A Diagnostic Self-Assessment

I. Usage, Word Choice, and Structure: What’s Wrong with This Sentence?
Mark the error in each of the following sentences and be prepared to explain how you would correct it. If the sentence is correct, leave it.

1. Less and less students are learning English grammar in high school.
2. As the principal participant in Dr. Kline’s study, Calvin was in a very unique position to predict its results.
3. According to the students’ survey questionnaires, the amount of studying they did barely effected their test performances.
4. Though Sam cannot remember in which book he found the statistics in, he claims his numbers are accurate.
6. The reason Franklin declined our offer is because he recently received a better offer from another firm.
7. The Republican senators have effected a change in their leadership.
8. Mrs. Dahlyrymeple was horrified to discover that her butler had served the pate de foie gras to the guests on paper plates.
9. Company policy prohibits smoking, which many employees resent.
10. Having already completed the coursework for my major and my minor, my advisor is going to help me choose my electives.
11. We have no doubt about Patricia’s care and interest in the proposal.
12. The psychic predicted last Saturday the world would end.

II. Grammar: Pronoun Proficiency
In each sentence below, choose the correct pronoun.

1. People (that/which/who/whom) talk during movies and concerts annoy me.
2. I cannot imagine anyone (who/whom) would object to your proposal.
3. Most of the work (that/which) is done in our lab is funded by the government.
4. Neither of the women had (her/their) project ready by the deadline.
5. Some people believe the groundhog, (that/which) is nothing but a common rodent, can predict the date of spring’s arrival.
6. Just between you and (I/me), I think most celebrities are unhappy.
7. The mayor asked Alice and (she/her) to plan the annual craft show.
8. (We/us) bargain shoppers look for coupons and store sales to get the most for our money.

9. I had never met Elizabeth before, but as soon as I heard her voice I knew it was (her/she).

10. Richard Cory was a man (who/whom) we all admired.

III. Grammar: Subject-Verb Agreement
Choose the right verb for the sentence.

1. Both John and his twin (is/are) planning to attend the reunion.

2. My sister, along with my mother, (plans/plan) to tour England.

3. Inside the secret panel of the closet (was/were) several old documents.

4. Either the newspaper or the magazines (has/have) the information you will need.

5. My daughter’s favorite food (is/are) peanut butter sandwiches.

6. Everyone in Dr. Brown’s biology classes (visits/visit) the lab twice each week.

7. Seventy-five dollars (is/are) too much to spend on that dress.

8. The number of five-year-olds who can read (is/are) higher than you’d think.

9. A number of five-year-olds (has/have) visited a zoo.

IV. Definitions: Name That Part of Speech
In each sentence below, identify the part of speech underlined (e.g. noun, verb, adjective, adverb, pronoun, etc.) and be prepared to define it (e.g. “A noun is a person, place or thing.”).

1. Duty made the police officer large and important.

2. Traffic roared past Florence and stirred the leaves in her path.

3. Alone and undaunted, Abby danced her way across the crowded dance floor.

4. Dancing presents a daunting challenge to those with no ear for music or rhythm.

5. Dancing presents a daunting challenge to people with no ear for music or rhythm.

6. Little Bernard inserted the dime and opened the box, yanking out a Herald from the spring contraption that held it tightly in its metal grip.

7. Jacob was understandably perplexed by his parents’ reaction to the news.

8. It was brillig, and the slithy toves did gyre and gimble in the wabe.
V. Definitions: Subjects & Predicates, the Principal Sentence Parts
Mark the subject of each sentence with an “S” and the predicate of each sentence with a “P.”

1. Friendship is Love without his wings. (Lord Byron)
2. One pill makes you taller, and one pill makes you small. (Grace Slick)
3. Some of us are becoming the men we wanted to marry. (Gloria Steinem)
4. To achieve harmony in bad taste is the height of elegance. (Jean Genet)
5. Although the villagers had forgotten most of the ritual, they remembered to use stones. (adapted from Shirley Jackson)
6. An inch of white ash tipped the end of his brown cigar. (Richard Wright)
7. In later years, holding forth to an interviewer or to an audience of aging fans at a comic book convention, Sam Clay liked to declare, apropos of his and Joe Kavalier’s greatest creation, that back when he was a boy, sealed and hog-tied inside the airtight vessel know as Brooklyn, New York, he had been haunted by dreams of Harry Houdini. (Michael Chabon)
8. It was brillig, and the slithy toves did gyre and gimble in the wabe. (Lewis Carroll)

VI. Definitions: Name That Sentence Part
In each sentence below, identify the sentence part underlined (e.g. subject, verb, direct object, indirect object, complement, etc.) and be prepared to define it (e.g. “The subject is the main agent of the sentence.”)

1. Peyton closed his eyes and thought about his wife and children.
2. Traffic roared past Florence and stirred the leaves in her path.
3. Dancing offers excellent exercise to all ages.
4. Dancing offers people with no ear for music or rhythm a daunting challenge.
5. The arrangement appeared simple and effective.
6. Thoughts of his wife and children made Peyton weary.

VII. Grammar: When Is a Sentence a Sentence?
Identify each word group below as a sentence, fragment, or run-on (comma splice).

1. Although time often erases bad memories, my ex-girlfriend never forgets anything, she even remembers things that happened five years ago.
2. Although he had been an often-decorated soldier during World War II and had fought many battles for the losing cause of liberalism in Congress.
3. Professor Pepin spends a lot of time translating medieval texts on ancient medicine, however, he also stays informed about the latest developments in modern asthma treatments.

4. Having prepared himself well for the realtor exams and having exhausted everyone in the family with his requests that someone help him with the true-and-false drills, Jeffrey, who had never been a particularly good student in high school, knew he was ready to take on the greatest challenge of his life.

VIII. Punctuation: That Pesky Apostrophe
Correct each incorrect sentence below. If an apostrophe’s missing, put it in. If an extra apostrophe appears, cross it out. If the apostrophe is misplaced, move it. Note: A sentence may contain more than one error.

1. Those mangy dogs over there are my brothers.
2. The poor dogs’ owner was fined for neglecting them.
3. Though its now named for the avenue on which its located, the diner is sometimes still referred to by its old name, Sam and Ellas.
4. Carla’s and Daphne’s husbands squirmed in their chairs as the two wives approached.
5. My mother’s and father’s twenty-fifth wedding anniversary meant a month’s worth of planning for my siblings and me.

IX. Punctuation: Commas, Semicolons, and Colons
Insert commas, semicolons, and colons where needed in the following sentences.

1. Tom the owner of Skip’s Septic Service said he would be here tomorrow however there’s always a chance he won’t be able to come especially if it rains.

2. Aunt Petunia hurled herself onto the ground beside Dudley seized the end of his swollen tongue and attempted to wrench it out of his mouth unsurprisingly Dudley yelled and sputtered worse than ever trying to fight her off.
   (from J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire)

3. I will buy the following at the store tahini tomatoes and orange juice.

4. My husband Chris is learning to make his own pasta.

5. But far from being reassured the Dursleys became more panic-stricken Aunt Petunia was sobbing hysterically tugging Dudley’s tongue as though determined to rip it out Dudley appeared to be suffocating under the combined pressure of his mother and his tongue and Uncle Vernon who had lost control completely seized a china figure from on top of the sideboard and threw it very hard at Mr Weasley who ducked causing the ornament to shatter in the blasted fireplace.
   (from J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire)