DEPARTMENT OF MASS COMMUNICATIONS  
DIAGNOSTIC EXAM STUDY GUIDE

Below is a sampling of things with which you should be familiar if you wish to do well on the Department of Mass Communications diagnostic examination. While this study guide is not intended to be exhaustive, it gives a good idea of many of the basic things over which you will be tested.

**Spelling:** Common words (e.g., prejudice, cemetery, unnecessary, neighbor, occurred, accidentally, forty, embarrass) – nothing too obscure or seldom-used.

**Vocabulary:** Also common words (e.g., mundane, pompous, foil, idyllic) – match them with a synonym.

**Grammar, punctuation, word choice:**
- noun/pronoun agreement: they vs. he/she/it; their vs. his/her/its
- subject-verb agreement: is/are; was/were; has/have
- try to/try and
- affect/effect
- lie/lay
- less/fewer than
- it’s/its
- that/which
- on/onto (and in/into)
- to/too/two
- they’re/their/there
- compared with/compared to,
- who/whom and whoever/whomever and whose/who’s
- I/me and he/him and she/her (e.g., “If it were up to Jana and I, we would cancel the party.”)
- comma splices (sometimes called comma faults or run-on sentences)
- commas with appositives and with essential/non-essential (restrictive/non-restrictive) clauses/phrases
- commas separating independent (but not dependent) clauses joined by a conjunction (such as and, but): “He loves baseball, and he never misses a game” vs. “He loves baseball and never misses a game.”
- sentence fragments
- redundancies (e.g., **mandatory required courses:** widower man)
- dangling modifiers
- compound adjectives (hyphenation: e.g., need hyphen in “rat-infested house” but not in “boring biology lecture”)
- possessives (e.g., women’s, not womens’: “Bill’s and Betty’s bicycles were stolen” vs. “Bill and Betty’s house caught fire” (individual vs. joint possession))
- neither/nor and either/or with number of verb (singular vs. plural)
- none usually means “not a single one,” and so it almost always takes a singular verb, as in “None of the stores sells (vs. sell) that item.”

**STUDY RESOURCES:** Strunk and White’s *Elements of Style*; Kessler and McDonald’s *When Words Collide*; Brooks and Pinson’s *Working with Words*; Callinan’s *Grammar for Journalists*; Wykoff and Shaw’s *Harper Handbook of College Composition*; Leggett, Mead and Kramer’s *Handbook for Writers* or just about any other basic grammar text.

*Exam takes approximately 50 minutes.*