

Punctuation Exercise
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“Only in grammar can you be more than perfect.”
 ---William Safire (1929-)

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to help students identify and rectify punctuation anomalies. The following passage was taken verbatim from a customer-facing, publicly-visible sign at a commercial establishment located in the San Fernando Valley.

The references in the table below refer to the following writing handbook:

Hacker, D. (2007), *The Writer’s Reference* (6th ed.), Bedford/St. Martin’s.

If this document is unclear, please see the instructor.

Initial Passage

The color or odor of a fluid is not an indication of it’s conditions, for this reason we will recommend fluid replacement services based on vehicles manufacture’s recommendation.

Potential Anomalies

| <i>Fragment</i> | <i>Issue</i> | <i>Reference</i> | <i>Correction</i> |
|------------------|--|--|-------------------|
| ...it’s... | <i>It’s</i> is a contraction of <i>it is</i> . The possessive pronoun <i>its</i> refers to the fluid. | “Do not use an apostrophe in the possessive pronouns <i>its, whose, his, hers, ours, yours, and theirs</i> despite the fact that these pronouns are possessive.” [W1, p. 130], [P5-e, pp. 281-282] | ...its... |
| ...conditions... | The noun <i>conditions</i> refers to the (singular) <i>fluid</i> , not the color or odor [of the fluid]. <i>Fluid</i> is a collective noun in this sentence, and is therefore treated as | “If the collective noun functions as a [non-severable] group, then the collective noun should be treated as singular.” [G3-a, p. 189] | ...condition... |

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| | singular. | | |
| ...it's conditions, for this reason... | A comma splice is a type of run-on sentence. [G6, p. 210] | “[Commas require] a coordinating conjunction (<i>and, but, or, nor, for, so, or yet</i>) [G6-a, p. 212]. [Semicolons require] a transitional expression (such as <i>however</i>) [P3-b, p. 274], a transitional phrase (such as <i>as a result</i>) [P3-c, p. 275], or a conjunctive adverb (such as <i>accordingly</i>) [B1-g, p. 497]. | ...its condition. For this reason,... |
| ...on vehicles... | The definite article <i>the</i> is omitted. | “Use <i>the</i> with most specific common [both count and non-count] nouns.” [E3-c, p. 243] | ...on the vehicle... |
| ...manufacture's... | <i>Manufacture</i> is a noun or a verb (i.e., a process). <i>Manufacturer</i> is specific common noun (i.e., an entity). | “A good dictionary...is an indispensable writer's aid.” [W6-a, p. 156] | ...manufacturer's |
| ...on vehicles manufacturer's recommendation. | The <i>recommendation</i> is owned by the <i>vehicle manufacturer</i> (as opposed to an <i>oil manufacturer</i>). As used in this sentence fragment, <i>vehicle</i> is a singular, cumulative adjective. | “In English, adjectives are not pluralized to agree with the words they modify.” [G4, p. 199] | ...on the vehicle manufacturer's recommendation. |

Improved Passage

The color or odor of a fluid is not an indication of its condition. For this reason, we will recommend fluid replacement services based on the vehicle manufacturer's recommendation.

(Note that other writers might make choices that are different, but equivalent, with respect to the selection and arrangement of words and sentences.)