

**Unit of Work for**

**Alex Jackson:**

**SWA**

By Pat Flynn

## Introduction

Welcome back to the world of Alex Jackson. A world created for young readers to laugh and learn as they enter via their imagination, a place where both boys and girls are welcome. And, of course, their teachers! This unit of work has been written to help teachers provide students with positive reading and learning experiences.

The unit is divided into 5 sections. Chapters 1-6, 7-12, 13-17, 18-22 and 23-27. Each section has a listening comprehension quiz, two-level chapter questions, a 10-word spelling list, fill-in-the-blanks vocabulary and a language lesson. At the end of the unit are suggested major activities and an answer section.

The language sections cover: dash and the hyphen; it's, its, you're, your; sentence fragments; past, present and future tense; point of view. The major activities include a book review, graffiti 'tag', diary entry and role-play.

This unit of work is published both in hard copy and on the internet at [www.patflynnwriter.com](http://www.patflynnwriter.com). The hard copy can be ordered through Penguin, or by phoning University of Queensland Press Sales at 07 33652440, or fax—07 33651988. This version includes an answer section at the back. The teacher section will be updated on the website, so keep an eye out for improvements and add-ons.

Parts of this unit are interactive, including writing a book review to the author. To obtain a reply make sure students write "review" in the subject of the email. The email address is [author@patflynnwriter.com](mailto:author@patflynnwriter.com). If students don't have access to the net and would like to send letters, please include stamped addressed envelopes to Pat Flynn C/O UQP, PO Box 6042, St Lucia, QLD, 4067.

Thank you for entering Alex's world. I hope you enjoy reading and teaching about his journey and that this unit of work makes learning enjoyable for both students and teachers.

## Themes

Alex Jackson: SWA continues the journey of **self-discovery** Alex is taking on the road from boyhood to manhood. Coming into his middle teens he is at his most vulnerable to **peer influence** – and as his parents are preoccupied over whether or not to move out of lower-class Beeton, and role-model Casey is away skating – Alex listens to his peers more than he should. The portrayal of the SWA gang parodies the rebellious attitude carefully constructed by some within and outside of the skateboarding/music industry. The gang willingly fights against **authority**, though what they actually stand for as a group is unclear. What they offer Alex is fun, excitement and support, and it takes both negative consequences and advice from his parents for Alex to realise this lifestyle isn't for him.

Alex also encounters **homophobia**, with many boys calling John 'gay' simply because he is different. The power of this label amongst teenage boys should not be underestimated, something Alex realizes when he is called a 'homo' by Sarah. It is a big step for Alex and Jimmy to see John for the person he is, not for the pariah he has become.

In Grommet, Alex had his first heady experience of love, now he begins to experience **romantic relationships** for the complicated entities that they are (especially with Becky overseas most of the book!). Alex is attracted to Kim Lim for obvious reasons – she is independent, a talented artist, and of course, she skates. However, she is incapable of true intimacy, keeping those who are close to her at arm's length. At the same time Becky is seemingly wavering in her commitment to Alex, and he has to deal with the possibility that important relationships can and do sometimes end.

Other minor themes include: the **rich/poor divide** and the effects this has on certain neighbourhoods, **parenting** and **one-parent families**, **cigarettes and alcohol**, and **teen parties**.

## CHAPTERS 1-6

### Taking Notice. Listening Comprehension—Quiz 1

1. Who was hiding while Alex was skateboarding at Beeton Skatebowl in Chapter 1?
  - a. Casey Marshall
  - b. Jimmy Homan
  - c. Sam Jackson
  - d. Becky Tonella
  
2. According to Becky Tonella, in Italy the heads of saints are kept in: (p.7)
  - a. Museums
  - b. Jars
  - c. Coffins
  - d. Churches
  
3. Sharon Jackson had a piece of jewellery stolen. It was a: (p.13)
  - a. White diamond bracelet
  - b. White diamond necklace
  - c. White diamond ring
  - d. Black Opal ring
  
4. At the school assembly, a year 10 boy yelled out: (p.22)
  - a. I HATE SCHOOL!
  - b. GET LOST, PIG!
  - c. GO HOME, PIG!
  - d. I'M GUILTY. ARREST ME!
  
5. Casey Marshall told Alex he was leaving Beeton to travel to: (p.30)
  - a. USA
  - b. Japan
  - c. Europe
  - d. Melbourne

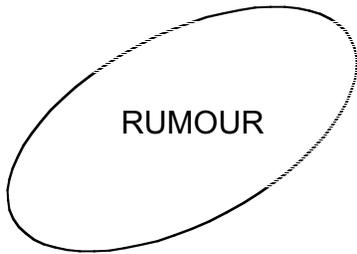


## Chapters 1-6

### Spelling

When we first learnt how to spell it was often helpful to sound out words. MAT. M—A—T. However, as words get more difficult, sounding out doesn't always help. For example, school could be spelt skool, liquid could be lickwud, etc. Fortunately, our brains are incredible computers, and after seeing a word a few times it can usually remember how to spell it. Successful spellers are very good at having a picture of the whole word in their head, rather than simply trying to sound the word out. They will then write it down and see if it looks right on paper. One way to practise this is to imagine the word in your head written across your favourite skateboard, bicycle, T-shirt, etc. This helps you to remember it better.

**Exercise:** There are 5 lists of 10 words from the book in this unit. For words you aren't sure of, imagine them written across something you know well, perhaps as a sticker. Make sure you can see the word clearly in your head. One way to test this is to close your eyes and spell the word backwards, as well as forwards.



**Chapters 1-6****Spelling****List 1**

commitment  
awkward  
miniature  
environment  
labelled  
receive  
graffiti  
dichotomy  
embarrassing  
sequel

**Vocabulary**

Place the correct words from List 1 into the following sentences.

1. There were no longer any girls who kissed him on the mouth while waiting for the train, then took off to Italy before there could be a \_\_\_\_\_ .  
(Chapter 1)
2. Alex thought about buying Becky a \_\_\_\_\_ skateboard but he ended up getting her a necklace. (Chapter 2)
3. “\_\_\_\_\_ is the key,” said Casey. “I’ve seen fear hurt a lot of people.” (Chapter 1)
4. Alex heard his mum say something about “growing up in a safe \_\_\_\_\_”, and Chief reply with “we’re as safe as houses”.  
(Chapter 3)
5. “Oh , by the way,” said Mr Graham, “\_\_\_\_\_ means to split in two.” (Chapter 4)

## Chapters 1-6

### Language Lessons — Its It's, Your, You're

Some words sound the same but have different meanings. Two examples that can be confusing are: **its**, **it's** and **your**, **you're**. **Its** is a possessive pronoun, which means it shows ownership by something that is not a male or female.

- The skateboard was getting old. **Its** griptape had almost completely peeled off.
- The shoe had lost **its** sole.

**It's** means it is.

- **It's** important that Jimmy sorts out his girl problems sooner rather than later.

**Your** is the possessive form of you, which means it represents ownership by a male or female.

- "Take **your** sweaty singlet out of the bedroom," Sharon told Chief.
- It's **your** life. Make the most of it.

**You're** means you are.

- "You're not to skate around Beeton alone, Alex," said Sharon.

One reason these two examples are confusing is that apostrophes often represent ownership (eg, Alex's skateboard). However, in these cases, the words without the apostrophe— **its** and **your**— represent ownership, while **it's** and **you're** simply mean it is and you are.

### Exercise

Place the correct **its**, **it's** into the following sentences

- 📖 "( ) not like your dad killed anyone," Alex said to Becky.
- 📖 "( ) irreplaceable," said Sharon after her white diamond bracelet was stolen.
- 📖 "I want you to look up the word dictum and write out ( ) meaning one hundred times," said Mr Graham.
- 📖 Casey's rustbucket of a car was on ( ) last legs. The tyres were shot and ( ) engine made funny noises.

### Exercise

Place the correct **your**, **you're** into the following sentences

- "( ) funny," said Alex. "Turn the camera off now."  
"Not yet," said Casey. "I just want to see ( ) reaction."
- Mr Graham said to design ( ) own radio program and present it to the class.
- "( ) kidding!" replied Zane Beard.
- "As a member of ( ) local police force, I am glad to be able to address you at school assembly," said Senior Sergeant Doyle.

## Chapters 7-12

### Taking Notice. Listening Comprehension—Quiz 2

1. Joining Alex in English to prepare a group presentation on Skateboarding were: (p.34)
  - a. Jimmy Homan and John Carson-Zanger
  - b. Jimmy Homan and Peter Callaghan
  - c. Peter Callaghan and Adrian Dorry
  - d. Sarah Sceney and Billy Johnstone
  
2. Alex asked his mum if the family was sponsored by: (p.37)
  - a. Palmolive
  - b. Bonds
  - c. No Frills
  - d. Toyota
  
3. Steve told Alex that Casey Marshall used to be best friends with his brother. Steve's brother's name is: (p.48)
  - a. George
  - b. Zane
  - c. Nugget
  - d. Ryan
  
4. Sarah told Alex that Becky had another boyfriend in Italy. His name is: (p.57)
  - a. Stefano
  - b. Roberto
  - c. Carlo
  - d. Jack
  
5. In Chapter 12, Sam and Mandy were getting ready to go to a party. Whose party was it? (p.61)
  - a. Emma Barney's
  - b. Nicole Casella's
  - c. Megan Bell's
  - d. Paul Penissi's



**Chapters 7-12****Spelling****List 2**

silhouette  
bass  
whisked  
assembly  
weird  
impromptu  
tempted  
recommend  
assessment,  
liquid

**Vocabulary**

Place the correct words from List 2 into the following sentences.

1. It didn't \_\_\_\_\_ against skating in these places, but instead told you what to do if the police nabbed you. (Chapter 7)
2. "Our major piece of \_\_\_\_\_ will be a small-group presentation on the attitude of skateboarders," Mr Graham said. (Chapter 7)
3. He heard footsteps down the hall and saw his dad's \_\_\_\_\_ in the bedroom doorway. (Chapter 8)
4. Alex and Jimmy grabbed an arm each and \_\_\_\_\_ John out of the room. (Chapter 9)
5. In primary school he'd spent most of his time trying to avoid her, but with the phone calls, notes, letters, rehearsed and \_\_\_\_\_ speeches – all about him, all about love – it wasn't easy. (Chapter 11)

## Chapters 7-12

### Language Lessons— Dash and the Hyphen

The **dash** is longer than the hyphen (— -) and is used to further explain a point.

- ☞ Sarah took it out on her mum — an older looking version of Sarah, glasses and all.
- ☞ Casey was doing scary stuff on the vert lately — he'd even landed a 540 rocket grab.

A pair of dashes can also be used within a sentence.

- ☞ Alex had spent his primary school years trying to avoid Sarah, but with her notes, letters and poems — all about him, all about love — it wasn't easy.
- ☞ Casey was heading to Europe — a heaven for pro skateboarders — next week.

Note that the dash in this instance signals a stronger change of thought than a comma, and is usually a better option than brackets. Usually there is a space before and after the dash.

**Hyphens** - are joiners. They usually form a single idea from 2 or 3 words.

- ☞ Chief was a well-known fighter in his day.
- ☞ Sam is a happy-go-lucky sort of person.
- ☞ He fifty-fiftied the library stairs.
- ☞ The 19-year-old Casey is a sick skateboarder. (Age is one of the most common uses for hyphens.)
- ☞ He came from a working-class area called Beeton.

Note that many words that are hyphenated before the noun don't need to be hyphenated after the noun. They are hyphenated before the noun to avoid confusion.

- ☞ **The team scored a first half goal...** is confusing.
- ☞ So we write, **The team scored a first-half goal.**
- ☞ But it is okay to write, **The team scored a goal in the first half.**

**Exercise: Write out the sentence, placing either a dash or a hyphen where needed.**

1. Jimmy bought Sarah a 12 month subscription to *Science and Nature* online magazine.
2. The video was impressive for a production with a budget of \$30 with slow motion, fades, fast music and lots of sick tricks.
3. Casey zoomed in for a close up of Alex.
4. After the radio program which Alex and Jimmy scored a B+ for the class studied skateboarding.
5. John Carson Zanger originally from Romania is an expert in rap music.
6. Fourteen year old Claire kissed Jordie at Emma's party. He was 18 years old.

## Chapters 13-17

### Taking Notice. Listening Comprehension—Quiz 3

1. Who wrote “SWA” on the wall of the AV room in the library? (p.73)
  - a. Steve
  - b. Cookie
  - c. Kim
  - d. Goof
  
2. Alex could think of only one way to convince his mum to let him go skateboarding Friday night with the SWA gang. He’d: (p.77)
  - a. Lie
  - b. Promise her he’d be responsible
  - c. Help her with the gardening
  - d. Tell her he really, really wanted to go
  
3. How many steps did Alex ollie down at the courthouse? (p.83)
  - a. 10
  - b. 12
  - c. 15
  - d. 18
  
4. Jimmy told Alex that he wouldn’t mind being this person for a day. (p.86)
  - a. Alex Jackson
  - b. Billy Johnstone
  - c. Sarah Sceney
  - d. The Rock
  
5. Becky Tonella was going to watch Casey Marshall skate in the Italian city of: (p.89)
  - a. Milan
  - b. Rome
  - c. Venice
  - d. Trieste



**Chapters 13-17****Spelling****List 3**

panicking  
genetically  
frequencies  
immature  
schedule  
swaggered  
succumbing  
flattened  
eerily  
mattress

**Vocabulary**

Place the correct words from List 3 in the following sentences.

1. Slowly Billy \_\_\_\_\_ away, his shoulders pulled back and his cereal-box chest puffed up. (Chapter 13)
2. Alex knew he was \_\_\_\_\_ to peer pressure, but he thought, what the heck. (Chapter 13)
3. A red light flickered \_\_\_\_\_ above the front door. (Chapter 15)
4. "They can't prove it was you," said Jimmy. "Not unless they took a hair or something and \_\_\_\_\_ matched it to yours." (Chapter 16)
5. "Have you met any Year 7 boys lately?" said Sam. "They are so \_\_\_\_\_." (Chapter 17)

## Chapters 13-17

### Language Lessons – When a Sentence is not a Sentence Sentence Fragments

A sentence should contain a complete thought or idea. It starts with a capital letter and ends with a full stop, question mark or exclamation mark. Sentences that are incomplete are known as sentence fragments.

- ☞ Because Alex skates.
- ☞ Emma, the girl who had a big party.

To stop writing sentence fragments make sure the idea in the sentence is complete.

- ☞ Because Alex skates he has scars on his elbows and knees.
- ☞ Emma was the girl who had a big party.
- ☞ Emma, the girl who had a big party, got into lots of trouble when her parents arrived home.

### Exercise

Rewrite the following sentences so they form complete thoughts.

1. Alex found it hard to fully enjoy the video as he was. Very nervous about getting caught by Mr Yates.
2. Gently pushing and prodding, the doctor waited for Jimmy to relax then quickly. He snapped the nose into place.
3. Adrian Dorry said Billy Johnstone was let off with a warning seeing as witnesses told. What they told Letch was that Billy had been provoked by. It was Jimmy who provoked him.
4. There lips met and she tasted. Different, more exciting, somehow. She felt different. This was because it was another girl he was dreaming.
5. At 9 o'clock Jimmy was still dead to the world so Alex. He left and bought himself a packet of Twisties on the way. He arrived at the library.

Note that sometimes writing sentence fragments is appropriate, particularly when using direct speech. This is because many spoken sentences are fragments. In the following conversation there is only one complete sentence. Which one is it?

“We had to chuck rocks until he let Steve go,” said Kim.

“At the dog?” asked Alex.

“Nah. The owner.”

## Chapters 18-22

### Taking Notice. Listening Comprehension—Quiz 4

1. What grade did Sarah Sceney receive for her oral presentation on William Shakespeare? (p.102)
  - a. A+
  - b. A
  - c. A-
  - d. D+
  
2. What type of warm jacket did Chief intend on taking to Russia? (p.105)
  - a. His 80s leather jacket
  - b. His 70s safari suit jacket
  - c. His driza-bone coat
  - d. He didn't need a jacket as it was summer in Russia
  
3. What does SWA stand for? (p.107)
  - a. Students who Want Acceptance
  - b. Satan Worshippers' Association
  - c. Skateboarders With Attitude
  - d. Skateboarders With Air-time
  
4. In the **first** part of Alex's initiation into SWA, he had to: (p.114)
  - a. Boardslide the courthouse stairs
  - b. 50-50 grind the library stairs
  - c. Ollie the courthouse stairs
  - d. Let the air out of the tyres of a police car
  
5. When the policewoman asked Steve his name he said he was: (p.120)
  - a. Tony Hawk
  - b. Steve McTeigue
  - c. Ned Flanders
  - d. Ben Dover



**Chapters 18-22****Spelling****List 4**

accidentally  
initiation  
bitumen  
baggy  
scary  
signal  
raving,  
amateur  
obscene  
occasions

**Vocabulary**

Place the correct words from List 4 into the following sentences:

1. On Monday Chief dropped Alex off at school, \_\_\_\_\_ about Ben's fight.
2. Ben knocked the guy out with a left hook "as good as any punch I've seen by an \_\_\_\_\_," he said. (Chapter 18)
3. In the video there were \_\_\_\_\_ language, gestures and music. (Chapter 18)
4. The courthouse is where Alex is having his \_\_\_\_\_ into the gang, SWA. (Chapter 20)
5. Steve ran up the steps and flicked his \_\_\_\_\_ shirt up by the shoulders. (Chapter 20)
6. Alex took a closer look. The painting was both beautiful and \_\_\_\_\_ at the same time. (Chapter 21)

## Chapters 18-22

### Language— Yesterday, Today or Tomorrow? Past, Present and Future Tense

In a piece of writing it is important that the reader knows **when** the events took or are taking place – in the past, present or future.

- Alex jumped on his board and cruised down to the Beeton Skatebowl. (past)
- Alex jumps on his board and cruises down to the Beeton Skatebowl. (present)
- Tomorrow, Alex will jump on his board and cruise to the Beeton Skatebowl. (future)

Most writing is done in the past tense (because the events usually have already happened) but tenses may change according to the event being described. Accidental tense changes can be distracting to the reader.

- Alex jumps on his board and cruised to the Beeton Skatebowl.

### Exercise

Change the following passage into past tense

- They take off at 5 and go down the shops, starting on a five-stair behind Red Rooster. It is a nice-sized ollie and there are soft bags of rubbish just past the landing zone. Kim needs them, crashing big-time when she tries to kickflip the steps. Steve nails a sweet hardflip, and Alex lands sketchy on a backside 180.

Change the following passage into present tense

- Alex did a 180 frontside flip down the first three stairs and then nollied the second three. He looked up but none of the guys saw it. Kim did, though, and she blew him a kiss.

The following passage has accidental tense changes. Rewrite the key verbs out twice, once in past tense and once in present tense. There should be two lists of **eight** verbs, one list under Past Tense and one list under Present Tense.

- After school Alex rides to Kim's house and watched a skating video while the Year 10s share a coke and a smoke. Kim's mum came in with a plate of lamingtons and the boys gobble them up like poker machines. Alex finds the way Kim and her mum talked to each other strange. It is like they were sisters, not mother and daughter.

## Chapters 23-27

### Taking Notice. Listening Comprehension—Quiz 5

1. Alex's parents found out he wasn't at Jimmy's place after: (p.130)
  - a. Sam told them
  - b. Letch called
  - c. Jimmy told his mum that he was worried about Alex
  - d. Casey Marshall rang from Italy
  
2. Chief asked the family if they wanted to move out of Beeton. Sam wanted to move to: (p.138)
  - a. The mountains
  - b. Italy
  - c. The beach
  - d. Sydney
  
3. Sarah Sceney told Billy he had the intelligence of: (p.146)
  - a. An ant
  - b. An amoeba
  - c. A baby
  - d. Shakespeare
  
4. In Chapter 26 Sam brought a boy home for afternoon tea. His name was: (p.148)
  - a. Rick
  - b. Zac
  - c. Bob
  - d. Felix
  
5. Alex got the chance to be in a skating video made by a professional team. They were the: (p.153)
  - a. Juice team
  - b. Volcom team
  - c. Element team
  - d. Zen team



**Chapters 23-27****Spelling****List 5**

visible  
professional  
cordoned  
sparring  
disqualified  
slimy  
jewellery  
viciously  
generalisations  
mimicking

**Vocabulary**

Place the correct words from List 5 into the following sentences.

1. "You were caught out like a \_\_\_\_\_ toad." (Chapter 22)
2. Jimmy put on his usual polished performance, explaining how the mainstream media made unfair \_\_\_\_\_ about skateboarders. (Chapter 25)
3. They began \_\_\_\_\_ John – turning when he turned, scratching when he scratched. (Chapter 25)
4. "In the first few competitions I kept getting \_\_\_\_\_ for slamming," said Casey. (Chapter 26)
5. The landing area was \_\_\_\_\_ off and a number of curious observers stood behind the rope. (Chapter 27)

## Chapters 23-27

### Language — What's your Point of View?

In a book or short story the story itself needs to be told by someone. The reader should be aware of who is telling the story. The story might be told by:

A 'third-person' narrator who is not part of the story. This narrator can usually 'read the mind' of one or more characters and tell the reader what they are thinking or how they are feeling.

- Alex looked over at Becky. *I'm one lucky bloke*, he thought to himself. Becky smiled at Alex. She was happy to be back in Australia.

A 'first-person' narrator who is actually one of the characters in the story. The writer can only 'read the mind' of that character, and can only write about what that character has seen, heard, experienced or felt.

- I looked over at Becky. *I'm one lucky bloke*, I thought to myself. Becky smiled back at me. She appeared happy to be back in Australia.

Note that in most books or stories, a third-person narrator can usually only 'read the mind' of the main character. It would often reveal too much if the reader knew what everyone in the story was thinking and feeling.

### Exercise

Rewrite the following passage in first person.

- When Alex hobbled back to his board the first thing he did was chuck it across the skatepark. Only when he looked up did he see that someone was sitting on one of the benches above the park watching him. It was his mum.

Rewrite the following passage in third person. The character is Alex.

- I lived up to my promise and told my parents the truth. I told them how I'd lied to Letch and the police. I told them about my problems with Becky, and even about Kim (though I left out a few details). Afterwards I felt surprisingly good. Like I'd taken a shower on the inside.

Write a few sentences about a time when you told your parents something personal. Use first person.

Now write about the same event using third person.

How does the different point of views change the tone of the story?

## Major Activities

The following are suggested major activities to accompany the book.

### Book Review

The main task of a book review is to tell the reader whether the book is worth reading.

In a Review you should:

- Give your opinion clearly.
- Support your opinion by referring to specific good and bad things about the book. For example, you might cover the effectiveness of the characters, plot (what happens in the story), style (humorous, fast-paced, etc) and major issues or themes covered.
- Draw your ideas together in a clear and concise conclusion.
- Mention at least some positive points.

In a Review you should not:

- Simply describe the item without saying why you liked or disliked different parts.
- Tell the reader the ending of the book.
- Make negative comments without giving a good reason.

Check the authors website [www.patflynnwriter.com](http://www.patflynnwriter.com) and read reviews of Alex Jackson: SWA.

Write your own review of Alex Jackson: SWA, and if you wish, send it to the author, Pat Flynn ([author@patflynnwriter.com](mailto:author@patflynnwriter.com)). He'll be interested to hear your comments and will send you a reply. Make sure in the subject of the email you write 'Review'.

### Graffiti 'Tag'

Design a graffiti 'tag' for the gang: SWA. Underneath write a statement telling what the gang stands for, what they hope to achieve, who can join, etc.

### Diary Entry

Write a diary entry as one of the characters explaining how you feel at a particular point in the story. You could be Becky after she kissed Roberto, or Jimmy after he had his nose broken by Billy Johnstone.

### Role-play

With a partner, choose a scene from the book that involves conflict. Create your own second scene where you come up with a realistic, appropriate resolution to the conflict. Act out the two scenes in a role-play.

## Answers

### Chapters 1-6

#### Listening Comprehension

1. D
2. B
3. A
4. C
5. C

#### Vocabulary

1. sequel
2. miniature
3. commitment
4. environment
5. dichotomy

### Chapters 7-12

#### Listening Comprehension

1. A
2. C
3. D
4. B
5. C

#### Vocabulary

1. recommend
2. assessment
3. silhouette
4. whisked
5. impromptu

### Chapters 13-17

#### Listening Comprehension

1. C
2. A
3. C
4. B
5. D

#### Vocabulary

1. swaggered
2. succumbing
3. eerily
4. genetically
5. immature

**Answers****Chapters 18-22****Listening Comprehension**

1. D
2. A
3. C
4. C
5. A

**Vocabulary**

1. raving
2. amateur
3. obscene
4. initiation
5. baggy
6. scary

**Chapters 23-27****Listening Comprehension**

1. D
2. C
3. A
4. B
5. D

**Vocabulary**

1. slimy
2. generalisations
3. mimicking
4. disqualified
5. cordoned