs, the judge decided to not grant either party an additional opportunity for oral argument. He said that would not be prudent.
 - C. The new summer associate hoped to return promptly from his lunch break, thereby avoiding another angry stare from his supervising attorney. He had already experienced that kind of reaction from this particular boss.
- 19. Which sentence best states the writer's point?**
- A. Having been found insane, Judge Jones ordered the defendant confined to a mental institution.
 - B. Judge Jones confined the defendant, who had been found insane, to a mental institution,
 - C. Judge Jones ordered the defendant confined to a mental institution, because he had been found insane.
- 20. Choose the preferable alternative and explain precisely what is wrong with the other two.**
- A. Several agencies draft regulations in the field of laboratory experiments. These often deal with animal rights.
 - B. Several agencies draft regulations to protect the rights of laboratory animals.
 - C. Several agencies draft laboratory animal rights protection regulations.
- 21. Which of the following choices represents the best expression of the thought intended by all of these sentences? What is wrong with the other two?**
- A. The defendant's testimony concerned his state of mind when he acted.
 - B. The testimony given by the defendant went to the point in his case with reference to his state of mind at the time of his action.
 - C. The defendant's testimony was offered in connection with his state of mind when he acted.
- 22. Choose the grammatically correct sentence and indicate specifically what is wrong with the other two.**
- A. The issue regarding the defendants' contradictory statements are whether either of them can be believed.
 - B. When the defendant contradicted himself, especially after his attorney gave him an opportunity to correct his testimony, his credibility became an issue.
 - C. Contradictory statements, such as the one uttered by the defendant, makes credibility an issue.

Grammar Bee Answers

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The “Grammar Bee” is simple to use, fun for the students, and effective in providing the necessary motivation to get students to learn the basic mechanics of good writing and the basic rules of legal writing.

Properly administered, it consumes only five minutes (or less) of each class session and can be completed in a single semester.

I use these sample questions over the course of my first semester. By the end of the competition, students have improved their basic skills and actually express disappointment that the “Bee” is not continued in the second semester.

Feel free to use these questions or to create your own if you choose to implement your own “Grammar Bee.”

Sample Grammar Bee Questions

1. **Which of the following formulations constitutes a complete sentence?**
- A. **He argued.**
 - B. Being the lead attorney and yet still feeling somewhat of a novice in his first jury trial.
 - C. James, even without his three-piece suit, in the center of the courtroom.

Answer: Only “A” is a complete sentence, containing both a subject “he” and a verb (argued).
“B” appears to be an introductory clause that, standing alone, lacks either a subject or a verb, the two requisites of a complete sentence.
“C” may have a subject (James), but it lacks a verb (an action word that describes/explains what James is doing).

2. **Pick the correct alternative:**
- A. Scientists now agree that the sun moves in it’s own orbit.
 - B. Scientists now agree that the sun moves in its own orbit.
 - C. Scientists now agree that the sun moves in its’ own orbit.

Answer: “B” is correct because “its” is the possessive form of “it.”
“A” contains the contraction for “it is,” which is the only time an apostrophe properly appears in the word.

“C” is incorrect because “its” with an apostrophe after the “s” is not a word.

3. Which of the following sentences is punctuated correctly?

- A. The professor, a crusty old coot, never referred to his students by their names.
- B. The professor, who was, a crusty old coot, never referred to his students by their names.
- C. The professor who never referred to his students by their names, was a crusty old coot.

Answer: “A” correctly sets off the parenthetical phrase with commas.
“B” incorrectly places a comma after the verb “was.”
“C” is missing a comma before “who.”

4. Select the most correctly punctuated sentence.

- A. I can’t remember why, I used to think I was special.
- B. I used to think I was special, but I can’t remember why.
- C. I know that I was once special but now I can’t remember why I was.

Answer: “B” correctly places a comma in the middle of the sentence. It does not contain two independent clauses joined by a conjunction and is, therefore, not a compound sentence.
“A” incorrectly places a comma after the first independent clause.
“C” does not contain a comma after the first independent clause.

5. Which alternative is correct?

- A. Dogs like Mr. Simpson’s can be dangerous, especially when it bites without warning.
- B. A dog can be dangerous, if, like Mr. Simpson’s, it bites without warning.
- C. A dog, like the ones Mr. Simpson owns, can be dangerous, especially when they bite without warning.

Answer: “B” contains the correct pronoun, “it,” to relate to the noun, “dog,” to which it refers.
“A” contains the incorrect singular pronoun, “it,” to relate to the plural noun, “dogs,” to which it refers.
“C” contains the incorrect plural pronoun, “they,” to relate to the singular noun, “dog” to which it refers.

6. Which alternative is the preferred form of a question?

- A. Why did you take such an action?
- B. what, in your opinion, led to the creation of the problem?
- C. How do you know she complained about it?

Answer: “C” states the point directly, using the verb “to complain” rather than a nominalization of it (e.g. “had registered a complaint”).

“A” and “B” are both examples of nominalizations of verbs (“action” instead of “act,” “creation” instead of “create”). Nominalizations (nouns that derive from verbs) create longer sentences, stating points less directly.

7. Which sentence is grammatically correct?

- A. If the plaintiff is successful, he will have prevailed because of his counsel’s arguments.
- B. If they’re points are considered, the representatives for the plaintiff will be likely to prevail.
- C. If the plaintiff’s points are stated accurately, it will lead to only one conclusion.

Answer: “A” is correct (assuming the plaintiff is a male). The apostrophe is placed correctly in “counsel’s” (assuming the plaintiff has only one attorney).

“B” uses “they’re” incorrectly. That word is a contraction for “they are.” The correct word in that sentence would be “their,” referring to the plaintiff’s representatives.

“C” contains the incorrect pronoun (“it”) when referring to the subject (“points”) of the first clause in the sentence.

8. Which sentence best states the writer’s intended meaning?

- A. When one considers all of the factors at play, it can only lead to one conclusion.
- B. When all of the factors are considered, there is only one logical conclusion.
- C. Only one logical conclusion emerges from consideration of all the factors.

Answer: “C” properly avoids uncertain/indefinite references, and correctly focuses on the action of the sentence (the conclusion that is reached by considering all of the factors).

“A” and “B” are less desirable ways to compose the sentence, because they both fail to focus on the action (reaching a conclusion). The key is to avoid sentences that include indefinite uses of words like “it,” and “there.”

9. First challenge-back question. Choose the best sentence and indicate why the other two are not as good (two minutes)

- A. This agreement is appropriate for the reason that the parties no longer wish to be engaged in the ongoing dispute that the agreement resolves.
- B. This agreement appropriately memorializes the resolution of the party’s dispute.
- C. This agreement appropriately memorializes the resolution of the dispute between the parties.

Answer: “C” states the writer’s point directly.

“A” contains the compound construction, “for the reason that,” and is otherwise excessively verbose.

“B” uses the apostrophe incorrectly. As written, it refers to only one party. Any dispute (and resulting agreement) would, perforce, require at least two. The correct word, therefore, would be “parties’.”

10. Choose the sentence with the correct punctuation.

- A. The doctrine of res judicata includes: merger, bar, and collateral estoppel.
- B. The doctrine of res judicata includes: merger; bar; and collateral estoppel.
- C. The doctrine of res judicata includes merger, bar, and collateral estoppel.

Answer: “C” correctly omits any punctuation after the word “includes.”

“A” and “B” both improperly place a colon after “includes,” and “B” also improperly separates the three concepts in the series with semi-colons. (Colons are used to introduce a series only when the phrase that precedes it can stand alone as an independent clause and semi-colons are used to separate items in a series only if the series is complicated or contains internal commas).

11. Select the most professionally-acceptable sentence.

- A. The Powell and Miller/Starr references on real property law, are excellent treaties for our research problem.
- B. One of the difficulties in researching the law of easements is the indefinite nature of this type of interest in land.
- C. In analyzing our research problem we must focus on the applicable statues from both the California Legislature and Congress.

Answer: “B” is correctly punctuated and uses and spells all the words in it Correctly.

“A” improperly uses “treaties” for “treatises” and contains an unnecessary and improper comma, unless a second comma is added after “references.”

“C” improperly uses “statues” for “statutes” and is missing a necessary comma after the introductory prepositional phrase.

12. Select the sentence that best expresses the thought the writer intended to convey.

- A. Among legal scholars, disagreements are common regarding almost every issue in the law.
- B. The lack of uniformity of perceptibility is apparent to anyone who reads any number of treatises.
- C. Legal scholars are almost never in complete unification on any issue in the law.

Answer: “A” uses appropriate words to express the thought the writer intended to convey.

“B” uses the wrong forms (“uniformity” and “perceptibility”) of what are probably the wrong words for the sentence. (“Consensus” or perhaps “unity” and “opinion” is probably what the writer means.
“C” uses the wrong form (“unification”) of what may be the wrong word for the sentence. (“Accord” or “agreement” is probably closer to what the writer means.)

13. Select the sentence that is the most “reader-friendly.”

- A. The fact that she died created a widespread feeling of grief.
- B. Her death caused widespread grief.
- C. Grief was felt by many when her death was reported.

Answer: “B” conveys the necessary information in a minimum number of words.

“A” contains surplus wording (“The fact that she died” instead of “her death” and “created a ... feeling” instead of “caused”).

“C” states the point in the less desirable passive voice (“Grief was felt by many”) instead of the preferable active voice (“Many felt grief”).

14. Choose the best alternative:

- A. In jury trials, the trial judge may not express an opinion on the defendant’s guilt or innocence, not may he or she respond to a question from a juror in such a way as to suggest any such opinion.
- B. Judges have to be careful not to reveal their own opinions in jury trials.
- C. In jury trials, judges must not state an opinion regarding the defendant’s guilt or innocence.

Answer: “C” is neither too long (containing too many words and thoughts) or too short (leaving out words that would clarify the import of the sentence).

“A” is too long (both as to actual number of words and thoughts contained).

“B” omits critical qualifying information, thereby making the sentence less precise (judges often give their opinions, as when they rule on objections) than it should be, and provides an indefinite direction (“have to be careful”) that results in unnecessary ambiguity.

15. Which sentence is punctuated correctly?

- A. Judges must make numerous decisions in every trial, including whether they should exclude testimony and permit expanded cross-examination.
- B. Judges must decide whether to exclude testimony, and whether to permit expanded cross-examination.
- C. Judges must decide whether to exclude testimony and they must also rule on objections to expanded cross-examination.

Answer: “A” correctly places a comma before the subordinate clause in this complex sentence.

“B” incorrectly places a comma in the middle of this simple declaratory sentence. The sentence does not consist of two independent clauses; it has one subject (judges) and one verb (must decide) followed by two alternatives, neither of which can stand alone as an independent clause.

“C” improperly omits a comma (before “and” in this compound sentence. The sentence consists of two independent clauses (each of which can stand alone) joined by a conjunction.

16. Which sentence has the best structure?

- A. To satisfy the timeliness requirement, a response must be filed with the hearing officer within twenty days after the petition is served.
- B. A response, to satisfy the timeliness requirement, must be filed with the hearing officer within twenty days after the petition is served.
- C. To satisfy the timeliness requirement, a response must be filed within twenty days after the petition is served with the hearing officer.

Answer: “A” correctly avoids a gap between the subject, verb and object of the sentence. (“Gaps” make the meaning of sentences more difficult to absorb quickly).

“B” places a qualifying phrase between the subject (“response”) and the verb (“must be filed”) in the sentence.

“C” places a qualifying phrase between the verb (“must be filed”) and the object (“hearing officer”) in the sentence

*****Note: Some students might choose “C” because they think the petition is supposed to be served with the hearing officer. Students who choose “C” should be allowed to explain their reasoning in this regard, but still must justify why it is more preferable than “A”).**

17. Which sentence is constructed in the preferred manner?

- A. A lawyer may disclose (if disclosure is necessary to prevent a crime that will result in physical harm to another) a client’s confidential information.
- B. If disclosure is necessary to prevent a crime that will result in physical harm to another, a lawyer may disclose a client’s confidential information.
- C. A lawyer may disclose a client’s confidential information, if disclosure is necessary to prevent a crime that will result in physical harm to another.

Answer: **“C” correctly places the lengthy condition after the main clause. (Distinguish the rule for short conditions or exceptions, which can be placed before the main clause.)**

“A” creates a difficult gap (parentheticals always break the chain of thought) between the verb and the object in the sentence.

“B” incorrectly places the lengthy condition before the main clause.

18. Choose the most correctly constructed sentences.

- A. The sequestered jury was eager to quickly, though with great deliberation, reach a unanimous verdict. This required a strong leader.
- B. After reviewing the parties’ revised briefs, the judge decided to not grant either party an additional opportunity for oral argument. He said that would not be prudent.
- C. The new summer associate hoped to return promptly from his lunch break, thereby avoiding another angry stare from his supervising attorney. He had already experienced that kind of reaction from this particular boss.

Answer: **“C” correctly avoids splitting the infinitive (“to return”) and follows the adjectives (“this” and “that” with nouns that make the references definite.**

“A” incorrectly splits the infinitive (“to reach”) and includes an indefinite reference (“this,” not followed by a clarifying noun”).

“B” incorrectly splits the infinitive (“to grant”) and includes an indefinite reference (“that,” not followed by a clarifying noun).

19. Which sentence best states the writer’s point?

- A. Having been found insane, Judge Jones ordered the defendant confined to a mental institution.
- B. Judge Jones confined the defendant, who had been found insane, to a mental institution,
- C. Judge Jones ordered the defendant confined to a mental institution, because he had been found insane.

Answer: **“B” avoids the ambiguity regarding who is insane by placing the modifying clause immediately after the person it describes (the defendant).**

“A,” by placing the modifying clause immediately in front of Judge Jones, seems to suggest that it is the judge who was found insane.

“C” because of the placement of the modifying clause at some distance from both of the individuals referred to in the sentence, raises questions as to just who is insane.

20. Choose the preferable alternative and explain precisely what is wrong with the other two.

- A. Several agencies draft regulations in the field of laboratory experiments. These often deal with animal rights.
- B. Several agencies draft regulations to protect the rights of laboratory animals.
- C. Several agencies draft laboratory animal rights protection regulations.

Answer: “B” correctly separates the numerous nouns with words that break up the chain and does so without creating ambiguity.

“A” contains an ambiguous reference. (Does “these” refer to the agencies, the regulations or the laboratory experiments?)

“C” contains a lengthy “noun chain.”

21. Which of the following choices represents the best expression of the thought intended by all of these sentences? What is wrong with the other two?

- A. The defendant’s testimony concerned his state of mind when he acted.
- B. The testimony given by the defendant went to the point in his case with reference to his state of mind at the time of his action.
- C. The defendant’s testimony was offered in connection with his state of mind when he acted.

“Answer: “A” avoids excessive “glue” words and states the point directly. (The ratio of glue words to working words is good).

“B” contains an abundance of unnecessary “glue” words (“went to the point,” “with reference to”).

“C” also contains unnecessary “glue” words (“in connection with”) and adds an unnecessary verb (“was offered”) that is presented in the dreaded passive voice.

22. Choose the grammatically correct sentence and indicate specifically what is wrong with the other two.

- A. The issue regarding the defendants’ contradictory statements are whether either of them can be believed.
- B. When the defendant contradicted himself, especially after his attorney gave him an opportunity to correct his testimony, his credibility became an issue.
- C. Contradictory statements, such as the one uttered by the defendant, makes credibility an issue.

Answer: “B” contains no grammatical errors.

“A” fails to conform subject to verb. (If the subject is “issue,” the verb should be “is;” if the verb is “are,” the subject should be “issues.”)

“C” contains the same defect. (If the subject is “statements,” the verb should be “make;” if the verb is “makes,” the subject should be “statement.”)