

## LOOKING AT YOURSELF AS A WRITER

### *The comma and unnecessary commas*

It is not necessary to learn all of the comma rules in P1 and P2; just know where to find them. If commas cause you a great deal of difficulty, however, you may want to consider possible causes and cures of your problems.

**CAUSE** You insert a comma whenever you take a breath.

**CURE** The “breath” method is too unreliable; learn to punctuate by the rules instead.

**CAUSE** You oversimplify the rules by focusing on words. For example, because a comma goes before *and* some of the time, you conclude that it belongs before *and* all of the time.

**CURE** Make a conscious effort to unlearn oversimplified rules. If the word *and* gives you problems, for example, consult P1-a and P2-a to see whether you need the comma.

**CAUSE** Two of the most important comma rules (P1-a and P1-b) refer to two different kinds of clauses—independent and subordinate—and you’ve never really understood clauses.

**CURE** You can probably grasp the rules by focusing on the examples in P1-a and P1-b, together with the brief definitions of clauses that are given in those sections. If not, turn to B3-e and B4-a for a quick review of clauses.

**CAUSE** You are confused about the difference between restrictive and nonrestrictive word groups (P1-e and P2-e).

**CURE** You are not alone. Most writers find this distinction tricky because it requires us to think carefully about our intended meaning. When in doubt, ask two or three “test readers” to tell you how the presence or absence of commas affects your meaning.