1. Billy’s motivation to succeed in this program seems to be greater than his sister.

* Billy’s motivation to succeed in this program seems to be greater than his sister’s (motivation).

*NOTE: we can (but don’t have to) leave off “motivation” with the second list item, as the possessive “sister’s” makes “motivation” implied.*

2. The sentence is difficult to understand not because the vocabulary is technical but because of faulty syntax.

* The sentence is difficult to understand not because the vocabulary is technical but because the syntax is faulty. (clauses: subject – verb – predicate adjective)

-- OR –

* The sentence is difficult to understand not because of the technical vocabulary but because of the faulty syntax. (nouns “vocabulary” and “syntax,” both with modifiers)

3. The dictionary can be used for these purposes: to find word meanings, pronunciations, correct spellings, and looking up irregular verbs.

* The dictionary can be used for these purposes: to find word meanings, pronunciations, and correct spellings, and to look up irregular verbs.

*NOTE: there are two lists. The first list breaks down to two infinitive phrases (“to find…” and “to look…”). The second, a list-within-a-list, distributes “to find” to three list items: “word meanings,” “pronunciations,” and “correct spellings.”*

4. The victims of this illness have sore throats, a fever, and their heads ache.

* The victims of this illness have fevers, sore throats, and headaches. (plural nouns, + modifiers)

*NOTE: If saying the following:*

*“The victims have sore throats, fevers, and headaches.”*

*It may seem, perhaps illogically, that “sore” is distributed to each item on the list (“sore throats, sore fevers, and sore headaches.” By moving “sore” to the middle list item (or last item, if we choose) we can more strongly indicate it only applies to that specific item.*

* The victims of this illness have fevers and sore throats, and their heads ache.

*NOTE: the comma-conjunction (“…, and…”) separates two independent clauses. “Have” is distributed equally to “fevers” and “sore throats.” This is not as good a sentence as the other, though.*

5. Before the barbecue, you should ignite some charcoal, have bought some steaks, and you should be preparing some marinade.

* Before the barbecue you should ignite some charcoal, buy some steaks, and prepare some marinade. (verbs + direct objects, all simple present tense paired up with the modal “should.”)