

**Using  To Examine
Effective Nonstandard Usage**

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- ☀️ Public
- ☀️ Comprehensive
- ☀️ 56,500 students

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prescriptive rules * data-driven learning * Google



Grammar Voyeur

I. Search

II. Analyze

III. Revise



I. What to search for?

- **Violated Conventions**
 - Deliberate misspelling
 - Ain't
 - Irregardless
 - Subject / Verb mismatch
 - Double negative
- **Shibboleths for the Educated**
- **Folklore infractions**



I. What to search for?

- **Violated Conventions**
- **Shibboleths for the Educated**
 - “impact” used as verb
 - “finalize” used at all
 - “hopefully” used as a sentence adverb
 - “literally” used figuratively
 - “myself” instead of “me”
 - absolute words with a modifier
- **Folklore infractions**



I. What to search for?

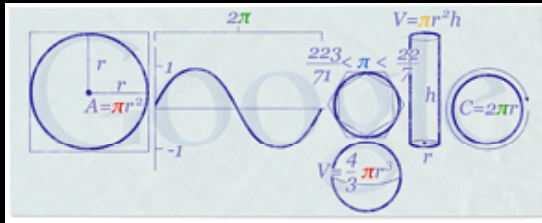
- Violated Conventions
- Shibboleths for the Educated
- Folklore infractions
 - Sentence begins with “And” or “But” or “Because”
 - That / Which rule
 - Less / Fewer rule
 - “Since” or “While” to mean “Because” or “Although”



I. What to search for?

- Violated Conventions
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- NO textbooks, poetry, song lyrics, headlines
- Only 3 of any one kind of thing
- To limit to written language, search e.g., *NYT*
- If this takes hours, you're doing it wrong



II. What To Analyze?

- Does this example really break the rule?
- Why did this writer break the rule?
 - The “rule” is merely *folklore* or style preference
 - The writer/speaker made a *mistake*
 - This usage fits the *dialect* being used
 - The *register* fits the rhetorical situation
 - This usage is a *stock phrase* or cliché
 - Something else (what?)



III. What Next?

- Investigate the history of the rule
- Revise so that the rule is no longer broken
- Compare the rewrite with the original
 - Which version is more effective? Why?
 - How does rhetorical context matter?

- “But, really, what is entropy?”
 - A person, possibly a student, posted this on the website discussing two different definitions of the word entropy that he/she was not able to reconcile as the same. The author therefore started the sentence with “but” to provide emphasis on the debate at hand of the true definition of entropy.
- “that movie impacted me in ways that anyone who saw it . . .”
 - The writer emphasizes how the movie *Garden State* affected her. The words “affected me” could be used, but that doesn’t convey the same meaning as impact. “Affect” can be more ambiguous. “Impact sounds more powerful.

- Barack's name ain't Jesus. Barack ain't gonna improve your child's reading score. *Rev. Jeremiah Wright at a speech in Selma, AL*
- u may think he ain't listening but he is. *Someone advising a suicidal person to pray.*
- They should be good, but they ain't done nothing yet. *Boston player on Miami's acquiring superstars*
- He Ain't Dumb, He's My President. *Calvin Trillin, Time*
- They Ain't With Main Street: Where Barack Obama's sympathies lie. *John B. Judis, The New Republic*
- There ain't going to be no money for nothing if we pour it all into Afghanistan. *Rep. David Obey*

- It's not you, it's me. *Anyone leaving a relationship*
- Are you there, God? It's me, Eli. *Yale student*
- And it's me coming back and playing golf . . . nothing to do with our decision to go our separate ways. *Tiger Woods*
- It's me who asked the "Tell me, what do you think of the outfit?" question. *yahoo commenter*
- . . . until finally it's me who's having the meltdown, you know, lying there in bed, whimpering, 'Please stop, please stop.' *Jonathan Franzen, Freedom*
- Mr. Schneiderman holds one of the cards up to his face. "It's me," he says, not ungraciously. *Candidate assuring voter that he did survive the primary.*

Benefits

- Real-world sentences
- Empirical approach (not personal preference)
- What language does (not what it shouldn't do)

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- Real-world sentences
- Empirical approach (not personal preference)
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Drawbacks

- They don't always know the rule to begin with
- Negative reinforcement (esp. peeve sites)
- Writers don't work this way

The lack of basic skills and factual knowledge is an obstacle to autonomous critical thinking.

Lazere, David. "Back to Basics: A Force for Oppression or Liberation?" *College English* 54.1 (1992): 7-21. Print.



Grammar is not a system for eliminating error.
It is a resource for making meaning.