

Common Grammatical and Spelling Errors (Miscellaneous Resources)

Accept/Except
 Affect/Effect
 All right (not alright)
 Altar/alter
 Assure/Insure/Ensure
 Breath/breathe
 Complement/Compliment
 Counsel/Council
 Emigrate/immigrate
 Lead/Led
 Loose/lose
 Moot/Mute
 It's/Its
 Past/passed
 Principal/Principle
 Rein/reign
 Shutter/shudder
 Than/Then
 There/Their/They're
 You're/Your

Use of semi-colon (use it to separate two full sentences: The house is too hot; turn on the air conditioning.)

**Comma before conjunction (use when second part of sentence after conjunction could stand on its own:
The
house is too hot, and the garage is too cold.)**

Agreement... their...his or her:

Be sure to watch that subjects match their possessive pronouns and prepositional phrases.

Wrong: Christians need to experience healing in their life.

Right: Christians need to experience healing in their lives.

Wrong: The believer is responsible for the strategic investment of their time.

Right: The believer is responsible for the strategic investment of his or her time.

Use of me, myself, and I

I went to the store. She told me to go to the store. I said to myself, I must go to the store.

Wrong: Jack told Suzie and myself to go to the store.

Right: Jack told Suzie and me to go to the store.

Use of that and who (use "that" for things, "who" for people). He is the one *who* came.

Common Spelling Errors and misused Words<http://www.genwriters.com/pdf/spelling.pdf>**Top 10 Spelling Errors**http://www.netmechanic.com/news/vol5/html_no9.htm**Common Spelling Errors**<http://www.oup.com/uk/booksites/content/0199296251/essentials/commonspellingerrors/>**Common Errors in Student Research Papers**<http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~bioslabs/tools/report/reporterror.html>**Common Term Paper Problems**<http://www.cs.utexas.edu/users/almstrum/classes/cs373/general/term-paper-probs.html>**Finding Common Errors**<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/561/02/>**Proofreading for Common Surface Errors: Spelling, Punctuation, and Grammar**http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/proofing_grammar.shtml

What are some of the more common surface errors?

Here is a listing of some of the more common surface errors, broken down by category. Either select the link you would like to view or scroll down to the appropriate topic.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spelling • Punctuation • Commas • Apostrophes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Periods • Verbs • Subject-verb agreement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pronouns • Other grammatical errors • Sentence fragments • Misplaced or dangling modifiers
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Common Grammatical Errorshttp://www.ece.msstate.edu/academics/writing_resource/grammatical_errors.html

Here is a list of some of the more commonly committed grammatical errors. You may click on any of these errors to view an example of each as well as a discussion of the grammatical rule in question

- [Adjective/Adverb Errors](#)
- [Apostrophe Misuse](#)
- [Article Errors](#)
- [Awkward Phrasing or Idiom](#)
- [Capitalization Errors](#)
- [Comma Omissions](#)
- [Comma Splice](#)
- [Contractions](#)
- [Double Negatives](#)
- [Failure to use Possessive before a Gerund](#)
- [Faulty Coordination](#)
- [Fragments](#)
- [Fused or Run-On Sentence](#)
- [Misplaced or Dangling Modifiers](#)
- [Misused Semicolons](#)
- [Mixed Construction](#)
- [Parallelism](#)
- [Past Tense Errors](#)
- [Plurality Errors-Nouns](#)

- [Pronoun Case Errors](#)
- [Pronoun Errors-- Ambiguous, Redundant, etc.](#)
- [Pronoun Reference](#)
- [Shifts in Person or Number](#)
- [Shifts In Tense](#)
- [Subject-Verb Agreement](#)
- [Unnecessary Commas](#)
- [Verb Errors \(wrong form\)](#)

The content of these pages was, in part, taken from the following sources:

Harbrace College Handbook (Revised Thirteenth Edition), Horner, Webb, and Miller. Harcourt Brace, 1998.

Digital Design, M. Morris Mano. Prentice Hall, 1984.

Physics: Principles and Problems, Zitzewitz and Neff. McGraw-Hill, 1995.

Common Grammatical Errors

http://darwin.bio.uci.edu/~sustain/bio65/Common_Grammatical_Errors.htm

1. Noun-verb mismatch, e.g. "A herd of horses are better than a flock of sheep" (herd is singular). The City feels that this is a bad idea. (A city can't feel)
2. Adjective used as adverb, e.g. and especially "I did good in this course"
3. Split infinitive, e.g. "I urge you to not support this Bill".
4. Misplaced modifier, e.g. "We need to stop dumping waste into the environment which kills the fish". TO avoid this mistake, put the modifier as close as possible to the noun it is modifying. Repaired: "We need to stop dumping waste, which kills the fish, into the environment".
5. Dangling (or misplaced) participle A participial phrase at the beginning of a sentence must refer to the grammatical SUBJECT of the sentence. Wrong: "As the largest reptiles ever to have lived, small mammals could not compete with the dinosaurs". This suggests that small mammals were the largest reptiles ever to have lived. Repaired: "Being small and defenseless, small mammals could not compete with the dinosaurs". More examples).
6. Ending a sentence with a preposition, e.g. "This is something we need to work on".
7. Starting a paragraph with a conjunction that should refer to the previous sentence, e.g. "Furthermore,...", "However,..."
8. Run-on sentences (two complete sentences joined by a comma rather than a period or semicolon) The lab is a dangerous place, you should wear a lab coat. (could be repaired by the addition of so).
9. Incomplete sentences, including those with no verb, e.g. "These animals could be harmed by various things. Pollution, for example."
10. Mixing up the "notorious confusables" (confusibles?)(e.g. their vs. there)

Other useful sites if you want to improve your writing skills:

[Guide to Grammar and Writing](#)

[Pleonasms, redundancies and tautologies](#) (needless repetition of words over and over again multiple times)

Common Grammatical Errors & How to Fix Them

<http://www.arc.sbc.edu/grammar.html>

Dangling Modifiers

A dangling modifier is a phrase or clause that — because of its proximity — seems to modify a word it could not logically modify. One of the most common dangling modifiers occurs in the following sentence: "Hopefully, the project will succeed." "Hopefully" is an adverb that appears to modify the noun "project," the subject of the sentence. But how can a project be hopeful? To fix the sentence, we need to show who's really doing the hoping: "We hope that the project will succeed."

Another very common dangling modifier appears in the following sentence construction: "Based on our observations, the project will succeed." Again, the modifier — "based" — cannot logically modify the noun to which it is attached — "project." "The project" is not "based on our observations." To fix the sentence, we need to say, "On the basis of our observations, we believe the project will succeed."

Inconsistent Verb Tenses

Make sure you use past tense consistently throughout a sentence and use past perfect tense when it is called for. For example, in the following sentence there is a lack of consistency in tense; it shifts from past to present: "Government officials said that they are correcting the problem." Since the verb in the main clause is stated in the past tense — "said" — the verb in the subordinate clause — "are correcting" — should also be stated in the past tense. The sentence should read "Government officials said that they were correcting the problem." If, however, the action of the dependent clause was completed before the action in the main clause, use past perfect tense in the dependent clause. For example, "Government officials said that they had corrected the problem."

Noun Strings

Try to avoid long strings of nouns, such as the following, that show no grammatical relationships among the many nouns: "Army Fiscal Year 1990 Apache Helicopter Spare and Repair Parts Budget Request." Add possessive case and prepositions to clarify how the nouns relate to each other. Revision: "The Army's Fiscal Year 1990 Budget Request for Spare and Repair Parts for the Apache Helicopter."

Faulty Agreement in Number

One of the most common pronoun agreement problems occurs when one tries to avoid the sexist use of pronouns. For example, the following sentence is inconsistent in number: "Each student must clean their own room." The plural pronoun "their" does not agree in number with the singular "Each student" and the singular "room." To fix the sentence, you could say "Each student must clean his or her own room." If you find the "his or her" construction awkward, make all pronouns and associated nouns in the sentence plural: "All students must clean their own rooms."

Unclear Antecedents for "This," "Which," and "It"

An "antecedent" is the noun a pronoun refers to. When using "this," "which," or "it," make sure there is no question about what the pronoun's antecedent is. In the following case, the antecedent for "this" is unclear: "The company needs accurate data for its estimates. This is the purpose of the task force." Similarly, the antecedent for "which" is unclear in this passage: "The company needs accurate data for its estimates, which is the purpose of the task force." To make the passages clearer, change them to: "The company needs accurate data for its estimates. Providing such data is the purpose of the task force."

In the following sentence, the antecedent for "it" is unclear: "When the government workers who should be classed as administrators are enumerated, it reaches staggering proportions." Revise to eliminate the vague pronoun as follows: "When the government workers who should be classed as administrators are enumerated, the total is staggering."

Failure to Use Possessive Case with a Gerund

A gerund is the present participle of the verb (the verbal form ending in "ing") when used as a noun. The possessive case should be used for modifiers of a gerund: "I would appreciate your attending the meeting." "It is all contingent on the President's signing the bill." If, however, you find this construction awkward or impossible, reword the sentence. For instance, to avoid awkward construction such as the following, revise: "This is one of several steps taken by the Secretary to prevent the ceiling on expenditures' being broken again

next year." Revision: "This is one of several steps taken by the Secretary to prevent the ceiling on expenditures from being broken again next year."

Misuse of "That" and "Which"

The key to determining when to use "that" and when to use "which" is in deciding whether the clause or phrase that follows is essential to defining what you mean (it's "restrictive") or is simply parenthetical information (it's "nonrestrictive"). Use "that" with restrictive phrases or clauses and "which" with nonrestrictive phrases or clauses. For example, if I am holding up only one book and say "I'll give you this book, which explains grammatical rules," you don't need to know that the book is about grammar to know which book I mean. If I'm holding up a history book and a grammar book and I say "I'll give you the book that explains grammatical rules," you need to know that the book explains grammatical rules to know which book I mean.

As a rule of thumb, use "which" and set the phrase or clause off by commas if the information that follows is parenthetical, or unessential to the meaning of your sentence. Use "that" and don't set your phrase or clause off by commas when the information that follows is essential to the meaning of your sentence.

Academic Resource Center
Sweet Briar College
Sweet Briar, VA 24595
<http://www.arc.sbc.edu/grammar.html>
(804) 381-6278

Top Ten List of Common Grammatical Errors

<http://www.eslteachersboard.com/cgi-bin/articles/index.pl?noframes;read=1029>

By Sue - teacher

10. The use of sexist language. Gibaldi states in the MLA Handbook, "Because good scholarship requires objectivity, careful writers . . . avoid language that implies unsubstantiated or irrelevant generalizations about such personal qualities as age, economic class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political or religious belief, race, or sex" (37). In other words, don't use language that could be deemed insulting or ignorant.

9. Do not change verb tense within a single paragraph.

8. Use the active voice in all your writing. It will make your paper that much more exciting to read. For example, "The reason he left 220 was that his health was impaired," is a passive sentence. The sentence becomes more vigorous in the active voice: "Failing health compelled him to drop 220." Notice that it is also a shorter sentence. Which brings us to point number 7.

7. Never use more words than necessary. This doesn't mean that you should abandon detail and color, spitting out short, staccato sentences like watermelon seeds, only make sure that every word counts. "Very," for example is a fluffy word that is only RARELY needed. Another overworked and mushy phrase is "the fact that." In all situations this phrase can be transformed into a tighter package, for example:
owing to the fact that since or because
in spite of the fact that though or although

I suggest that you revise "the fact that" out of every sentence.

6. The way to form a possessive singular of nouns is to add -'s- to the end no matter what the last letter is, thus,
Marx's precepts
Burns's poem

the witch's broom.

Plural nouns use only the -'s:

Vanderbilts' estate

the Woodsons' crazy dog.

You do not, however, use an apostrophe to form the plural of an abbreviation or a number:

PhDs

1990s.

5. Do not mistake its for it's. The first is a possessive, the second is a contraction of "it is." It is best, actually to spurn all contractions in formal language. Just say no.

4. Plays are considered literature and thus are always happening. You write about them, then, in the present tense. Productions of plays are ephemeral and singular. You write about them, then, in the past tense.

3. All parts of MLA style papers are double spaced including the works cited and off-set quotes. Margins are one inch and you should use font no bigger than twelve pica and no smaller than ten.

2. Just because you spell check does not mean the word will be spelled correctly. When in doubt, look it up. The moral of this is PROOF READ! PROOF READ! and then PROOF READ! Try reading your work backwards sentence by sentence, this can help you look at the words and not automatically move into meaning.

1. Play titles are ALWAYS underlined or italicized.

More at: <http://herbergeronline.asu.edu/the220/notes/notes.html>

Common Grammar & Usage Errors

<http://www.webgrammar.com/commonmistakes.html>

A and An before a word beginning with "h": "An historical book" is not idiomatic in American English. Before a **pronounced h**, the indefinite article should be **a**. A hotel; a historical. Therefore, precede a word beginning with a "breathy" **h** with an **a**.

Due to or Because of? Due to modifies nouns and is generally used after some form of the verb to be (is, are, was, were, etc.). Jan's **success** is **due to** talent and spunk (**due to** modifies success). **Because of** should **modify verbs**. Ted **resigned because of** poor health (**because of** modifies resigned).

Its or It's? Its: The possessive form of the pronoun **it** is **never** written with an apostrophe, e.g., . . . read the book. "**Its** title is . . ." or, "What is **its** value?" **It's:** contractions of **it is** and **it has**. **It's** time to go. **It's** been great. (AHD3)

Myriad As a noun, **myriad** means **ten thousand, or a great number (a myriad of aircraft)**. In this case, you're not using myriad to modify: it's the subject. **As an adjective, myriad means "having innumerable aspects or elements" (those myriad challenges - the myriad activity of the people - myriad butterflies)**. These days, the distinction is blurred, and we see quite a bit of "...a myriad of..."

Their, They're, or There? **Their**: possessive form of the word **they**, e.g., **Their** Web site is full of typos. **They're**: Contraction of the words "they" and "are," e.g., **They're** doing a great job on their Web site. **There**: at or in that place, e.g., "Now **there** is a stunning Web site."

Your or you're? **You're**: Contraction of the words "you are," e.g., "**You're** up for an award. Someone said **you're** leaving." **Your** is a possessive form of a personal pronoun, e.g., "I like **your** Web site. Tom, thanks for giving **your** time to this effort." Both: "**Your** knowledge of HTML shows that **you're** a dedicated designer."

Want to delve more deeply into the cauldron of confusing words? Here are two of the best on the Web:

[Common Errors in English: Professor Paul Brians](#)
Notorious Confusables: Professor Charles Darling

Learning from the Twenty Most Common Errors

<http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/lunsford/twenty.html>

- [1](#) Missing comma after an introductory element
- [2](#) Vague pronoun reference
- [3](#) Missing comma in a compound sentence
- [4](#) Wrong word
- [5](#) Missing comma(s) with a nonrestrictive element
- [6](#) Wrong or missing verb ending
- [7](#) Wrong or missing preposition
- [8](#) Comma splice
- [9](#) Missing or misplaced possessive apostrophe
- [10](#) Unnecessary shift in tense
- [11](#) Unnecessary shift in pronoun
- [12](#) Sentence fragment
- [13](#) Wrong tense or verb form
- [14](#) Lack of subject-verb agreement
- [15](#) Missing comma in a series
- [16](#) Lack of agreement between pronoun and antecedent
- [17](#) Unnecessary comma(s) with a restrictive element
- [18](#) Fused sentence
- [19](#) Misplaced or dangling modifier
- [20](#) *Its/It's* confusion

Grammar, punctuation, and other sentence-level matters will seldom draw much attention unless they interfere with the meaning you're trying to get across. Because they do get in the way, however, they are important to your success as a writer.

What kinds of surface errors are you likely to find in your writing, and how will readers respond to them? Our study of college writing patterns revealed that spelling errors are by far the most common type of error, even with spell checkers, by a factor of more than three to one. Our study also showed that not all surface errors disturb readers, nor do instructors always mark all of them. Finally, not all surface errors are consistently viewed as errors. In fact, some of the patterns identified in our research are considered errors by some readers but stylistic options by others.

While many people think of correctness as absolute, based on hard and fast unchanging "rules," instructors and students know better. We know that there are rules, but that the rules change all the time. "Is it okay to use *I* in essays for this class?" asks one student. "My high school teacher wouldn't let us." "Will more than one comma

error lower my grade?" asks another. Such questions show that rules clearly exist but that they are always shifting and thus need our ongoing attention.

Our research shows some of the shifts that have occurred in the last century alone. Some mechanical and grammatical questions that are of little or no concern today used to be perceived as extremely important. In the late-nineteenth century, for instance, instructors at Harvard said that their students' most serious writing problem was the inability to distinguish between the proper uses of *shall* and *will*. Similarly, split infinitives represented a serious problem for many instructors of the 1950s. Nowadays, at least since the starship *Enterprise* set out "to boldly go" where no one has gone before, split infinitives seem to wrinkle fewer brows.

These examples of shifting standards do not mean that there is no such thing as "correctness" in writing-only that *correctness always depends on some context*. Correctness is not so much a question of absolute right or wrong as it is a question of the way the choices a writer makes are perceived by readers. As writers, we are all judged by the words we put on the page. We all want to be considered competent and careful, and writing errors work against that impression. The world judges us by our control of the conventions we have agreed to use, and we all know it. As Robert Frost once said of poetry, trying to write without honoring the conventions and agreed-upon rules is like playing tennis without a net.

Since you already know most of these rules, the most efficient way to proceed is to focus on those that are still unfamiliar or puzzling. To aid you in this process, we have identified the twenty error patterns (other than misspelling) that were most common among U.S. college students in the late 1980s and list them here in order of frequency. These twenty errors are likely to cause you the most trouble, so it is well worth your effort to check for them in your writing. This area of our Web site includes brief examples and explanations of each error pattern; for more detail and additional examples, you should consult your handbook.