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Finding Common Errors

Spelling

- Your computer's spell check will not find all errors.
- Proofread the paper yourself. Take a break before proofreading; otherwise, you might only see what you want to see.
- Pay extra attention to homonyms. Know the difference between the following:
 - o Your: this indicates possession. This is YOUR book.
 - o You're: this is YOU ARE.

 - o We're: this is WE ARE.
 - o Were: this is the past tense of 'are' – today, we are going. Yesterday, we WERE going.
 - o Where: this refers to place. WHERE are you going?

 - o They're: this is THEY ARE.
 - o Their: this indicates possession. This is THEIR house.
 - o There: this refers to place. I put your book over THERE. →

 - o To: this is a preposition. I am going TO the store.
 - o Too: this means 'also' – I was going to that event TOO.
 - o Two: this is the number.

 - o Affect: As a verb, it means 'to change' something. The accident AFFECTED him deeply.
 - o Affect: As a noun, it refers to a feeling or emotion. He displayed flat AFFECT.
 - o Effect: (noun) this is a result. The EFFECT of the change was increased productivity.

 - o Remember:
 - Half to – WRONG. Have to – RIGHT.
 - Could of – WRONG. Could have – RIGHT. Could've – ALSO RIGHT.

Sentence Fragments

- Make sure each sentence has a subject and a complete verb.
 - o The subject is the who or the what of the sentence.
 - o The verb is the action being performed in the sentence.Examples:
 - He read the book ("he" is the subject, "read" is the verb).
 - It is raining today ("it" is the subject "is raining" is the complete verb). - o A dependent clause cannot stand on its own.
- Example:

- Which is why I read the book I found in the library (THIS IS A SENTENCE FRAGMENT).
- To correct it, add an independent clause: I wanted to learn more about the topic, which is why I read the book I found in the library.

Run-on Sentences

- See if any sentences in your paper have more than one independent clause.
- If any sentence does have more than one, make sure the independent clauses are separated by the appropriate punctuation.
- If the clauses are not separated by proper punctuation, add it, or break the sentence into two or more sentences (and make sure you do not end up with sentence fragments).

Comma Splices

- Revise the sentences that have commas.
- If those sentences have two main clauses then make sure the clauses are separated from each other by a conjunction (such as and, but, for, or, so, yet) or a semicolon (Purdue OWL 2).

Example of CS: I would like to write my paper about basketball, it's a topic I can talk about at length.

Edited version: I would like to write my paper about basketball because it's a topic I can talk about at length.

Edited version with a semicolon: I would like to write my paper about basketball; it's a topic I can talk about at length (Purdue OEL 2-3).

Subject-Verb Agreement

- Find the subject of the sentence.
- Find the verb that goes with the subject.
- Make sure that the subject and the verb agree in number (if the subject is singular – meaning ONE – then the verb should also be singular. If the subject is plural – meaning TWO or more – then the verb should also be plural).

Examples:

The STUDENT wanted to see HIS/HER grade.

The STUDENTS wanted to see THEIR grades.

Subject-Pronoun Agreement

- Find any used pronouns.
- Find the subject that each pronoun replaces.
- Make sure they agree in number and person.

Examples:

SHE went to pick up HER mail.

The OWNERS went to claim what belonged to THEM.

Parallelism

- When there is a series of items, make sure they are all presented in the same form.

Examples:

She baked a cake, cleaned the kitchen, and got ready to leave (BAKED, CLEANED, and GOT are all verbs and so they should all be in the same tense).

He said "you have to know how to read, write, and draw pictures" (READ, WRITE, and DRAW are all verbs and are all in the same tense).

Pronoun Case

There are three cases:

Subjective case: pronouns used as subject.

Objective case: pronouns used as objects of verbs or prepositions.

Possessive case: pronouns which express ownership.

Pronouns as Subjects	Pronouns as Objects	Pronouns that show Possession
I	me	my (mine)
you	you	your (yours)
he, she, it	him, her, it	his, her (hers), it (its)
we	us	our (ours)
they	them	their (theirs)
who	whom	whose

The pronouns **This**, **That**, **These**, **Those**, and **Which** do not change form.

Some problems of case:

1. In compound structures, where there are two pronouns or a noun and a pronoun, drop the other noun for a moment. Then you can see which case you want.

Not: Bob and me travel a good deal.

(Would you say, "me travel"?)

Not: He gave the flowers to Jane and I.

(Would you say, "he gave the flowers to I"?)

Not: Us men like the coach.

(Would you say, "us like the coach"?)

2. In comparisons. Comparisons usually follow than or as:

He is taller than I (am tall).

This helps you as much as (it helps) me.

She is as noisy as I (am).

Comparisons are really shorthand sentences which usually omit words, such as those in the parentheses in the sentences above. If you complete the comparison in your head, you can choose the correct case for the pronoun.

Not: He is taller than me.

(Would you say, "than me am tall"?)

3. In formal and semiformal writing:

Use the subjective form after a form of the verb to be.

Formal: It is I.

Informal: It is me.

Use whom in the objective case.

Formal: To whom am I talking?

Informal: Who am I talking to?

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Writing a Good Thesis

Defining the Thesis Statement

A **thesis statement** is more than a *title*, an *announcement of your intent*, or a *statement of fact*.

Although a descriptive title orients your readers, it is not detailed enough to reveal your essay's purpose or direction. An announcement of your intent can reveal more, but it is stylistically distracting. Finally, a statement of fact – such as a historical fact or a statistic – is a dead end and therefore cannot be developed into an essay.

What a good thesis does

➤ *For writers*

It helps plan an essay.

It helps writers organize ideas in an essay.

It helps writers unify all the ideas in an essay.

➤ *For readers*

It identifies the main ideas of an essay.

It guides readers through an essay.

It clarifies the subject and the focus of an essay.

Stating Your Thesis

It is a good idea to include a one-sentence statement of your thesis early in your essay. An effective thesis statement has three characteristics:

1. *An effective thesis statement clearly expresses your essay's main idea.* It does more than state your topic; it indicates what you will say about your topic and it signals how you will approach your material.
2. *An effective thesis statement communicates your essay's purpose.* Whether your purpose is to evaluate or analyze or simply to describe or inform, your thesis statement should communicate that purpose to your readers. In general terms, your thesis can be **expressive**, conveying a mood or impression; it can be **informative**, perhaps listing the major points you will discuss or presenting an objective overview of the essay; or it can be **persuasive**, taking a strong stand or outlining the position you will argue.
3. *An effective thesis statement is clearly worded.* The thesis statement should give a straightforward and accurate indication of what follows, and it should not mislead readers about

the essay's direction, emphasis, scope, content, or viewpoint. Vague language, confusing abstractions, irrelevant details, and unnecessarily complex terminology have no place in a thesis statement.

NOTE: avoid statements such as "My thesis is that..." or "The thesis of this paper is..." Your thesis should speak for itself.

Make sure that your thesis

Is stated in one complete, concise sentence;

Indicates your purpose;

Suits the assignment;

Clearly conveys the main idea you intend to support in your essay; and

Suggests how you will organize your essay.

(Kirszner and Mandell 44-47).

Considering the Audience

When writing a paper, you should consider your audience. The following are some of the things that you should keep in mind when writing. You may consider other factors as well as disregard those here that do not apply to your assignment.

When writing a formal paper, write in third person only unless otherwise specified.

1 st person singular	I
2 nd person singular	you
3 rd person singular	he, she, it
1 st person plural	we
2 nd person plural	you
3 rd person plural	they

NOTE: third person includes words such as people, humans, girl, man, animals, etc...

When considering the audience, think of what you expect from it. Do you want readers to consider your point of view, to change their minds, to learn something new...?

How do you think your audience will react to your paper? NOTE: considering this is very helpful when writing an argumentative paper. Anticipating the audience's reaction may help you strengthen weak parts of your argument.

Identify your audience's background and educational level when writing; then, adjust your tone and word choice.