

Hit Parade Of Errors In Grammar, Punctuation, And Style

Markers look at four general areas in deciding on a mark for a written assignment:

- how well you've handled the topic and followed the assignment
- the quality of your ideas
- the way you've organized your paper
- the quality of your writing style and grammar.

This means that grammar is only one of a number of factors determining your grade. Still, too many errors in grammar, punctuation, and style will lose you marks. This guide describes the ways to avoid the most common errors.

1. Faulty Agreement

a. Subjects and verbs must agree in number:

✘ Recent discoveries about the weather reveals that several cycles are involved.

✔ Recent discoveries about the weather reveal that several cycles are involved.

✘ The media was biased in its reporting of the event.

✔ The media were biased in their reporting of the event.

b. Nouns and pronouns must agree in number:

✘ A student is free to express their opinion.

✔ A student is free to express his or her opinion.

✔ Students are free to express their opinions.

c. Pronouns must agree with each other:

✘ Once one has decided to take the course, you must keep certain policies in mind.

✔ Once you have decided to take the course, you must keep certain policies in mind.

2. Sentence Fragments

A sentence fragment is a group of words that is punctuated to look like a sentence (i.e., begins with a capital letter and ends with a period), but doesn't fulfil the requirements of a complete sentence.

A complete sentence must contain both a subject and a predicate (verb). The subject is what (or whom) the sentence is about, while the verb tells something about the subject or expresses an action. In this example, there's no subject. We don't know who needs to know about the regulations:

- All of these regulations should be made aware.**
- Athletes should be made aware of all these regulations.**

Also, a complete sentence must contain at least one "independent clause," that is, a group of words that stands by itself as a complete thought. A sentence may also have "subordinate clauses," that is, a group of words that needs another to complete its meaning. In this example, the first sentence forms a complete thought. However, the second is a fragment because it depends on the verb "was poured"—it answers the question why the liquid was poured but doesn't itself express any action:

- We poured the acid into a glass beaker. Being the only material impervious to these liquids.**
- We poured the acid into a glass beaker, being the only material impervious to these liquids.**
- Because it is the only material impervious to these liquids, we poured the acid into a glass beaker.**

Note: Many people have been told that it is wrong to begin a sentence with "because." However, it is perfectly correct when it is also introducing a subordinate clause.

3. Run-on [fused] Sentences

A sentence should express only one central idea:

- Home care has been expanding tremendously over the past decade partly due to technological advances that enable treatments to be a part of the home setting which at one time could only be performed within the hospital environment.**
- Home care has expanded tremendously over the past decade. This increase is partly due to technological advances that now make more treatments possible in the home rather than the hospital environment.**

4. Overuse of Passive Voice

Prefer active verbs to passive verbs. They are more direct and less wordy:

✘ It is through this paper that the proposed benefits of active exercise for Chronic Lower Back Pain (CLBP) will be examined.

✔ This paper will examine the proposed benefits of active exercise for Chronic Lower Back Pain (CLBP).

Also, be careful not to shift voice unnecessarily:

✘ I gave the patient 10cc orally, and 5 more were given intravenously.

✔ I gave the patient 10cc orally and 5cc intravenously.

5. Faulty Parallelism

Building parallel elements into a sentence adds clarity and elegance. Make sure that the different elements are grammatically the same (i.e., “parallel”):

✘ Eating huge meals, snacking between meals, and too little exercise can lead to obesity.

✔ Eating huge meals, snacking between meals, and exercising too little can lead to obesity.

✘ Our coach is paid too much, obese, over forty, and a former champion wrestler.

✔ Our coach is a former champion wrestler, but now he is overpaid, overweight, and over forty.

6. Vague Pronouns

Make sure that pronouns such as “it” and “this” refer to something specific. “It is” and “There are” beginnings not only add meaningless words, they can also create confusion. In this example, what does “it” refer to? The ischaemic heart disease or the hypertension? It could mean either one:

✘ Hypertension is an established risk factor for the development of ischaemic heart disease. It is also present in many patients who develop stroke.

✔ Hypertension is an established risk factor for the development of ischaemic heart disease. Hypertension is also present in many patients who develop stroke.

✘ In the report they suggest that moderate exercise is better than no exercise at all.

✔ The authors of the report suggest that moderate exercise is better than no exercise at all.

7. Dangling Modifiers

Make sure that a modifying phrase or clause doesn't "dangle" without the subject it is intended to modify. Here, the first example implies that the pain was doing the manipulating. The second implies that the hobbies go to school:

✘ By manipulating the lower back, the pain was greatly eased.

✔ By manipulating the lower back, the physiotherapist greatly eased the pain.

✘ When not going to school, my hobbies range from athletics to automobiles.

✔ When I am not going to school, my hobbies range from athletics to automobiles.

8. Squinting or Misplaced Modifiers

A modifying phrase or clause is said to "squint" if it applies equally to two different parts of a sentence. Make sure the modifier clearly refers to the element you want it to. In the following example, is the council advising at regular intervals, or should the physicians be administering the drug at regular intervals?

✘ The council advises physicians at regular intervals to administer the drug.

✔ The council advises physicians to administer the drug at regular intervals.

✔ At regular intervals, the council advises physicians to administer the drug.

A "misplaced" modifier (usually an adverb) is positioned so that it changes the meaning of the sentence. This example raises an image of an elderly gentleman climbing through a window:

✘ I could see my grandfather coming through the window.

✔ Through the window, I could see my grandfather coming.

9. Mixed or Dead Metaphors

Recognize the literal meanings of your metaphors. The following example offers a ludicrous image of lightning grabbing someone and then becoming a wooden toy:

✘ Like a bolt from the blue the idea grabbed him, and it quickly took its place as one of his hobby-horses.

✔ The idea grabbed him as soon as he heard of it, and it quickly became an obsession.

Also, avoid clichés. Instead, give a precise description. The cliché in this example suggests that, at some point in their lives, Canadians may begin to age 48 hours for every 24 that pass:

✘ We studied pain management techniques for Canada's rapidly aging population.

✔ We studied pain management techniques for the elderly in long-term care institutions in urban settings.

10. Faulty Word Choice [Faulty Diction]

Don't use "fancy" words for their own sake; use a dictionary to check words whose meaning you are not sure of:

✘ Explaining the rationale for treatment can help distil patients' fears.

✔ Explaining the rationale for treatment can help dispel patients' fears.

11. Wordiness

Don't spin empty words; instead, use the minimum number of words to express your idea. In the first example, the idea can be stated much more simply. The second example is so wordy and its idea so vague that it should simply be omitted.

✘ A definition that can be employed usefully, according to LaPlante et al. (1993), states that "assistive technology..."

✔ LaPlante et al. (1993) state that "assistive technology..."

✘ It is evident that this term is associated with much ambiguity. Many concepts and ideas come to mind upon first hearing this phrase; however, a true grasp of its meaning is quite difficult to establish.

12. Comma Splices

A comma splice is the joining (“splicing”) of two independent clauses with only a comma. Here are the rules for avoiding them:

a. Use a period or semicolon to separate two independent clauses, or join them with a subordinating conjunction:

✘ We started to unpack our equipment, pretty soon we were ready for the test.

✔ We started to unpack our equipment; pretty soon we were ready for the test.

✔ We started to unpack our equipment, and pretty soon we were ready for the test.

b. Use a semicolon as well as a conjunctive adverb to join two independent clauses:

✘ Much of the literature advocates stretching preparatory to exercise, however, the mechanisms are not well understood.

✔ Much of the literature advocates stretching preparatory to exercise; however, the mechanisms are not well understood.

These are the most common conjunctive adverbs:

however

thus

as a result

rather

therefore

nevertheless

moreover

indeed

then

accordingly

even so

for example

13. Misuse of Comma, Semicolon, and Colon

a. Use a comma after each item in a series of three or more:

✘ Many studies indicate favourable results in function, decreased pain and range of motion.

✔ Many studies indicate favourable results in function, decreased pain, and range of motion.

Note: The final comma is generally omitted when the series consists of single-word items, for example, “red, yellow and blue.”

b. Use a comma when you join independent clauses with one of the seven coordinating conjunctions (and, or, nor, but, so, yet, for):

✘ **Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.**

✔ **Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.**

c. Use a semicolon when you join independent clauses without a coordinating conjunction:

✘ **Power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely.**

✔ **Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely.**

d. Do not use a comma to separate subject and verb:

✘ **His enthusiasm for the project and his desire to be of help, led him to volunteer.**

✔ **His enthusiasm for the project and his desire to be of help led him to volunteer.**

e. Use a colon to introduce a list or a long or formal quotation after a complete sentence. Otherwise make the quotation part of the grammar of your sentence:

✘ **Strunk (1995) asserts that: “Too many programmes are already underfinanced” (p.87).**

✔ **Strunk (1995) asserts: “Too many programmes are already underfinanced” (p.87).**

✔ **Strunk (1995) asserts that “Too many programmes are already underfinanced” (p.87).**

14. Incorrect Comparison

“Compared to” is often used incorrectly. It shouldn't be used if the sentence contains a comparative term such “higher,” “greater,” “less,” or “lower.” For example,

✘ **The blood serum levels in the control group were higher when compared to the treatment group.**

✔ **The blood serum levels in the control group were higher than in the treatment group.**

Another error that creeps into comparison sentences is the comparison of items that are unlike each other:

✘ **Our results are similar to our previous studies.**

✔ **Our results are similar to the results of our previous studies.**

15. Double Constructions

This is a form of grammar overkill in which a part of speech is unnecessarily duplicated:

- ✘ **Since the legislation has passed, therefore we will have more nurse practitioners.**
- ✔ **Since the legislation has passed, we will have more nurse practitioners.**
- ✔ **The legislation has passed; therefore, we will have more nurse practitioners.**
the legislation was the long waiting lists.
- ✘ **The new procedure was popular with both doctors as well as nurses.**
- ✔ **The new procedure was popular with both doctors and nurses.**
- ✔ **The new procedure was popular with doctors as well as nurses.**

- ✘ **The reason for the legislation was due to the long waiting lists.**
- ✔ **The reason for**