Be your own editor: Make it right

Part A  Say what you mean, mean what you say

Poor:  Hanging around the house all day, my room felt like a prison.
Your room was “hanging around the house”? Where does it generally spend its time? And your room can “feel”? Well, now! The proper term for such a lack of clarity is ambiguity. This means you could take a word or statement more than one way. You can only guess or assume you know what the person really means.

Better: After hanging around the house all day, I felt my room was like a prison.

Directions:
Read the following statements and determine why each sentence is ambiguous. Then, write a new version that eliminates such ambiguity.

1. Mr. Theodore Kendricks, board president, suggested changes in staging the rally that the committee did not approve.

2. The originators of the campaign stress the fact that dropping out of school causes many kinds of future losses by providing a video on the topic.

3. Potential dropouts often refuse to listen to parents and teachers, and the video promises to help them.

4. It was Principal Kevin Claypoole who announced that Head basketball Coach Andy Wilcox had submitted his resignation yesterday at an emotional pep rally in the gym.

5. Facing the need to choose a college, a big problem is finding the time and money to visit those that seem promising.

Part B Choose the right word

The spell check won’t help you choose between two words that sound similar or alike but have different spellings and meanings. Your only hopes: turn to the dictionary, ask someone who knows or choose another word.

Read the following sentences, then choose the correct word form the pair written in parentheses. You may need to consult the dictionary – and some errors result from a reporter’s creatively hopeful attempt at spelling.

1. The committee rejected several comedies because they considered the dialogue too (risky, risqué) for a school play.
2. Students’ complaints that they received a plethora of homework need not be taken seriously, the speaker said.

3. The track team ended its season by proving the truth of their motto: No team is too powerful for the Blazers to beat.

4. Incoming freshmen find it hard to accept the fact that their high school record seriously affects their future.

5. This year, the USB has all its plans in sync.

6. Not many students can claim to be a real-life heroine but Anne Zellers deserves the honor.

7. Most teens belong to some kind of clique or group.