

Part II

Correcting Common Grammar Errors

The discussion that follows is a user friendly grammar guideline, an attempt to simplify the mysteries of the English language and give you, the writer, control of your writing skills. We start with the basics, but scoff not. These simple rules are the foundation for more sophisticated levels of rhetoric that we need for academic success and for Formal Standard American English. Here are some guidelines to help you edit your own papers, to help you identify and correct common writing errors, and to help you write with style and strength.

The Sentence

Question: What is a sentence?

Answer: A complete thought.

Question: What is a complete thought? Is the following a complete thought?
"Enjoying the winter holidays."

Answer: No. It is a fragment.

Question: So what does a sentence need in order to be a complete thought?

Answer: A sentence must have a subject and a verb. (We can also say a subject and a "predicate" which means basically the verb and the rest of the sentence.) Let's add a subject and a verb to the fragment:

S V

The student is enjoying the winter holidays.

Question: But I forget the parts of speech and all those grammar labels, and I honestly don't know how to identify a subject and a verb?

Answer: No problem. To find a subject, ask "who or what does something" (or "who or what instigates action of some sort"?)

The answer in this case will be "student."

To find the verb ask "what does who or what do? In the above example, the "student, the subject, "is enjoying." The verb is "is enjoying."

FYI

Verbs such as be, am, feel, look, smell, sound, taste, become, and remain are linking verbs, and they are classified as verbs even if the "action" isn't very physical.

S V

The food tastes good.

S V

I am hungry.

S V

The singer sounds a bit off key.

Question: So is that all I need to know about a sentence?

Answer: No. That would be too easy! We need to know that sentences are often intricate combinations of main clauses, subordinate clauses and phrases.

Question: I'm sorry, but I don't know the difference between **a main clause**, **a subordinate clause** and **a phrase**.

Answer: Ok. Here are some definitions.

A Main Clause (often called an Independent Clause) has a subject and a verb. It can stand alone as a sentence by itself:

S V
The student is enjoying the winter holidays.

A Subordinate Clause (often called a Dependent Clause) has a Subject and a verb, but it cannot stand alone as a sentence by itself because it begins with a subordinating conjunction. Here is a list of subordinating conjunctions:

after	even	than	which
although	even if	that	while
as	even though	though	who
as if	if unless	unless	whoever
as long as	in order that	until	whose
as soon as	rather than	when	
before	since	whenever	
because	so that	where	

Here are some examples of clauses which begin with a subordinating conjunction and are therefore labeled as subordinate clauses (sc):

Subordinate clauses

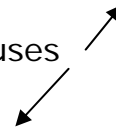
Although the student is enjoying the winter holidays . . .

Before the day is over . . .

As is, these subordinate clauses are not complete sentences. They are fragments.

Let's add a main clause (mc) to each:

Although the student is enjoying the winter holidays, he is also working part-time at the supermarket. main clauses



Before the day is over, I will have finished two final exams.

By adding main clauses to subordinate clauses, we create complete sentences and avoid fragments.

A Phrase

Finally, a phrase is a group of words which fit together but lack a subject and/or a verb. A phrase is not a complete sentence; it is merely a group of related words.

- 1. Not wanting to jeopardize my GPA . . . no subject & no main verb*
- 2. Startled by the noise . . . no subject & no main verb*

Let's add a main clause to the first phrase to form a complete sentence:

phrase main clause
Not wanting to jeopardize my GPA, I am taking only fifteen units during the spring semester.

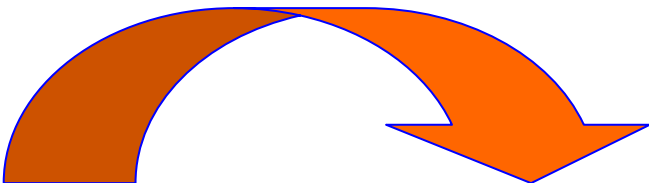
We can do the same thing to the second sentence:

phrase main clause
Startled by the noise, the librarian went to the front entrance to see what was going on.

Or we can simply place a subject and a main verb in front of the phrase:

The librarian was startled by the noise.

By adding main clauses to phrases, we create complete sentences. A phrase punctuated as a sentence is not really a sentence. It is a fragment.



It is probably time to talk about the difference between main verbs and other verb forms.

MAIN VERBS

Once again, there must be a main verb in a sentence.
The infinitive and the participle are not main verbs.

* An **infinitive** is the basic form of a verb with no endings such as "ed" "s" and "ing," endings which indicate tense. The infinitive starts with the word "to":

to sail, to swim, to be, to write.

Note that there are no endings on an infinitive. We wouldn't say "to walked" or "to talks."

Sidebar: To test whether a word is a verb, put a "to" in front of it to see if it can be made into an infinitive:

Take the word "computer." Can you say "to computer"?
No. The word "computer" is not a verb.

Take the word "write." Can you say "to write"? Yes.
The word "write" is a verb.

Since the infinitive form of a verb is not a main verb, the following phrase,

"To go to Paris"

is not a sentence. It is a phrase.
To turn the phrase into a sentence, add a subject and a verb:

subject	verb	infinitive phrase
I	decided	to go to Paris.

* A **participle**, a verb form, can take the present tense: -ing (working, wishing)
or the past tense: -ed (worked, wished)

The participle has many uses, one of which is to act as an adjective, as in
traveling salesman and disgruntled musician.

However, a participle is not a main verb. A participle must include a helping verb such as
"am" or "are" or "will be" if it is to be labeled a main verb.

The following phrase

"Eating pumpkin pie"

is not a sentence because "eating" is not a main verb. It is a participle.

Here is a way to use the helping verb "are" to create a complete sentence:

subject main verb
The children are eating pumpkin pie.

The following phrase

"Stopped by the police"

is not a sentence because "stopped" is not a main verb.

Here is a way to create a complete sentence:

subject verb
The fugitive was stopped by the police in front of the bank.

("was" is the helping verb)

HELPING VERBS

Here is a list of commonly used helping verbs (auxiliary verbs):
does, do, did, be, am, is, are, was, were, being, been, has, have, had.

Here is a list of nine helping words, sometimes called "modal auxiliaries":
can, could, may, might, must, ought, shall, should, will, would.

Here are some modal auxiliary compounds:
would have been, should have been, could be, can be, must have been.

By the way: Present participles are useful as subjects:

Fencing is difficult.

This use of the participle is known as a gerund.

See if you can create a complete sentence out of the following phrases:

1. To be a millionaire
2. Realizing there is not much time left
3. Amazed by the quality of the dancer's performance
4. To be or not to be

Putting it all together: Sentence Combining

A main clause can stand alone as a simple sentence, or it can be embedded into a larger group of words, phrases and clauses. Let's illustrate that point by starting with a simple sentence. (Note: "s" stands for subject and "v" stands for verb.)

s v
I have only one credit card.

To make the above thought more interesting and add more specificity, we can add clauses and phrases to it:

After many years of over-extending my credit, I have only one credit card which I pay off each month even if I have to give up some of my favorite luxuries, luxuries such as gas and food.

The above main clause is embedded in a larger group of words. It is introduced by a phrase and followed by two subordinate clauses and another phrase.

*The result of using simple and complex sentence is a sophisticated writing style that uses a variety of sentence structures. However, in the process of combining sentences, we might create **fragments**, **comma-splices** and/or **run-ons**. Here are some instructions on how to recognize and then correct these serious, but unfortunately common errors.*

Correcting Fragments

Remember, phrases are groups of words that fit together and give us more information about a subject, but they can not be punctuated as complete sentences. If they are punctuated as if they were sentences, they are fragments. Here are some fragments:

Under the elm tree.

Finally going home.

For example, candy, ice cream and cake.

Startled by the sudden noise.

Jumping from the train.

To earn a degree in biochemistry.

None of the above phrases can answer the charge: "Who or what does something?" or "What does who or what do?" Thus the above phrases are not sentences. They are fragments. Here are some ways we can add a main clause to the first phrase, thereby correcting the problem as well as adding more information about the subject:

subject main verb
The man is sitting under the Elm tree.

A fragment may also occur in the form of a subordinate clause that is not connected to a main clause. In the following instance, simply connecting the fragment to the main clause that follows it will fix the error:

fragment —→ Although I submitted my proposal. It was past the deadline.

corrected Although I submitted my proposal, it was past the deadline.

FYI

Here are some common fragment traps:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1. The prepositional phrase | Around the corner next to the gas station. |
| 2. The present participial phrase | Driving eighty-five miles per hour. |
| 3. The past participial phrase | Undaunted by his diminishing bank account. |
| 4. The infinitive phrase | To make a decision. |
| 5. The subordinate clause | Since the damage was negligible. |
| 6. The list | For example, fried eggs, bacon and toast. |

Grammar side bar:

1. a preposition is a word signifying placement or a relation to nouns in a sentence. Here is a list of commonly used prepositions:

about	beneath	into	through
above	beside	like	to
across	between	near	toward
after	by	of	under
along	despite	off	underneath
among	down	on	unlike
around	during	onto	until
at	except	out	up
before	for	outside	upon
behind	from	over	with
below	in	past	without

A prepositional phrase is a group of words that starts with the preposition and ends with the object of the preposition:
"under the bridge," "beyond the obvious," "in the box."

Correcting the Comma-Splice

Another common sentence error is the comma-splice. Here we are not dealing with incomplete sentences, but we are using a comma instead of a period or some other suitable connecting device to connect two sentences (main clauses). A period (or a question mark or an exclamation mark) goes at the end of a sentence. We don't use commas as end punctuation. For example, we would never write a sentence and end it with a comma! (See the following example.)

College freshmen are often overwhelmed by the amount of schoolwork they have to do, ← comma

So it stands to reason that we would not connect one sentence to another with only a comma. The result would be a comma splice (cs):

College freshmen are often overwhelmed by the amount of schoolwork they have to do, they would benefit from acquiring good study habits such as time management, appropriate study environments, and a positive attitude.
↙ comma splice (cs)

One obvious way to correct the above comma-splice error is to replace the comma with a period (thereby creating two complete sentences):

College freshmen are often overwhelmed by the amount of schoolwork they have to do. They would benefit from acquiring good study habits such as time management, appropriate study environments, and a positive attitude.
↖ Use a period.

Correcting the Run-On

The run-on is similar to the comma-splice, but there is one difference. Instead of using a comma to connect two sentences (main clauses), the writer uses no punctuation at all. We all know that we do not end sentences in mid-air with no punctuation. We would not end a sentence with no punctuation at all:

College freshmen are often overwhelmed by the amount of schoolwork they have to do ← no punctuation at all

Here is an example of a run-on (two sentences/main clauses connected with no punctuation at all):

College freshmen are often overwhelmed by the amount of schoolwork they have to do they would benefit from acquiring good study habits such as time management, appropriate study environments, and a positive attitude.

run-on (ro)

Once again, we can insert a period to fix the error.

College freshmen are often overwhelmed by the amount of schoolwork they have to do. They would benefit from acquiring good study habits such as time management, appropriate study environments, and a positive attitude.

Use a period.

There are four other ways to fix the comma-splice and run-on errors.

Using a period to fix comma-splices and run-on errors works well. But the result may be a series of short, choppy, and oversimplified sentences. Simple sentences can be a bit dull and repetitive, so we can use one of the other four ways to fix the comma-splice (cs) and run-on (ro) error in order to create a variety of sophisticated sentence structures.

- 1. Use a coordinating conjunction and a comma.**
- 2. Use a semi-colon.**
- 3. subordinate one of the main clauses.**
- 4. Use a conjunctive adverb and a semi-colon.**

1. Use a coordinating conjunction and a comma.

There are seven coordinating conjunctions: and, but, so, for, nor, or, and yet.

A coordinating conjunction connects two equal grammatical parts.

FYI

Here are some examples of equal grammatical parts connected by a coordinating conjunction:

a noun + a noun: the truck and the train

a verb + a verb: jumping and clapping

a phrase + a phrase: to be or not to be

a main clause + a main clause: You are good, and you are wise.

Let's look at the comma-splice sentence we worked on earlier and fix it with one of the coordinating conjunctions (We will fix only the comma-spliced sentences, but we can use the same methods to fix the run-ons.)

College freshmen are often overwhelmed by the amount of schoolwork they have to do, they would benefit from acquiring good study habits such as time management, appropriate study environments, and a positive attitude.

comma splice

We can use the coordinating conjunction "so" with a comma to fix this comma splice:

College freshmen are often overwhelmed by the amount of schoolwork they have to do, **so** they would benefit from acquiring good study habits such as time management, appropriate study environments, and a positive attitude.

correction using a coordinating conjunction.

We can use the same method to fix the run-on: "they have to do ^{RO} so they would . . . "

College freshmen are often overwhelmed by the amount of schoolwork they have to do, **so** they would benefit from acquiring good study habits such as time management, appropriate study environments, and a positive attitude.

2. Use a semi-colon ; A semi-colon is equal to a period ; = .

The semi-colon is the same as a period. It connects two related thoughts but is less final than a period. You can use a semi-colon to connect two main clauses. However, be sure that you use the semi-colon correctly. Here is an example of correcting our sample comma/splice and run-on errors using a semi-colon:

College freshmen are often overwhelmed by the amount of schoolwork they have to do; they would benefit from acquiring good study habits such as time management, appropriate study environments, and a positive attitude.

correction using a semi-colon

3. Subordinate one of the main clauses.

We can turn one of the main clauses into a subordinate (dependent) clause by adding a subordinating conjunction (see list below). If we turn one of the sentences into a subordinate clause, all we need is a comma. Here is a list of subordinating conjunctions.

after	even	than	while
although	even if	that	who
as	even though	though	whoever
as if	if unless	until	whom
as long as	in order that	when	whose
as soon as	rather than	whenever	
before	since	where	
because	so that	which	

Let's go back to our original comma-splice error and fix it by subordinating one of the main clauses. In this case, the original comma is ok because it connects the subordinate clause to a main clause. The subordinating conjunction "since" will work well here:

Since college freshmen are often overwhelmed by the amount of schoolwork they have to do, they would benefit from acquiring good study habits such as time management, appropriate study environments, and a positive attitude.

correction using a subordinating conjunction

FYI: If the subordinate clause comes first, you need to put a comma after the subordinate clause. You do not need to put a comma after the main clause if the main clause comes first.

4. Use a Conjunctive Adverb (transition word) and a semi-colon.

These transitional words (conjunctive adverbs) help us to provide connections and to keep our readers on track and involved in the reading. Here is a complete list of transitional words:

however	moreover	furthermore
nevertheless	as a result	thus
on the other hand	consequently	therefore
instead	accordingly	anyway
meanwhile	certainly	conversely
otherwise	finally	likewise
indeed	next	nonetheless
in addition	otherwise	similarly
also	then	subsequently

The important point to remember about conjunctive adverbs is that they can begin a sentence and not subordinate it. In other words, a transitional word will not subordinate a main clause. Let's use "therefore" as an example.

There have been a series of thefts in the neighborhood recently. Therefore, it would be wise for citizens to lock up their houses before they leave.

Since a conjunctive adverb does not subordinate main clauses, we can use it to connect two main clauses with a semi-colon. Here is a correction of our original comma-splice error using a conjunctive adverb and a semi-colon:

College freshmen are often overwhelmed by the amount of schoolwork they have to do; **therefore**, they would benefit from acquiring good study habits such as time management, appropriate study environments, and a positive attitude.
correction using a conjunctive adverb and a semi-colon.

FYI: Note that the conjunctive adverb is followed by a comma. Also note that sometimes a transitional words don't introduce main clauses, so they don't *always* require a semi-colon.

phrase
It was a good choice, therefore a wise one.

main clause
It was a good choice; therefore, it was a wise one.

WARNING: Don't use the semi-colon incorrectly. Make sure your semi-colon connects two main clauses, not a clause and a phrase. Wrong: After we bought the car; we went for a ride.

Now that we have addressed three of the major writing problems, the comma-splice, the run-on, and the fragment, let's look at the variety of sentence structures we can create when we correctly combine main clauses (independent clauses) and subordinate (dependent) clauses. We will start with the simple sentence.

Sentence Variety

1. A Simple Sentence contains one main clause. It has a subject and a verb:

Solar panels are a good investment.

2. A Compound Sentence contains two or more main clauses:

Solar panels are a good investment, but they are still very expensive.

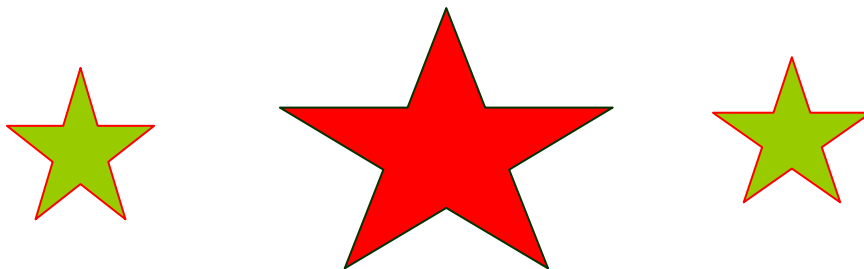
3. A Complex Sentence contains one main clause and one or more subordinate clauses:

Even though solar panels are a good investment, they are still very expensive.

4. A Compound-Complex sentence has two or more main clauses, and one or more subordinate clauses:

Even though solar panels are a good investment and the government gives a 30% federal tax credit toward installation cost, they are still very expensive.

Use a variety of sentence structures to enhance the quality of your writing, to provide your reader with a combination of sophisticated phrases and clauses, and to use simple, readable short sentences to pepper your writing with style. Try it. It works!



Correcting Pronoun/Antecedent Agreement Errors

There is one more major grammatical error you should be able to recognize and correct: the pronoun/antecedent agreement problem.

Usually, the pronoun we use to take the place of a specific noun or subject should agree with the number and gender of that subject. However, the rules have been relaxed as informal speech and the media have decided to allow the word "they" to refer to all genders and numbers. It is not uncommon to hear a sports announcer say "A player on this team has their work cut out for them." (Note the error: "a player" is singular, but the pronoun modifying the word player is plural: "their.")

*This kind of slurring of basic rules is acceptable in the vernacular, but not for formal college writing demands. If you skim through the following discussion, you will see why **USING THE CORRECT PRONOUN REALLY DOES MATTER.***

1. *We use pronouns to eliminate repetition, so we can avoid the following awkward style of writing:*

The young boy can not sign up for the military until the boy is eighteen, no matter how much the boy might want to fight for the boy's country.

2. *Instead, we can use pronouns to stand in place of the subject or noun:*

The young boy can not sign up for the military until he is eighteen no matter how much he might want to fight for his country.

3. *It stands to reason that pronouns must agree with the gender of the antecedent (the word or phrase that the pronoun refers to), so we wouldn't write the following:*

The young boy can not sign up for the military until she is eighteen, no matter how much she might want to fight for her country.

4. *If the subject is plural (boys/mothers), the pronoun must be plural, in this case "they." The pronoun "they" stands for both the masculine and feminine plurals. The following sentence would not be considered correct:*

Young boys can not sign up for the military until he is eighteen, no matter how much he might want to fight for his country.

Nor would this one:

Young girls can not sign up for the military until she is eighteen, no matter how much she might want to fight for her country.

We would correct the above error as follows:

Young girls can not sign up for the military until they are eighteen, no matter how much they might want to fight for their country.

Conversely, we wouldn't use the plural pronoun for a singular subject:

The young boy can not sign up for the military until they are eighteen, no matter how much they might want to fight for their country.

5. The problem has arisen because of an attempt to avoid gender bias.

Before the women's rights issues came into the picture, it was acceptable to use the pronoun "he" to refer to all genders. But today we don't assume that a doctor or a lawyer or a bus driver is a male or that a nurse or beautician is a female; therefore, we are careful to use "he/she" to refer to avoid gender bias. Here is an example of gender bias:

An airline pilot needs adequate time off between flights so he can recuperate from the stresses of his job, and so he may often have a week or so off between his flights.

If we keep the singular subject "pilot," we must avoid biased language and include both pronouns "he" and "she."

An airline pilot needs adequate time off between flights so that he/she can recuperate from the stresses of his/her job, and so he/she may often have a week or so between his/her flights.

Since the "his/her" and "he/she" format is repetitious and awkward, somewhere, somehow, the language slipped enough to allow the plural pronoun "they" to refer to a singular subject, no matter whether that subject is male or female:

An airline pilot needs enough time off so that they can recuperate from the stresses of their job.



*Since this kind of writing is inappropriate for the scholarly work done in college, good writers follow the rules. Here is an easy and sensible solution to avoiding the cumbersome "his/her," "him/her" "she/he." **When the subject is generic (can refer to either gender), use a plural subject:***



Airline **pilots** need adequate time off between flights so that they can recuperate from the stresses of **their** jobs, and so **they** may often have a week or so between **their** flights.

Plurals

To change a noun from the singular to the plural, simply add an "s."

friend	friends	Sue and Stacia are the best of friends.
boy	boys	Give the boys their pay checks.
house	houses	Four houses on my street are for sale.
horse	horses	Let the horses run free.

There are a few exceptions for forming plurals:

story	stories	Sad stories make me cry.
party	parties	Too many parties can ruin a GPA.
city	cities	I have visited all the major cities in America.
woman	women	Women have more choices than they used to.
thief	thieves	The thieves were apprehended immediately.
life	lives	The brave firefighters saved many lives.
tomato	tomatoes	I love to grow tomatoes in my garden.

If a noun ends in "s," "ch," "zz," "ss," or "x," we have to add "es":

church	churches	witch	witches	class	classes
box	boxes	bench	benches	glass	glasses
fox	foxes	quiz	quizzes	crutch	crutches



**DO NOT use an apostrophe to form a simple plural:
The boy's went to the game early.**



Possessives

The possessive shows ownership. To show ownership for singular nouns, use an apostrophe and add an "s" even when using nouns that end in "s," "ch," "ss," etc.

The boy's bicycle is in the yard.	(The bicycle of the boy is in the yard.)
The story's ending is sad.	(The ending of the story is sad.)
The woman's shawl is torn.	
The church's steeple is rusty.	
The fox's fur is bloody.	
The glass's rim is dirty.	

To show ownership for a plural noun, add an apostrophe to the plural form of the noun:

The witches' brew is bitter.
The girls' lessons are on the table.
All of the churches' steeples in this part of town are in need of repair.
The politicians' agendas are stated in the program.

A final look at some basic rules for better writing

#1: Avoid the second person point-of-view (YOU) in formal academic writing.

Use the second person pronoun *YOU* only when addressing an individual or group of individuals directly or when explaining a process.

Normally, one would think of a point of view as a person's opinion. This is a logical assumption. For instance the point of view of a farmer concerning relocation of an irrigation system might be totally different from the point of view of a developer. However, when we write formal essays, we need to think about another use of the "point of view." To explain this concept, we can conjugate a verb to see who is doing the action or the thinking.

	Singular	Plural
first person:	I work	we work
second person:	you work	you (plural) work
third Person:	he, she, it works	they work

Here is a sentence using the **first person singular point of view**:

I am concerned about the environment, so I support a ban on drilling for oil in Alaska.

The **second person singular point of view** is used when talking directly to the reader:

Hi Jane, how are you coming along with your new job?

. . . or when giving instructions:

You will need a pen with black ink, three-ring notebook paper, and a dictionary.



The informal second person singular (or plural) pronoun should NOT be used in formal essays:

Women have more choices in today's world.
~~You~~ can become mothers, politicians, lawyers
or actors. ~~You~~ don't even have to get married.

Women have more choices in today's world.
~~You~~ They can become mothers, politicians, lawyers
or actors. ~~You~~ They don't even have to get married.

This rule applies especially to the conclusion of an essay, as the use of the YOU will sound like preaching. For example, at the end of an argument about the dangers of smoking, a writer might state the following:

"So if you want to live a long and healthy life, don't start smoking, and if you do smoke, quit."

A more subtle and appropriate way to conclude would be as follows:

"With so much information available about the dangers of smoking, people who are addicted to cigarettes should take any means available to quit the habit."

#2 The pronoun used for people is "who," not "that."

Again, as in the problem with the pronoun/antecedent agreement errors, the media and popular usage are often responsible for this minor error. The problem probably stems from the fact that there is a lack of awareness about when to use "who" and when to use "whom." So the pronoun "that" seems to be a way to cover up any errors in usage. To add to the quality of your own writing, use the correct pronoun.

Incorrect: People ~~that~~ are unconcerned about the environment are part of the problem.

Correct: People who are unconcerned about the environment are part of the problem.

Correct: Books that are for sale go on the front desk.
(Here the pronoun "that" refers correctly to a thing.)

FYI:
"Who" is used as a subject in a sentence.

Who is going to go to the library with us?

"Whom" is used as an object.

For whom will you vote in the upcoming election?

#3: Discussion of essays, articles and fiction should be written in the present tense because the action is on-going.

Juliet **falls** in love with Romeo.

In his essay, "Letter From Birmingham Jail," Martin Luther King, Jr. **says** that his people have waited for 340 years for their God given rights.

Delilah **cuts** Samson's hair, and then he loses all his strength.

FYI:

Adhering to this simple rule is a very helpful way to keep your tenses consistent. As you edit your paper, note how many times you switch from the past to the present tense. If you stick to the present tense, the problem is fixed. Caveat: personal anecdotes, narratives, and biographical discussions will usually require the past tense. But most importantly, be consistent.

#4: Refer to an author by his/her first and last name or just the last name.

Correct:

In his novel, Nicholas Nickleby, author Charles Dickens reveals the abuses of the private school system in England. Dickens also manages to include a great deal of wit and humor into the story.

Incorrect: "Charles also manages to include a great deal of wit and humor into the story."

#5: Avoid ambiguous references such as "this," "that," "it," and "which."

Here is an example of an ambiguous reference:

In general, people no longer think that global warming is some hoax cooked up by quirky scientists and rabid environmentalists. It is a reality we all have to face, no matter how "inconvenient" as Al Gore states in his documentary, "An Inconvenient Truth." Unfortunately many Americans still are not convinced and they refuse to give up their luxuries, luxuries which pollute the atmosphere and deplete natural resources. There is no excuse for **this**.

The word "this" has no specific referent. "This what?" we ask. We can fix the problem by changing the last sentence to the following:

"There is no excuse for **this attitude**."

#6: Use a variety of sentence structures.

Eliminate strings of short sentences by combining them. Here is an example of a set of short simple sentences that detract from the quality of the writing:

Marie went to the library. She looked up statistics. She looked up statistics on accidents caused by drunk driving in the US. She discovered that the subject she had chosen was too broad. So she decided to change her topic.

Note the improvement as we combine the sentences:

When Marie went to the library to look up statistics on accidents caused by drunk drivers in the United States, she discovered that the subject she had chosen was too broad, so she decided to change her topic.

#7: Eliminate awkward sentences that begin with the prepositions "by" and "for."

Awkward:

By preparing for a test a week ahead of time it will help us retain the information.

Better:

Preparing for a test a week ahead of time will help us retain the information.

Awkward:

For the people who don't vote, they shouldn't complain about the results of an election.

Better:

People who don't vote shouldn't complain about the results of an election.

#8: Avoid announcing your intentions.

Sometimes specific references to what you are going to do in your academic assignments work well, as in a speech or a lengthy scientific treatise. However, for an average five to ten page essay, avoid explaining the obvious:

"This essay will be about . . . First I am going to talk about . . . second I will . . . "
"In conclusion, I have just proven that . . . "

#9: Avoid trite language and clichés.

It is time to smell the roses and stop running around in circles. Sure it's nice to be busy as a bee, but I want some time and space so I can chill out.

#10: Know when to qualify such words as "all," "always," "everyone," and "never."

Overgeneralization:

All parents love their children and want the best for them.

More correct:

Most parents love their children and want the best for them.

Overgeneralization:

Everyone in the world wants to get married and raise a family.

More Correct:

In general, most people want to get married and raise a family.

#11: The period and the comma go inside the quotation mark.

"This is the way to solve the equation," said the instructor as he turned his back on the students and began to write on the board.

I have read Poe's poem, "The Raven," but not any of his short stories.

The child was adamant in his denial: "I did not steal that candy bar."

(Note that the only time the comma or the period comes after the quotation mark occurs when using in-text parenthetical references: According to Browne and Keeley, "Whoever finds the better conclusion first is not relevant; what is important is the search for better conclusions" (206). Work Cited: Browne, M. Neil, and Stuart M. Keeley. Asking the Right Questions, A Guide to Critical Thinking New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2007.)

#12: Major Spelling Errors You Absolutely Must Avoid

Here is a list of spelling errors your professor will notice, ones you must avoid at all cost.

your/you're

Your coat is at the cleaners.
(*Your* is a possessive pronoun.)

You're a fine one to talk.
(*You're* is a contraction.)

there/their/they're

The book is over there.
(*There* is an adverb denoting place)

Their books are expensive.
(*Their* is a possessive pronoun)

They're going to purchase a large order.
(*They're* is a contraction of they + are.)

definitely

There are definitely too many men in the boat.
(*This* word is almost always misspelled.)

a lot

The professor gave us a lot of leeway on our due date.
(*a lot* is two words, not one.)

would have



We hear *would of*, but the proper spelling is *would have*. Never, never write *would of*, *should of*, or *could of*; write *would have*, *should have* and *could have*.

nevertheless

Nevertheless, I will turn my paper in before the deadline.
(*This* word is not separated as in *never the less*.)

nowadays

People nowadays are aware of the dangers of smoking.
(*This* word is not separated as in *now a days*.)

themselves

Students should give themselves some time to relax.
(*The* plural of this pronoun is not *them selfs*. It is *themselves*.)

Websites for Further Research

"Workshop for College Writers" by Mary Little

<http://web.pacific.edu/x22298.xml>

Here is the link to this document. It is located in the Bernerd School of Education Website. Go to the Educational Resource Center link to find it.

"Guide to Grammar and Writing"

Here is an excellent overview of grammar, user friendly, fun and comprehensive.

www.grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar

"100 Words Every High School Graduate Should Know"

by Editors of the American Heritage Dictionaries.

Challenge yourself and see how many of these words you actually do know.

http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/booksellers/press_release/100words/

"The Writing Center"

This Harvard website covers the essentials from "How to Read an Assignment" to "Tips on Grammar, Punctuation, and Style." It is an excellent resource for writers.

<http://www.fas.harvard.edu>

"Writing Labs & Writing Centers on the Web"

This lengthy list of college online writing sites is listed alphabetically from "Amherst College" to "Trinity College."

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/internet/owls/writing-labs.html>

"International Writing Centers Association"

Have fun and get lost in this vast and tempting array of sources for your perusal. Just use "International Writing Centers Association as your keywords."