

The Top Ten Grammar Errors

10. Missing Apostrophes: An apostrophe is needed to form the possessive form of most words.

Example: The *dog's* toy was found under the deck.

Be sure to check for variations of this rule. Another common apostrophe error is the inclusion of an apostrophe when the noun is plural

Incorrect Example: Most Monday's I want to skip work.

Correct Example: Most Mondays I want to skip work.

9. Dangling Modifiers: A modifying clause must clearly and sensibly modify a word in a sentence. When there is no word that the phrase or clause can sensibly modify, the modifier is said to dangle.

Incorrect Example: *Carrying groceries, the bird* flew to its nest. (Can a bird carry groceries?)

Correct Example: *While carrying groceries, I saw* a bird fly into its nest.

8. Pronoun Antecedent: A pronoun should agree in number with the word to which it refers.

Incorrect Example: Anyone entering must show *their* ticket.

Correct Example: Anyone entering must show *his or her* ticket.

7. Vague Pronoun: A pronoun becomes vague when it does not explicitly refer back to a noun.

Incorrect Example: J.D. Salinger, Kurt Vonnegut, and John Steinbeck are three of my favorite authors. *He* wrote my all-time favorite book, East of Eden.

Correct Example: J.D. Salinger, Kurt Vonnegut, and John Steinbeck are three of my favorite authors. *Steinbeck* wrote my all-time favorite book, East of Eden.

6. Subject/Verb Agreement: Subjects and verbs should agree in number; that is, they must both be either singular or plural.

Incorrect Example: *Meg, as well as her friends, like* the Cubs.

Correct Example: *Meg, as well as her friends, likes* the Cubs.

5. Mixed Tenses: Whatever verb tense you use (past, present, or future), it should remain consistent in your writing.

Incorrect Example: She *went* to the store and *goes* to the bank.

Correct Example: She *went* to the store and the bank.

When writing about history, use past tense.

Example: There *was* much protest over the Vietnam War.

Also, when writing about literature, refer to texts in the present tense.

Example: Faulkner *writes* about the burden of history in The Sound and the Fury.

4. Its/It's: The "it's" (with the apostrophe) is short for it is. The "its" is possessive; it indicates that the "it" has ownership over something.

Incorrect Example: *Its* closing time at the local dive.

Correct Example: *It's* closing time at the local dive.

3. Comma Splice: A comma splice is created when a comma is used to join two independent clauses. Independent clauses must be joined by a coordinator (and, but, yet, so, etc.), by a full stop (a period, question mark, exclamation point, etc.), or by a semi-colon.

Incorrect Example: My dog likes to bark at birds, *she* howls when they come around.

Correct Example: My dog likes to bark at birds; *she* howls when they come around.

2. Fragments: A sentence consists of a group of words that contains a subject and a verb and expresses a complete thought. A fragment, therefore, lacks one or more of these conditions.

Incorrect Example: I saw Jake. *Leaving the Writing Center.*

Correct Example: I saw Jake *leaving the Writing Center.*

1. Run-on Sentences: A run-on sentence occurs when two or more independent clauses are improperly joined. A comma splice (see #3) is one example of a run-on sentence.

Incorrect Example: I went to the gym, but all the machines were occupied I decided to eat cake.

Correct Example: I went to the gym, but all the machines were occupied. I decided to eat cake.