First, a short quiz.

Identify what kind of problem exists.

A) faulty pronoun reference

B) passive voice

C) dangling / misplaced / squinting modifier (modifier problem – all kinds are “C”)

D) parallel structure

E) ***no error***

1. Finally done with my homework, the phone rang.

2. Billy hiked a mountain last summer with his cousin that was nearly as high as Mt. Everest.

3. I would rather take my time and ace the test than I would go speeding through it and fail it.

4. Each room is fully carpeted, air conditioned, padded chairs, and a speaker's podium.

5. Several questions were asked by the audience that the presenter could not answer.

6. We asked the store for a discount but they said no.

7. Many people finished their tests within the allotted time, which is typical.

8. Arriving early has two benefits: finding a close parking space and you can get better seats.

9. In the play it says Lysander will run away with Hermia.

10. Sally said Saturday she needs help.

I recommend carefully reading each sentence and going through the A 🡪 E list and trying to apply each one until you can eliminate that selection. Rushing through these can easily lead to careless and costly mistakes!

Scroll down for the answers and explanations . . .

ANSWERS:

**1. Finally done with my homework, the phone rang.**

**ANSWER #1: C – dangling modifier**

“Finally done with my homework” is a modifier which implies *someone* is done with “my homework.” But that someone is not mentioned in the sentence. The sentence reads as though the phone finished the homework, which we know to be impossible. And, as the sentence is written, there is no word in the sentence that could represent ***who finished the homework***. So, the modifier is dangling – not actually modifying any specific word in the sentence.

How this might be correctly stated:

* Finally done with my homework, I heard the phone ring.
* As I finished my homework, the phone rang.

**2. Billy hiked a mountain last summer with his cousin that was nearly as high as Mt. Everest.**

**ANSWER #2: C – misplaced modifier**

The modifier “that was nearly as high as Mt. Everest” should be modifying “mountain,” and we always want our modifiers as close as possible to the words they modify, for this exact reason. The placement of this modifier next to “cousin” implies the cousin was unusually tall. Logic tells us the mountain Billy and his cousin hiked was, according to the sentence, as tall as Everest. So **the modifier belongs in the sentence**, just not where it is currently placed.

How this might be correctly stated:

* Billy and his cousin hiked last summer a mountain that was nearly as tall as Mt. Everest.
* Last summer, Billy and his cousin hiked a mountain nearly as tall as Mt. Everest.

**3. I would rather take my time and ace the test than I would go speeding through it and fail it.**

**ANSWER #3: D – parallel structure error**

Read this kind of sentence this way:

I would rather \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ than \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

This is how you have to approach parallel structure issues with correlative conjunctions (conjunctions that work in pairs, like ***either/or*** or ***not only/but also***). Whatever follows each part (“rather” and “than” in the sentence above) must be made parallel.

Think: I would rather EAT than SLEEP. “Eat” and “sleep” are infinitive forms (just without the “to” we usually see in infinitives) – otherwise known as “simple present tense forms.”

We would not have parallel structure if we did this: I would rather EAT than TO SLEEP. Both are infinitive forms, but not the *same* infinitive forms. For the sentence’s “list” to be parallel, we need them to be the same.

So our original sentence has these as the “list” items:

* “take my time and ace the test” (which, you should notice, is, in itself, parallel!)
* “I would go speeding through it and fail it.”

The first is a **fragment**, the second a **clause**. NOT PARALLEL.

How this might be correctly stated:

* I would rather take my time and ace the test than speed through it and fail it.

[“take” – “speed” – both simple present tense forms = parallel]

**4. Each room is fully carpeted, air conditioned, padded chairs, and a speaker's podium.**

**ANSWER #4: D – parallel structure error**

This is a straightforward list – the easiest kind of parallel structure error to identify and fix. Remember your steps to correcting these problems:

1. Identify that there is a list (yes)
2. Identify how many items are on the list (four, in this sentence)
3. Identify the individual items (“**carpeted**,” “**air conditioned**,” “**chairs**,” “**podium**” – Notice I eliminated the frivolous modifiers to the items, because they play no part in maintaining parallel structure.)
4. Exclude everything not part of the list to check for parallelism

The first and second items on the list are adjectives/adjective phrases; the third and fourth items are both nouns. NOT PARALLEL.

Identify which way would be the easier fix: turning the adjectives/adjective phrases into nouns/noun phrases, or vice versa. Either way is acceptable. (See first corrected version, below).

~OR~

Notice that with 2+2, you can make a list of two and two sub-lists (making each individual item on the main list, a list itself – see second corrected version, below).

How this might be correctly stated:

* Each room has carpet, an air conditioner, padded chairs, and a speaker's podium.
* Each room is fully carpeted and air conditioned, and has padded chairs and a speaker's podium.

Main list: “Each room is (1) and has (2) .”[Note the different verbs are necessary for the different list items.]

* Sublist (1): (adjective) and (adjective)
* Sublist (2): (noun) and (noun)

**5. Several questions were asked by the audience that the presenter could not answer.**

**ANSWER #5: B – passive voice**

Subject: questions

Verb: were asked

Who is doing the asking? The audience. The subject (“questions”) is **NOT** doing the action implied by the verb (asking) so . . . passive voice.

How this might be correctly stated:

* The audience asked several questions which the presenter could not answer.

**6. We asked the store for a discount but they said no.**

**ANSWER #6: A – faulty pronoun reference**

Who is “they”? The store? “Store” is singular; “they” is plural. DOES NOT COMPUTE. The issue of metonymy come up here (look it up!), and that’s okay: We can use “store” to represent “owners of the store” or “workers at the store.” And even though those examples are plural, “store” still is not – and “store” is the **antecedent**. Pronouns must always agree with their antecedents.

How this might be correctly stated:

* We asked the clerk for a discount but he said no. (“he” = pronoun; “clerk” = antecedent; single-single)
* We asked the owners of the store for a discount but they said no. (“they” = pronoun; “owners” = antecedent; plural-plural)

**7. Many people finished their tests within the allotted time, which is typical.**

**ANSWER #7: A – faulty pronoun reference**

“Which” is a pronoun, and (as we just discussed in #6) all pronouns must have an antecedent. But for problem #7, what is the antecedent for “which”? **Antecedents** can only be nouns and pronouns, because those are the only kinds of words pronouns represent. In the main clause of problem #7, there are only three nouns: “people,” “tests,” and “time.” Is “people” typical? Is “tests” typical? Is “time” typical? No to all three questions.

How this might be correctly stated:

* Typically, people finish their tests within the allotted time.
* As is typical, many people finished their tests within the allotted time.

**8. Arriving early has two benefits: finding a close parking space and you can get better seats.**

**ANSWER #8: D – parallel structure error**

Similar to problem #3. You have a list; present all items on the list in the same way.

* Item 1: finding a close parking space [fragment]
* Item 2: you can get better seats [clause]

\* Let’s not forget another problem here: **second person** (“you”). Avoid at all costs.

How this might be correctly stated:

* Arriving early has two benefits: finding a close parking space and getting better seats.

[Note: the two items are now gerund phrases – gerunds plus their modifiers: “finding…” and “getting…”]

**9. In the play it says Lysander will run away with Hermia.**

**ANSWER #9: A – faulty pronoun reference**

What does “it” refer to, the play? Can the play be *within* itself? The answer to both questions is **no**. “It” has no antecedent, but needs one.

How this might be correctly stated:

* In the play, Lysander runs away with Hermia.

**10. Sally said Saturday she needs help.**

**ANSWER: #10: C – squinting modifier**

Squinting modifiers create confusion because they could logically be modifying any of several possible parts of the sentence. In the above example, what is “Saturday” modifying, when Sally ***said*** something or when she ***needs*** the help? Given the placement of “Saturday,” it could be modifying either part, and logic can’t help us figure it out like it can with misplaced or dangling modifiers because “Saturday” makes sense either way. So fixing these we are required to choose randomly one or the other, unless we have a broader context for the sentence – which here we do not.

Notice particularly the **placement** of “Saturday” – right in the middle of the two different items it might modify. The *location* of the modifier is the basis for the confusion.

How this might be correctly stated:

* Saturday, Sally told us she needed help.
* Sally said she needed help this Saturday.

Hopefully this helps a little. If you have questions ask them in class on Monday or Tuesday. Sorry this might read a little like a textbook.