Righting Writing  A SELF-VIOLATING GUIDE

A1. Don’t use no double negatives.
A2. Make each pronoun agree with their antecedent.
A3. When dangling, you should avoid participles and dependent clauses.
A4. Don’t use commas, which aren’t necessary. (A4*. However some may be needed.)
A5. Verbs has to agree numerically with their subjects.
A6. About those sentence fragments.
A7. Try to never split infinitives.
A8. Its important to give the apostrophe it’s proper use.
A9. Always proofread carefully to see you any words out.
A10. Avoid mispellings, especially the names of authors.

The above ten self-referential antirules are due (with slight revisions) to Harold Evans, editor of the London Sunday Times (A4* being my addition). I have doubts about the universality of #’s 2, 6 and 7: To be explicit, a counterexample or two. It seems draconian to completely repudiate all split infinitives. And isn’t it acceptable to talk of someone’s having a problem with their pronouns? [In speech, yes: in writing, no. Avoiding violations of Antirule 2 is difficult in English: “one’s pronouns” seems pedantic, “his pronouns” sexist, and “his/her pronouns” cumbersome. One solution is to surprise your reader with a “her” when she’s expecting a “his”. But perhaps the best solution is to use the plural form throughout wherever you can: thus people have no problem with their pronouns.] Otherwise, though, these antirules seem sound and should always be observed. Here are some more I have composed in the same vein (lately modified with some debt to William Saffire):

A11. Weed out mixed metaphors, those rotten apples of language.
A12. Try to avoid redundant expressions that don’t add anything.
A13. Only ditherers or indecisive people clutter sentences with useless alternatives or variants.
A14. It is somewhat contradictory to qualify absolute terms.
A15. Nuke bumper-sticker prose!
A16. Distinct thoughts need distinct sentences, however you should avoid joining them this way too.
A17. Pronouns should be as close as possible, especially in sentences of, say, ten or more words, to their antecedents.
A18. People never use ‘as’ or ‘as if’, like there’s something wrong with them?
A19. Another problem is why do people think a question is a statement of a problem.
A20. The mood of each sentence should be consistent, and don’t suddenly switch to the imperative half way through.
A21. Make sure your tenses agreed when you are writing about the past.
•  Lastly, if your spelling is bad, please use a computer spelling checker. But
A22. Bare in mind that a spelling checker wont catch mistakes like the fore hear!
I shall use the numbers of these antirules to draw your attention to mistakes in your own papers. Thus the following sentence:

“According to Descartes's methodology, a physicist should experiment and make use of hypotheses to prove their theories.”

would evince notations such as A8!, A2!

A Righting Test

The following are all taken from student papers. See if you can identify which of the previous antirules each one transgresses (often more than one!), and rewrite each sentence to make its meaning clearer.

Hall of Infamy

1. Plato's *Timaeus*, is a work art that describes Plato's view of the creation of the universe.
2. Many of the early philosophers believed that one of these four elements were necessary for life.
3. Astrology has outlived the boundaries of what it can explain.
4. They could take away a man's intelligence and leave them stupid.
5. Bayle contends that if the soul is a simple indivisible substance, then how can Leibniz compare it to a clock?
6. The hypothesis being that if cells and tissues had electro-chemical properties then tiny electric currents might act as control signals.
7. While revolving concentrically, the Pythagoreans believed the planets produced musical harmonies together in the surrounding air.
8. Henri Poincaré all of a sudden got the answer he was looking for in his study of fuchsion functions, it was while he was stepping on a bus during a geology outing.
9. But, as Feyerabend points out, these two concepts are somewhat contradictory.
10. This sets him apart from his earlier predecessors who, if they did believe it was created for some reason, did not sight a divine being for this logical reason.
11. Whose to say that our waking thoughts are any more veritable?
12. If the earth moved, the air would be striped from the surface of the globe.
13. Socrates in defending himself knocks other people and imitates them.
14. He is omnipresent and perceives things through his actual presence, like the mind of a man is present to pictures formed in his brain.
15. Diodorus Cronus believed in atomic jerks like Aristotle.

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