CMU Department of Languages, Literature and Mass Communication

The top ten English grammar mistakes	
Sentence Fragment	*The bagel rolling relentlessly toward the museum exit.*
	☞ *The bagel **was** rolling relentlessly toward the museum exit.*
Run-on	*The pilot steered towards the pyramid, the dirigible landed without incident.*
	☞ *The pilot steered towards the pyramid, **and** the dirigible landed without incident.*
	☞ *The pilot steered towards the pyramid**;** the dirigible landed without incident.*
Using a semicolon like a colon	*The regents' report clearly indicates one fact; phrenology is the most popular major at CMU.*
	☞ *The regents' report clearly indicates one fact: phrenology is the most popular major at CMU.*
Using a colon like a semicolon	*You need a new flux capacitor: otherwise, you may be stuck in 1955.*
	☞ *You need a new flux capacitor; otherwise, you may be stuck in 1955.*
Using a semicolon like a comma	*Michelle studies ancient Egypt; but Sonya studies medieval Persia.*
	☞ *Michelle studies ancient Egypt, but Sonya studies medieval Persia.*
Dangling modifier	*Having flunked physics, my advisor recommended I pursue cryptozoology.* (sounds like the advisor flunked)
	☞ *After **I** flunked physics, my advisor recommended I pursue cryptozoology.*
Verb agreement	*The delivery of the machine guns **allow** Garibaldi to defeat the Austrian troops.* ('allow' agrees with the singular noun 'delivery' and not the plural noun 'guns')
	☞ *The delivery of the machine guns **allows** Garibaldi to defeat the Austrian troops.*
Apostrophe mistake	*Carthage became supreme in the region as **it's** overseas colonies expanded.* (it's = it is/it has)
	☞ *Carthage became supreme in the region as **its** overseas colonies expanded.*
Wrong pronoun form	*Mazzini's revolutionary principles inevitably led to a conflict between **he** and the King.*
	*Mazzini's revolutionary principles inevitably led to a conflict between **him** and the King.*
Faulty parallelism	*Caesar's goals include winning the election, conquering Gaul, and control of the senate.* (items in a list must have identical grammatical structures)
	☞ *Caesar's goals include winning the election, conquering Gaul, and controlling the senate.*

THE FIVE PHRASES FOUND IN SENTENCES	
VERB PHRASE. A noun and any articles or determiners. <u>Function</u>: predicate	*Fabrizio <u>gazed longingly at Clelia from the dungeon window</u>.*
NOUN PHRASE. A noun and any adjectives or determiners. <u>Functions</u>: subject, direct object, indirect object, possessor, object of a preposition	*<u>That extremely cantankerous man</u> became our benefactor.*
ADJECTIVE PHRASE. An adjective and any qualifiers. <u>Function</u>: modifier of a noun	*That <u>extremely cantankerous</u> man became our benefactor.*
ADVERB PHRASE. An adverb and any qualifiers. <u>Function</u>: modifier of a verb	*The yak <u>ran nimbly</u> through the tundra.*
PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE. A prepositional phrase followed by a noun phrase. <u>Function</u>: modifier of a verb or noun	*Fabrizio gazed longingly at Clelia <u>from the dungeon window</u>.*

Punctuation	
comma	**sets off nonessential information** *My friends play World of Warcraft, which I hate.* *Nevertheless, the zombies will return in the spring.* **with a coordinating conjunction, joins two independent clauses** *I love mangoes, but I can't stand kumquats.* **separates items in a list** *I love mangoes, kumquats, and lychees.* **sets off dependent clause that precedes an independent clause** *Unless I make a lot of noise, they won't know I'm trapped in the coffin.*
semicolon	**joins two independent clauses** *I love mangoes; I can't stand kumquats.*
colon	**introduces a list, an example, or a rephrasing of the previous clause** *There are three fruits I have never tasted: mangoes, kumquats, and lychees.* *The BLM report plainly establishes one fact: cryptids are real.* ☞ **A colon must be preceded by an independent clause.**
hyphen	**joins words that form a single modifier** *heart-shaped, load-bearing, dog-friendly, two-year-old, home-cooked*
dash	**sets off interrupting information** *Very few students—in fact, only one—ever managed to pass Dr. Brad's class.* **sets off surprising information** *They offered the intrepid linguist an unusual entrée—chilled monkey brains.*

clause: A subject and its predicate. An independent clause is a sentence.

dependent clause (or subordinate clause): A clause that is not complete and that cannot stand alone as a sentence. For example, in the following sentence the clause in bold is dependent and the following clause is independent: **When a Chihuahua is angry**, *it won't let go.*

helping verb: A verb that is used to help a main verb express probability, possibility, ability, future meaning, or progressive aspect. For example, in the following sentence the helping verb in bold is helping to indicate the action of the main verb is progressive: *I **am** studying in the library.* The three helping verbs are *be, have,* and *do* as well as the modals *may/might, will/would, shall/should, can/could,* and *must.* Also known as an auxiliary.

independent clause: A clause that is complete and that can stand alone as a sentence. For example, in the following sentence the clause in bold is independent and the preceding clause is dependent: *Whenever I build a snowman,* **it melts**.

passive voice: An English construction that makes the object of a transitive verb the subject. For example, the passive of *The boy chased the skunk* is *The skunk was chased by the boy.*

past participle: The form of a verb that is used after the helping verb *have*. Example: *The water in the lagoon has frozen.* *Freezing,* by contrast, is the present participle of the verb *freeze.*

predicate: The part of a clause that describes the subject or what the subject is doing. The predicate is always a verb phrase. Example: *Fabrizio gazed longingly at Clelia from the dungeon window*.

present participle: The *-ing* form of a main verb used after the helping verb *be (am, are, is, was, were, being, been, be)*. Example: *The water in the lagoon is freezing. Frozen,* by contrast, is the past participle of the verb *freeze.*

THE PARTS OF SPEECH	
noun	a person, place, or thing; functions as the subject or object of a sentence; most nouns can be plural (-s) and possessive (-'s)
verb	describes a state or action; can be put in the past tense and be preceded by helping verbs
adjective	describes a noun; most can be preceded by a qualifier (e.g. *very tricky, so deceitful*)
adverb	describes a verb; most can be preceded by a qualifier (e.g. *very quickly, so deceitfully*); most (but not all) end in *-ly*
preposition	precedes a noun phrase and shows the relationship of the noun phrase to the rest of the sentence. Examples: *in, at, on, for, to,* etc.
pronoun	takes the place of a full noun phrase. Examples: *I, me, he, him, she, her, they, them, it, everybody, nobody,* etc.
helping verb	special verb that precedes a main verb: *will/would, may/might, can/could, shall/should, must*; also forms of BE, HAVE, DO
qualifier	modifies a verb or adverb. Examples: *very, so, too, more, less,* etc.
determiner	introduces a noun phrase. Includes articles, demonstratives, and possessives. *the, a, this, that, my, his,* etc.
conjunction	a **coordinating conjunction** joins words, phrases, or clauses that are equal. Examples: *and, but, for, nor, or, yet, so* a **subordinating conjunction** joins a dependent (subordinate) clause to an independent clause. Examples: *while, because, although,* etc.