

Finding Common Errors

Below are some common proofreading errors and issues that arise for university writers. For any grammatical or spelling errors, try highlighting or underlining the words that may give you difficulty. On the sentence level, make note of any errors you make frequently. Also make note of any common sentence errors you have made such as comma splices, run-on sentences, or sentence fragments as this will help you to proofread your work more effectively in the future.

Apostrophes

- Quickly review your paper, focusing on words that end with "s." If the "s" indicates possession, it should have an apostrophe, such as in "John's book."
- Check the contractions, such as "you're" for "you are" and "it's" for "it is." Each of these should contain an apostrophe.
- Keep in mind that apostrophes are not used for pluralizing words. To make a word plural, simply add an "s" or correctly make the plural of a word without using an apostrophe.

Examples:

- "It's a lovely day for a stroll." This statement is accurate because "it's" can be substituted with "it is."
- "A bird is nesting in that tree. Do you see its eggs?" In this instance, "its" functions as a pronoun referring to the noun "bird," so no apostrophe is necessary.
- "Classes are canceled today" is correct, while "Class's are canceled today" is incorrect because the plural of class simply requires adding "-es" to the end of the word.
- "Olivia's markers aren't working." In this case, Olivia requires an apostrophe since the noun is possessive, indicating that the markers belong to her.

Comma Splices

- Pay close attention to sentences that include commas.
- Check if the sentence has two independent clauses, which are complete thoughts on their own.
- If there are two independent clauses, they should be linked by a comma and a conjunction (such as-- and, but, for, or, so, yet, nor). Some subordinating conjunctions (like-- because, for, since, while, etc.) do not require a comma since they connect dependent and independent clauses.
- Alternatively, you can replace the comma with a semicolon.

Examples:

- Comma Splice: “I want to write my paper on baseball, it's a subject I can discuss extensively.” The highlighted parts are independent clauses, and a comma alone cannot connect them.
- Edited version: “I want to write my paper on baseball because it's a subject I can discuss extensively.” Here, the highlighted part is an independent clause, while the other is dependent, connected by the subordinating conjunction “because.”
- Edited version, using a semicolon: “I want to write my paper on baseball; it's a subject I can discuss extensively.” A semicolon effectively connects the two independent clauses.

Left-out and doubled words

Read your paper aloud slowly to catch any missing or duplicated words. Try reading each sentence in reverse order to focus on them individually.

Mixed Construction

Carefully examine your sentences to ensure they maintain a consistent structure. A sentence that shifts structures is known as a mixed construction.

Examples:

- “Since I have so many things to finish is why I can't go with you.” Both highlighted sections are dependent clauses, which do not form a complete sentence.

Edited version: “Since I have so many things to finish, I can't go with you.” The first part highlighted in blue is a dependent clause, while the second part highlighted in yellow is independent, making it a complete sentence.

Parallel Structure

Look for lists of items in your paper, typically separated by commas, and ensure they adhere to parallel structure.

- Example: “Being a good friend means listening, to be considerate, and knowing how to have fun.” Here, “listening” is in present tense, “to be” is in infinitive form, and “knowing how to have fun” is a fragment. These items do not match.
- Edited version: “Being a good friend means listening, being considerate, and having fun.” All items are now in the present continuous form, creating parallel structure.

Pronoun Antecedent Agreement

- Scan your paper for pronouns and identify the nouns they replace.
- If you can't find the corresponding noun, either add one or change the pronoun to a noun.

- Ensure that the noun agrees in number and person with the pronoun.

Examples:

- “**Bridget** had baked oatmeal for breakfast. **She** wasn’t hungry again until lunch.” It’s clear that “she” refers to Bridget, so the singular pronoun matches.
- “**Adriane** and **Susan** walked the dog. The dog bit **her**.” It’s unclear who “her” refers to, as it could be either Adriane or Susan.
- “**Adriane** and **Susan** walked the dog. Later, it bit **them**.” Here, “them” clearly refers to both individuals.
- “**Adriane** and **Susan** walked the dog. Adriane unhooked the leash, and the dog bit **her**.” The context makes it clear that “her” refers to Adriane.

Run-on Sentences

- Review all sentences to check for multiple independent clauses.
- If there are multiple clauses, ensure they are separated by the correct punctuation.
- Sometimes, it’s more effective to split the sentence into two separate sentences rather than using punctuation.

Examples:

- Run on: “I need to write a research paper about homesteading all I know is that I’m interested in it.” This contains two independent clauses without proper punctuation.
- Edited version: “I need to write a research paper about homesteading, and all I know is that I’m interested in it.” The clauses are now connected correctly with the conjunction “and” and a comma.
- Another edited version: “I need to write a research paper about homesteading. All I know is that I’m interested in it.” The clauses are now separated into two separate and distinct sentences

Sentence Fragments

Sentence fragments are incomplete thoughts that lack a subject or verb. For instance, “Had a milkshake” is a fragment because it has no subject.

Ensure every sentence has a subject:

- “Looked at the Manna University Writing Center website.” is a fragment without a subject.

- Whereas in “The students looked at the Manna University Writing Center website.” Adding “The students” completes the sentence.

Ensure each sentence has a complete verb:

- “They trying to improve their research and writing skills.” is incomplete because “trying” is not a complete verb.
- Whereas in “They are trying to improve their research and writing skills.” Adding “are” completes the sentence.

Verify that each of your sentences has an independent clause remembering that dependent clauses cannot stand on their own. In the following examples, dependent clauses are highlighted in blue and the independent clauses are highlighted in yellow.

- “**Although I love roller coasters.**” This dependent clause that needs an independent clause. As of right now, it is a sentence fragment.
- “**I decided to steer clear of Griffon while at Busch Gardens Williamsburg,** **although I love roller coasters.**” “**I decided to steer clear of Griffon while at Busch Gardens Williamsburg,**” is the independent clause that now connecting it with the dependent clause makes this sentence complete.

Spelling

- Don’t rely entirely on your computer’s spell-check feature; it won’t catch every mistake!
- Carefully run a pencil/eraser under each line of your text to examine the words one by one.
- Pay extra attention to words with tricky letter combinations, such as "ei" and "ie."
- Be mindful of homonyms like their/there/they're, to/too/two, and your/you're as your computer’s spell-check feature may not flag these as errors.

Subject/Verb Agreement

- Identify the subject in each sentence.
- Locate the verb that corresponds with that subject.
- Ensure that the subject and verb agree in number; if the subject is plural, the verb should also be plural.
- A helpful method is to underline all the subjects and then circle or highlight the verbs individually to check for agreement.

Examples:

- **Incorrect Subject/Verb Agreement:** “Students pursuing a doctorate degree usually is very busy.” In this case, the plural subject “students” does not match the singular verb “is.”
- **Revised Version:** “Students pursuing a doctorate degree usually are very busy.” Here, “are” is the plural verb that correctly matches the plural noun “students.”