

## Style &amp; Editing

## 10 Common Errors: Student Checklist

1. **Sentence Fragments.** Make sure each word group you have punctuated as a sentence contains a grammatically complete and independent thought that can stand alone as an acceptable sentence.

**Incorrect:** Tests of the Shroud of Turin have produced some curious findings. *For example, the pollen of forty-eight plants native to Europe and the Middle East.*

**Revised:** Tests of the Shroud of Turin have produced some curious findings. For example, *the cloth contains pollen of forty-eight plants native to Europe and the Middle East.*

More information: [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g\\_frag.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_frag.html)

2. **Sentence Sprawl.** Too many equally weighted phrases and clauses produce tiresome sentences.

**Incorrect:** The hearing was planned for Monday, December 2, *but* not all the witnesses could be available, so it was rescheduled for the following Friday. [There are no grammatical errors here, but the sprawling sentence does not communicate clearly and concisely]

**Revised:** The hearing, which had been planned for Monday, December 2, was rescheduled for the following Friday so that all witnesses would be able to attend.

More information: [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl\\_sentclar.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl_sentclar.html)

3. **Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers.** Place modifiers near the words they describe.

**Incorrect:** Many tourists visit Arlington National Cemetery, where veterans and military personnel are buried *every day from 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m.*

**Revised:** *Every day from 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m.,* many tourists visit Arlington National Cemetery, where veterans and military personnel are buried.

More information: [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g\\_dangmod.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_dangmod.html)

4. **Faulty Parallelism.** Be sure you use grammatically equal sentence elements to express two or more matching ideas or items in a series.

**Incorrect:** The candidate's goals include winning the election, a health program, and education.

**Revised:** The candidate's goals include *winning* the election, *enacting* a national health program, and *improving* the educational system.

More information: [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g\\_parallel.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_parallel.html)

5. **Unclear Pronoun Reference.** Pronouns must clearly refer to definite referents [nouns]. Use (it, they, that, these, those,) and (which) carefully to prevent confusion.

**Incorrect:** Einstein was a brilliant mathematician. *This* is how he was able to explain the workings of the universe.

**Revised:** Einstein, who was a brilliant mathematician, *used his quantitative ability* to explain the workings of the universe.

More information: [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g\\_pronuse.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_pronuse.html)

6. **Pronoun Agreement.** Be sure that each pronoun agrees in number (singular or plural) with the noun to which it refers (its antecedent or referent).

**Incorrect:** According to tenets of the “new urbanism,” *everyone* needs to consider the relationship of *their* house to the surrounding community.

**Revised:** According to tenets of the “new urbanism,” *everyone* needs to consider the relationship of *his or her* house to the surrounding community.

More information: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/595/01/>

7. **Incorrect Pronoun Case.** Determine whether the pronoun is being used as a subject, object, or possessive in the sentence, and select the pronoun form to match.

**Incorrect:** Castro’s communist principles inevitably led to an ideological conflict between *he* and President Kennedy.

**Revised:** Castro’s communist principles inevitably led to an ideological conflict between *him* and President Kennedy.

8. **Omitted Commas.** Use commas to signal non-restrictive or nonessential material to prevent confusion and indicate relationships among ideas and sentence parts.

**Incorrect:** The Huns who were Mongolian invaded Gual in 451.

**Revised:** Huns, who were Mongolian, invaded Gual in 451. [*“Who were Mongolian” adds information but does not change the core meaning of the sentence because Huns were a Mongolian people; it is therefore non-restrictive or nonessential and should be set apart with commas.*]

9. **Superfluous Commas.** Unnecessary commas make sentences difficult to read.

**Incorrect:** Field trips are required, in several courses, such as botany and geology.

**Revised:** Field trips are required in several courses, such as botany and geology.

More information: [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g\\_comma.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_comma.html)

10. **Comma Splices.** Do not link two independent not clauses with a comma (unless you also use a coordinating conjunction and, or, but, for, nor, so, yet). Instead use a period or semicolon, or rewrite the sentence.

**Incorrect:** In 1952 Japan’s gross national product was one third that of France, by the late 1970s it was larger than the GNPs of France and Britain combined.

**Revised:** In 1952 Japan’s gross national product was one third that of France. By the late 1970s it was larger than the GNPs of France and Britain combined.

**Incorrect:** Diseased coronary arteries are often surgically bypassed, however, half of bypass grafts fail within ten years.

**Revised:** Diseased coronary arteries are often surgically bypassed; however, half of bypass grafts fail within ten years.

More information: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/598/02/>

Source: University of Wisconsin-Madison. (December 2008). *The writing center*. Retrieved December 15, 2008, <http://writing.wisc.edu/>

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