21L.017 The Art of the Probable: Literature and Probability
Spring 2008

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Rather than write the equivalent of a novel in your margins, I have reduced my difficulties with bad prose to a few headings. The kinds of infelicities listed below will produce difficulties for the reader, ranging from a momentary pause (after which the reader may puzzle out the meaning, but a series of such pauses taxes one's powers of attention) to downright bafflement. Please attend to these markings and think about what has caused me to inscribe them.

_awk:_ awkward construction.

_awkward construction._

_circle drawn around a comma:_ delete comma

_contraction. Do not use contractions in expository prose._

_coord:_ faulty coordination. The grammar indicates an unintended opposition or an unintended equality of importance, with consequent distortion of sense. The opposite of faulty parallelism. See below.

_compress:_ comma splice; two sentences joined by a comma.

_sentence fragment; not grammatically a sentence, although written as one._

_random lapse of grammar.

_lex:_ [also "word" and "dictionary"] faulty lexicon; word or phrase is inappropriate, producing vagueness or ambiguity, or perhaps the wrong meaning.

_metaphor:_ inappropriately or banal metaphor; possibly a cliche.

_faulty, confused or misleading adjectival or adverbial modification._

_unequal coordination._

_visual or textual parallel; the grammar fails to indicate an intended opposition or an intended equality of importance, with consequent distortion of sense._

_why? I don't get it._

_!_ a sign of astonishment--usually either at the silliness of what you have said or at its brilliance. You will have to figure out which is intended.

_Some general rules:_

1. Do not split infinitives.
2. Do not use "this" unaccompanied by a noun.
3. Do not use "different than". "Different" (and "differently") conjoin with the word "from".
4. Do not use the word "lifestyle" as a synonym for the phrase "way of life". Do not use "referred" as a synonym for "referred to".
5. "On the other hand" must be proceeded by "on the one hand"; it is not a synonym for either "in contrast to" or "at the same time"("just the same").
6. The word "so" introduces a comparative (e.g., "so tall that "). It is not a conjunction. For the conjunction use either "so that" or "and so".
7. Avoid contractions and exclamations in expository prose. Do not resort to italics simply to lay emphasis on a word; the typographical form must have a better reason for its use.