Artistic Grammar
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Grammar is often considered to be an integral part of our language, most often when it comes to our writing. It is. After all, without grammar, what would our language be? A jumble is what it would be - an unreadable jumble of words and phrases, thrown together with no rhyme or reason. But grammar isn’t strictly as necessary as we have come to believe; yes, it’s a building block. In order to write without grammar, one must know the rules of writing with grammar. Writing without grammar can be achieved by knowing the rules that make our written language readable and understandable, because one can only use and break the rules to the best extent by knowing the rules they break.

All ‘writers’ abuse grammar - and when I say writers in this context, I of course mean those who use writing as a form of art for communication, rather than those who use it as a form of communication for life. Read a novel, an essay, almost anything. This very piece of writing, even, is filled with broken grammar. That twisted, broken grammar, isn’t simply a fool not knowing the rules, though. When George R.R. Martin, for example, misuses grammar, he does so in a strategic way. Grammar is used, in fiction and otherwise, to make us think. When we see something written, we presumably read it in our heads, if not out loud. It is the combination of punctuation and word placement that determines how we do this, and using only by-the-book
proper grammar we could not possibly achieve what we can by knowing the rules and actively breaking them.

For instance, starting in elementary school, we’re told that when writing papers we should never begin a sentence with ‘and’, ‘but’, or ‘or’. But published writers do it all the time, and are never discounted. In *A Game of Thrones*, George R.R. Martin uses sentences with conjunctions to express his characters’ trains of thought. When Eddard Stark discovers that conspirators might be planning his murder, it is said “And of late he had often found himself dreaming of snow, of the deep quiet of the wolfswood at night.” (356) Beginning a sentence with a conjunction can add a new level to communication, allowing the writer or artist to manipulate how the reader understands what he or she is saying. In this case specifically, Martin uses the word ‘and’ to show the reader Ned’s thoughts, rather than bluntly saying them. If a writer wants to say one thing, a grammatically proper replacement just might not cut it. A conjunction at the start of a sentence gives the impression of a breath caught - an impression that could, yes, be brought about by other punctuation, but not properly. A period causes the reader to take a breath and step back from their reading. It immediately and entirely stops the flow of thought, completely severing one piece of the writing from another. A comma, a semicolon, even an ellipse simply pauses the reader’s mind momentarily; it allows the reader to continue almost immediately, where a period doesn’t. In some writing, this forced pause is entirely necessary to capture the sought after reaction.
Likewise, we are taught from a young age that it is never, in writing, appropriate to utilize fragment sentences. Yet, we use them all the time. Similarly to misuse of conjunction, the use of fragment sentences forces the reader to halt. The periods that frame the fragment separate it from the surrounding writing; it allows the fragment, and its contents, to stand out. In George R.R. Martin’s *A Game of Thrones*, this is the most used grammatical error. About halfway through the book is a prime example, directly after an unnamed knight is killed by Sandor Clegane in a joust and Sansa thinks how sad it is: “And now the world would forget his name too, Sansa realized; there would be no songs sung for him. That was sad.” (296) The reader knows for a fact that whatever they learn from that sentence is important. Fragments make importance blatant.

These two common ‘mistakes’ are seen often, but are sometimes accompanied by grammar mistakes that are more challenging to use well. Misplaced and dangling modifiers, for instance, can be found in professional writing, but are often not due to their natures. They tend to sound unnatural and confusing, because they don’t have clear subjects. When sentences are formed like this, it becomes difficult for a reader to make sense of what a writer is trying to say. This difficulty makes readers unable to understand the writer’s intent, which is something a writer should try to keep from happening at all times. Nonetheless, they are often used in informal writing that doesn’t hinge on the reader being able to understand what is being said immediately. Dangling and misplaced modifiers are not generally used in modern literature, due to
the confusion involved with them; however, they are used on occasion in non-prose forms and in newspaper articles on occasion. They are difficult to notice as well as difficult to understand.

There are many errors one can make in a grammatical sense; more prominent in writing, these errors are often made by those not totally knowledgeable on the subject of grammar. However, the vast majority that appear in published, professional writing are errors that exist intentionally. They serve legitimate purpose within the writing, aiding the writer in creating a tone and mood appropriate to whatever he or she is attempting to say.

When writing this paper, I learned a significant amount about my personal views on certain aspects of “proper” grammar. Frankly, I like grammar - when people say improper things, depending on what they are, it bothers me. I have a habit of correcting people’s grammar, and I like proper grammar in writing - things like parallelism, using proper forms of words, proper punctuation - but at the same time, in writing I don’t use proper grammar, especially in less formal writing - fiction and other similar methods I abuse grammar as much as I can while still sounding proper. But during the essay, I realized that I use bad grammar a lot more than I might have thought otherwise, and I realized that the fact that I’ve never really noticed or been told to stop is really quite strange. I would never have expected it.