

HIT PARADE OF ERRORS IN GRAMMAR, PUNCTUATION, AND STYLE

1. lack of agreement
2. sentence fragments
3. overly-long sentences
4. overuse of passive voice
5. faulty parallelism
6. vague pronouns
7. dangling modifiers
8. squinting modifiers
9. mixed or dead metaphors
10. faulty word choice / faulty diction
11. wordiness
12. comma splices
13. misuse of comma, semicolon, colon

1. FAULTY AGREEMENT

a. *Subjects and verbs must agree in number.*

- X Recent discoveries about the weather reveals that several cycles are involved.
√ Recent discoveries about the weather reveal that several cycles are involved.
X The media was biased in its reporting of the event.
√ The media were biased in their reporting of the event.

b. *Nouns and pronouns must agree in number.*

- X A student is free to express their opinion.
√ A student is free to express his or her opinion.
√ Students are free to express their opinions.

c. *Pronouns must agree with each other.*

- X Once one has decided to take the course, you must keep certain policies in mind.
√ Once you have decided to take the course, you must keep certain policies in mind.

2. SENTENCE FRAGMENTS

A sentence consists of an independent unit with at least a subject and a verb.

- X All of these rules and regulations should be made aware of.
√ Athletes should be made aware of all these rules and regulations.
X The liquid was poured into a glass beaker. Being a strong acid.
√ Because it was a strong acid, the liquid was poured into a glass beaker.

3. OVERLY-LONG SENTENCES (see also #12, comma splices)

A sentence should express only one idea or a clearly connected set of ideas.

- X Home care has been expanding tremendously over the past few years partly due to recent technological advances that enable assessments and treatments to be a part of the home setting which at one time could only be performed within the hospital environment.
- √ Home care has expanded tremendously over the past few years. This increase is partly due to recent technological advances that now make more assessments and treatments possible in the home rather than only in the hospital.

4. OVERUSE OF PASSIVE VOICE

Prefer active verbs to passive verbs, and prefer persons over abstract ideas for the subjects of these verbs.

- X It is through this essay that the proposed benefits of active exercise for Chronic Lower Back Pain (CLBP) will be examined.
- √ This essay will examine the proposed benefits of active exercise for Chronic Lower Back Pain (CLBP).

5. FAULTY PARALLELISM

Building parallel elements into a sentence adds clarity and emphasis.

- X Eating huge meals, snacking between meals, and too little exercise can lead to obesity.
- √ Eating huge meals, snacking between meals, and exercising too little can lead to obesity.
- X Our coach is paid too much, obese, over forty, and a former champion wrestler.
- √ Our coach is a former champion wrestler, but now he is overpaid, overweight, and over forty.

6. VAGUE PRONOUNS

Make sure that pronouns such as it and this refer to something specific.

- X In the report it suggests that moderate exercise is better than no exercise at all.
- √ The report suggests that moderate exercise is better than no exercise at all.
- X The group wanted to meet in January, but this didn't happen until May.
- √ The group wanted to meet in January, but the conference didn't take place until May.

7. DANGLING MODIFIERS

Make sure that a modifying phrase or clause has something to modify.

- X By manipulating the lower back, the pain was greatly eased. (*--implies the pain was doing the manipulating*)
- √ By manipulating the lower back, the therapist greatly eased the pain.
- X When not going to school, my hobbies range from athletics to automobiles. (*--implies the hobbies go to school*)
- √ When I am not going to school, my hobbies range from athletics to automobiles.

8. SQUINTING MODIFIERS

Make sure the modifier clearly refers to the element you want it to modify.

- X The council advises physicians at regular intervals to administer the drug.
- √ The council advises physicians to administer the drug at regular intervals.
- √ At regular intervals, the council advises physicians to administer the drug.

9. MIXED OR DEAD METAPHORS

Recognize the literal meanings of your metaphors; avoid clichés.

- X Like a bolt from the blue the idea grabbed him, and it soon took its place as one of his hobby-horses.
- √ The idea excited him as soon as he heard of it, and it soon became an obsession.

10. FAULTY WORD CHOICE / FAULTY DICTION

Don't use "fancy" words for their own sake; use a dictionary to check words whose meaning you are not sure of.

- X Explaining the rationale for treatment can help distil patients' fears.
- √ Explaining the rationale for treatment can help dispel patients' fears.

11. WORDINESS

Don't spin empty words; use the minimum number of words.

- X It is evident that this term is associated with much ambiguity. Many concepts and ideas come to mind upon first hearing this phrase; however, a true grasp of its meaning is quite difficult to establish. Despite this ambiguity . . .
[not worth saying -- omit]
- X A definition that can be employed usefully, according to LaPlante et al. (1993), states that "assistive technology. . ."
- √ LaPlante et al. (1993) state that "assistive technology . . ."

12. COMMA SPLICES

a. Use a period or semicolon to separate two independent clauses, or join them with a coordinating conjunction.

- X We started to unpack our things, pretty soon clothes were strewn all over the place.
- √ We started to unpack our things; pretty soon clothes were strewn all over the place.
- √ We started to unpack our things, and pretty soon clothes were strewn all over the place.

b. Use a semicolon as well as a conjunctive adverb to join two independent clauses.

X Much of the literature advocates stretching preparatory to exercise, however, the mechanisms are not well understood.

√ Much of the literature advocates stretching preparatory to exercise; however, the mechanisms are not well understood.

These are the most common conjunctive adverbs:

however	therefore	then
therefore	nevertheless	accordingly
as a result	moreover	even so
rather	indeed	for example

13. MISUSE OF COMMA, SEMICOLON, AND COLON

a. Use a comma after each item in a series of three or more.

X Many studies indicate favourable results in function, decreased pain and range of motion.

√ Many studies indicate favourable results in function, decreased pain, and range of motion.

b. Use a comma when you join independent clauses with one of the seven coordinating conjunctions (and, or, nor, but, so, yet, for).

X Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

√ Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

c. Use a semicolon when you join independent clauses without a coordinating conjunction.

X Power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely.

√ Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely.

d. Do not use a comma to separate subject and verb.

X His enthusiasm for the subject and his desire to be of help, led him to volunteer.

√ His enthusiasm for the subject and his desire to be of help led him to volunteer.

e. Use a colon to introduce a list or a long or formal quotation after a complete sentence. Otherwise make the quotation part of the grammar of your sentence.

X Strunk (1995) asserts that: “Too many programmes are already underfinanced” (p. 87).

√ Strunk (1995) asserts: “Too many programmes are already underfinanced” (p. 87).

√ Strunk’s assertion (1995) that “Too many programmes are already underfinanced” (p. 87) is based on questionable assumptions.