

6 Major Writing Errors

(4 or more of these can result in a failing English grade)

1. Comma Splice

Rule: Two independent clauses must *not* be connected with merely a comma (doing so creates a comma splice.) This type of error can be corrected by a variety of different methods, including changing the comma to a semicolon, converting one of the clauses to a dependent clause and keeping the comma, or adding a coordinating conjunction after the comma.

Incorrect: Last weekend I went to the football game, it was really exciting.

Correct: Last weekend I went to the football game; it was really exciting.
Last weekend I went to the football game. It was really exciting.
Last weekend I went to the football game, and it was really exciting

2. Missing or misplaced possessive apostrophe

Rule: To form the possessive of a singular noun, add an apostrophe followed by *s*. To form the possessive of a plural noun, place an apostrophe after the *s*, except for irregular plural words that do not end in *s*; treat these like singular nouns.

Incorrect: My friends car was towed for being parked in the faculty lot.
My parent's pride in me as I received my diploma was evident by their smiles.
The mens' golf team has a good record this season.

Correct: My friend's car was towed for being parked in the faculty lot.
My parents' pride in me as I received my diploma was evident by their smiles.
The men's golf team has a good record this season.

3. Sentence Fragment

Rule: A sentence fragment is a phrase or dependent clause that is treated as though it were a sentence (i.e. beginning with a capital and ending with a period.) Most sentence fragments can be corrected by attaching the phrase or dependent clause to the sentence or main clause to which it logically relates. (Hint: Subordinating conjunctions - words like *when, because, if, although, whereas, since* - begin dependent clauses. These clauses must be attached to a main clause.)

Incorrect: I plan to major in business. Although my parents want me to major in chemistry and eventually become a doctor.
Last year I went to Cancun, Mexico. A neat city with great beaches.

Correct: I plan to major in business, although my parents want me to major in chemistry and eventually become a doctor.
Last year I went to Cancun, Mexico, a neat city with great beaches.

4. Lack of agreement between subject and verb

Rule: A singular subject takes a singular verb; a plural subject takes a plural verb. Do not be fooled by words coming between the subject and verb or by a subject that follows the verb.

Incorrect: One of my goals have been to keep the HOPE.
My RA was mad because there was dirty lunch trays in the hallway.

Correct: One of my goals has been to keep the HOPE.
My RA was mad because there were dirty lunch trays in the hallway.

5. Lack of agreement between pronoun and antecedent

Rule: A pronoun must agree in number with its antecedent (i.e. a singular pronoun must be used if the antecedent is singular, and a plural pronoun if the antecedent is plural.) (Hint: Be particularly careful if the antecedent is a word like *someone*, *everyone*, or *nobody*. Although in spoken and informal English it is okay to use a plural pronoun to refer back to one of these kinds of words, in formal written English you should use a singular pronoun.)

Incorrect: Each of the girls rushing that sorority did their best to make a good impression.
Every student must move out of their residence hall room between semesters.

Correct: Each of the girls rushing that sorority did her best to make a good impression.
Every student must move out of his/her residence hall room between semesters.

6. Fused sentence

Rule: Do not run two independent clauses together with no punctuation or connector between them (doing so creates a fused sentence.) You can usually correct a fused sentence using one of the same methods you use to correct a comma splice.

Incorrect: My roommate never gets depressed she's always smiling.

Correct: My roommate never gets depressed; she's always smiling.
My roommate never gets depressed, and she's always smiling.
My roommate never gets depressed. She's always smiling.