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grammar, style, and proofreading exercises

**The Grammar Dog Guide to
An Occurrence at
Owl Creek Bridge
by Ambrose Bierce**

**All exercises use sentences from the story.
Includes over 230 multiple choice questions.**

About Grammartdog

Grammartdog was founded in 2001 by Mary Jane McKinney, a high school English teacher and dedicated grammarian. She and other experienced English teachers in both high school and college regard grammar and style as the key to unlocking the essence of an author.

Their philosophy, that grammar and literature are best understood when learned together, led to the formation of Grammartdog.com, a means of sharing knowledge about the structure and patterns of language unique to specific authors. These patterns are what make a great book *a great book*. The arduous task of analyzing works for grammar and style has yielded a unique product, guaranteed to enlighten the reader of literary classics.

Grammartdog's strategy is to put the author's words under the microscope. The result yields an increased appreciation of the art of writing and awareness of the importance and power of language.



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AN OCCURRENCE AT OWL CREEK BRIDGE by Ambrose Bierce – Grammar and Style
All exercises use sentences from the story

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EXERCISE 5 COMPLEMENTS

Identify the complements in the following sentences. Label the underlined words:

d.o. = direct object i.o. = indirect object p.n. = predicate nominative
p.a. = predicate adjective o.p. = object of preposition

- ___1. The man's hands were behind his back, the wrists bound with a cord.
- ___2. A rope closely encircled his neck.
- ___3. The other bank of the stream was open ground – a gentle acclivity topped with a stockade of vertical trunks, loopholed for rifles, with a single embrasure through which protruded the muzzle of a brass cannon commanding the bridge.

EXERCISE 6 PHRASES

Identify the phrases in the following sentences. Label the underlined words:

par = participle ger = gerund inf = infinitive appos = appositive prep = preposition

- ___1. A man stood upon a railroad bridge in northern Alabama, looking down into the swift water twenty feet below.
- ___2. What he heard was the ticking of his watch.
- ___3. As these thoughts, which have here to be set down in words, were flashed into the doomed man's brain rather than evolved from it the captain nodded to the sergeant.

EXERCISE 9 STYLE: FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Identify the figurative language in the following sentences. Label the underlined words:

p = personification m = metaphor s = simile o = onomatopoeia h = hyperbole

- ___1. Death is a dignitary who when he comes announced is to be received with formal manifestations of respect, even by those most familiar with him.
- ___2. Striking through the thought of his dear ones was a sound which he could neither ignore nor understand, a sharp, distinct, metallic percussion like the stroke of a blacksmith's hammer upon the anvil.
- ___3. Its recurrence was regular, but as slow as the tolling of a death knell.

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EXERCISE 12

STYLE: ALLUSIONS AND SYMBOLS

Identify the type of allusion used in the following sentences. Label the underlined words:

a. Confederacy b. Union Army c. weapons d. family e. archetypal symbols

- ____ 1. A lieutenant stood at the right of the line, the point of his sword upon the ground, his left hand resting upon his right.
- ____ 2. A piece of dancing driftwood caught his attention and his eyes followed it down the current.
- ____ 3. The water, touched to gold by the early sun, the brooding mists under the banks at some distance down the stream, the fort, the soldiers, the piece of drift – all had distracted him.

EXERCISE 13

STYLE: LITERARY ANALYSIS – SELECTED PASSAGE 1

Read the following passage the first time through for meaning.

He closed his eyes in order to fix his last thoughts upon his wife and children. The water, touched to gold by the early sun, the brooding mists under the banks at some distance down the stream, the fort, the soldiers, the piece of drift – all had distracted him. And now he became conscious of a new disturbance. Striking through the thought of his dear ones was a sound which he could neither ignore nor understand, a sharp, distinct, metallic percussion like the stroke of a blacksmith's hammer upon the anvil; it had the same ringing quality. He wondered what it was, and whether immeasurably distant or near by – it seemed both. Its recurrence was regular, but as slow as the tolling of a death knell. He awaited each stroke with impatience and – he knew not why – apprehension. The intervals of silence grew progressively longer; the delays became maddening. With their greater infrequency the sounds increased in strength and sharpness. They hurt his ear like the thrust of a knife; he feared he would shriek. What he heard was the ticking of his watch. He unclosed his eyes and saw again the water below him. "If I could free my hands," he thought, "I might throw off the noose and spring into the stream. By diving I could evade the bullets and, swimming vigorously, reach the bank, take to the woods and get away home. My home, thank God, is as yet outside their lines; my wife and little ones are still beyond the invader's farthest advance." As these thoughts, which have here to be set down in words, were flashed into the doomed man's brain rather than evolved from it the captain nodded to the sergeant. The sergeant stepped aside.

Read the passage a second time, marking figurative language, sensory imagery, poetic devices, and any other patterns of diction and rhetoric, then answer the questions below.

- 1 He closed his eyes in order to fix his last thoughts upon his wife and children. The water,
- 2 touched to gold by the early sun, the brooding mists under the banks at some distance down
- 3 the stream, the fort, the soldiers, the piece of drift – all had distracted him. And now he became
- 4 conscious of a new disturbance. Striking through the thought of his dear ones was a sound which he
- 5 could neither ignore nor understand, a sharp, distinct, metallic percussion like the stroke of a blacksmith's

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6 hammer upon the anvil; it had the same ringing quality. He wondered what it was, and whether
7 immeasurably distant or near by – it seemed both. Its recurrence was regular, but as slow as the
8 tolling of a death knell. He awaited each stroke with impatience and – he knew not why – apprehension.
9 The intervals of silence grew progressively longer; the delays became maddening. With their greater
10 infrequency the sounds increased in strength and sharpness. They hurt his ear like the thrust of a knife;
11 he feared he would shriek. What he heard was the ticking of his watch.
12 He unclosed his eyes and saw again the water below him. “If I could free my hands,” he thought, “I
13 might throw off the noose and spring into the stream. By diving I could evade the bullets and,
14 swimming vigorously, reach the bank, take to the woods and get away home. My home, thank God,
15 is as yet outside their lines; my wife and little ones are still beyond the invader’s farthest advance.”
16 As these thoughts, which have here to be set down in words, were flashed into the doomed man’s brain
17 rather than evolved from it the captain nodded to the sergeant. The sergeant stepped aside.

- ___ 1. Line 2 contains an example of . . .
a. metaphor b. simile c. personification d. hyperbole
- ___ 2. ALL of the following words are part of the pattern of repetition EXCEPT . . .
a. maddening b. water c. stroke d. eyes
- ___ 3. ALL of the following devices contribute to the tone EXCEPT . . .
a. figurative language b. sensory imagery c. dialogue d. repetition