

## Common 'Grammatical' Errors

What are the most commonly criticised 'grammatical' errors? This checklist should help you to proofread:

1.	Complete sentences: no comma splices or run-ons [cs], fused sentences [fs] or sentence fragments [frag], no faulty syntax (incorrectly constructed sentences) [syntax]. Read essay aloud.
2.	Formation of plurals, contractions and possessives—especially the it's/its distinction [pl=plural, pos=possessive].
3.	Underlining or italicisation of titles of longer works and placement of shorter works within inverted commas [titles].
4.	Spelling: proofreading, typos, commonly misspelled words, authors' names, tutor's name, technical term [sp]. Use spelling checker — intelligently.
5.	Proper use of introductory language, punctuation and capitalisation and formatting for block quotations and in-text quotations, closure of quotation marks. [IQ=introduction of quotations]. Proper documentation — citation and bibliography [doc]. <b>No plagiarism.</b>
6.	Presentation: Proper paragraph boundaries and use of MLA manuscript form: paragraphs must be double spaced, first line of each paragraph indented 1/2 inch, no extra spacing between paragraphs or with block quotations [Paragraphing! No ¶, New ¶, ->=indent, ↑=close-up space]. Document identified properly, 1 inch margins, page numbers, block quotations indented 1 inch.
7.	Commas: introductory, connecting, separating [intro, link, sep, ].
8.	Tense: proper formation of tenses, esp. avoidance of 'I seen' and 'I done', no faulty tense shifts [tense].
9.	Capitalisation [caps, no caps].
10.	Diction (word choice): use of standard, formal English avoiding jargon, inappropriate word choices, unnecessary language, use of 'we', excessive usage of 'I'. [jargon, wordiness, wrong word, right word? too informal, avoid <u>we</u> ].
11.	Split infinitive [si].
12.	High-order punctuation: semicolon, colon, full stop, dash [hop].
13.	Dangling participles [dangl].
14.	Gender-free language [gender].
15.	Subject/verb and noun/pronoun agreement [s/v or n/p agr].
16.	Reference to antecedents [antecedent].

**1. Sentences must be complete and not incorrectly combined with other sentences.**

- *Sentence Fragment*: The sentence is either missing the subject or the verb or contains an incomplete thought:
  - When you write an essay. (Incomplete thought.)
  - Peter, the son of a fisherman. (No verb.)
  - Went shopping. (No subject.)
- *Fused sentence*: The placement of two sentences together as if they were one sentence:
  - The new wave is not new it is a repetition of old ideas (A full stop, colon, semicolon, or comma followed by co-ordinating conjunction is needed after new.)
- *Comma splice, comma fault, dash splice or run-on sentence*: Two sentences incorrectly joined by a comma or a dash—a very common, but very fundamental, error.
  - The new wave is not new, it is something old. (A full stop, colon or semicolon is needed after new.)
  - The new wave is not new—it is something completely different. (A full stop, colon or semicolon is needed after new.)
- *Run-on sentence*: An excessively long sentence, not necessarily grammatically incorrect but difficult to follow or a comma splice.
- *Choppy 'style'*: Too many short, simple sentences. A lack of variety in sentence structure.

**2. Distinguish between plurals and possessives. Know the its (=belongs to it)—it's (=it is) distinction/**

- Example of possessive: Jekyll's house, **not** Jekylls house
- Example of plural: The cinema of the 1950s, not the cinema of the 1950's
- It's often said, **not** its often said
- The flower has come into its own, **not** the flower has come into it's own

**3. Underline or italicise longer works. Place shorter works within quotation marks.**

- Examples:
  - Gray's Anatomy or *Gray's Anatomy*. (book)
  - The British Medical Journal (journal)
  - 'Renal Failure in Pre-Adolescents' or 'Renal Failure in Pre-Adolescents'. (Essay.)
  - 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud' or 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud'. (Short poem.)
- Italics or underlining is acceptable in word-processed documents. Be consistent in your usage. Use either single or double quotation marks consistently. Some bibliographic forms omit quotation marks for shorter works.

**4. Proofread for spelling errors.**

- Typographical errors (teh for the)
- Authors' names.
- Your tutor's name or sponsor's name
- Characters within novels.
- Technical terms (e.g. prosopopoeia, dysthymia)
- Frequently misspelled words. (e.g. grammar, secretary)

**5. Introduce quotations correctly, cite properly, use bibliography**

- Use block quotations when you are citing more than two lines of text:
  - The following lines are relevant:  
  
The earth is too much with us, late and soon,  
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.  
Little we see in nature that is ours:  
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon. (Wordsworth 64).
  - Note: colon, no quotation marks, footnote.
- Use in-text form for shorter quotations. Make sure all opened quotations are closed.
  - Tony Blair said, 'Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their party' (Blair 45). [Note comma, capitalisation, terminal punctuation around bracket.]
  - In the tried-and-true tradition of political loyalty, John Major made the following statement: 'Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their party' (Major 96). [Note usage of colon]
  - Bush wrote that now was 'the time for all intelligent men to come to his aid' (Bush 52). [Note lack of introductory comma, no capitalisation, terminal punctuation, footnote.]

**6. Make your paragraphs of appropriate length.**

- Experiment with shifting paragraph boundaries to increase coherence.
- Very occasionally, short paragraphs are used for emphasis.
- The more scholarly the work, the longer the paragraphs are likely to be.
- Consider writing transitional paragraphs instead of creating new sections with new titles.
- Present your essay according to MLA standard conventions of presentation.

**7. Proofread for the correct usage of commas according to several criteria.**

- Setting off introductory material:
  - However, I am of a different opinion. (Introductory word.)
  - Depending on his condition, he will have to remain in hospital overnight (Introductory dependent clause.)

- Items in a list:
  - He bought chillies, avocados, salsa and tortillas. (A noun list.)
  - It was an anachronistic, stylised costume. (An adjective list.)
- Connecting independent clauses.
  - I went to the store, and I bought a copy of The Full Monty. (Independent clauses joined by and, but, or, for, nor, so yet).
- Setting off non-essential elements.
  - My uncle, who fought in the Great War, is over 100 years old. (Non-essential.)
  - The relative who fought in the Great War was my uncle. (Essential.)

**8. Deploy tenses consistently and according to convention.**

- Refer to historical events in the past: 'Coleridge wrote The Ancient Mariner in 1797.
- Consider analysing texts and studies as if they occur in the present: The study maintains there is no benefit to separate injections for measles and mumps.
- Be chronologically logical: Keats contracted tuberculosis after he had written 'The Nightingale'.
- Avoid colloquialisms: 'I seen' and 'I done' for 'I saw' and 'I did'

**9. Follow rules for appropriate capitalisation. (The most common rules are listed below.)**

- Capitalise the names of historical events: Industrial Revolution, Romantic Period.
- Capitalise the names of proper adjectives: English, European.
- Do not capitalise directions (east, west) or seasons (summer, winter), unless they refer to particularly named regions. Example: In the West, computers dominate.
- Use capitalisation appropriately when quoting. (See item 5 above.)

**10. Make appropriate word choices.**

- Know the proper usage of technical terms.
- Use synonyms carefully.
- Avoid 'we' and use 'I' sparingly.
- Know common word pair errors, e.g. 'lose' and 'loose'.
- Avoid informalities unless appropriate for effect: 'Immunisation is really brilliant.'
- Don't use slang or substandard English: e.g. 'youse' or 'ain't'

**11. Consider avoiding split infinitives.**

- 'To go boldly where no one has gone before' and not, 'To boldly go where no one has gone before'
- Note: Though it is still predominantly a standard convention to avoid splitting infinitives, linguists currently argue there is no good reason for this rule and that artificially 'un-splitting' infinitives can create confusion in meaning.

**12. Use colon, semicolon, dash appropriately.**

- Use a semicolon in the following standard form:
  - If I had my way, the streets would be paved with gold; however, macadam will have to do for the present.
  - Not: If I had my way, the streets would be paved with gold; however, macadam will have to do.
- Use a semicolon to separate two sentences of equal importance but very closely related.
  - I would like to go home now; my daughter would like to go home, too.
- Use a colon to separate two sentences when the first sentence announces the importance of the second
  - Do not go home that way: the traffic is tied up because of a bomb scare.
- Use a colon to introduce a block quotation.
- Use a colon to introduce an important list.
  - Please bring the following: okra, brown rice and tobasco sauce.

**13. Avoid dangling participles.**

- Dangling participle: 'Turning now to sports, Manchester United is once again in the headlines.'
- Corrected: 'Turning now to sports, I bring you the latest scores.'
- (Manchester United does not turn to sports: the sports presenter does.)

**14. Deploy gender free language, generally through the use of plural form.**

- A reader must make up his own mind.
- Readers must make up their own minds.

**15. Make subject and verb, noun and pronoun agree in number.**

- Readers must make up their minds.
- Not one of the many applicants is going to get the job.

**16. References to Antecedents.**

Have pointing words such as 'this' clearly identified:

- This is what is important.
- This discrepancy in interpretation is important.