

# Error #1 : Abbreviations

Generally, we use abbreviations in technical or informal writing. However, in a formal academic prose, abbreviations should be avoided under most circumstances, even if it saves you time or space!

Example) wrong : There were many students absent from class today because of the APUSH exam.

*Though you may be familiar with the term “APUSH” others may not. If you must use “APUSH” or any initialized or abbreviated term in a paper, include it’s full name in parenthesis.*

*Right : There were many students absent from class today because of the Advanced Placement United States History exam.*

The following are other types of words that should NOT use any abbreviated form in your writing :

~ Days of the week, months of the year

~ Names of people, places, school courses

Example 2) wrong : I went to Mass. today for a lacrosse game.

Right : I went to Massachusetts today for a lacrosse game.

And most importantly, do not use text-messaging/chat abbreviations.

[http://www.webopedia.com/quick\\_ref/textmessageabbreviations.asp](http://www.webopedia.com/quick_ref/textmessageabbreviations.asp)

# Error # 2:

## Shifts in Pronouns

It is necessary to remain consistent with a particular pronoun while writing.

*Example:*

**Wrong :** One cannot fail the exam unless you want to.

*Here, the sentence has transitioned from third-person (One) to second-person (you).*

**Correct :** *You cannot fail the exam unless you want to.*

*One cannot fail the exam unless they want to .*

*Example 2 :*

**Wrong:** In Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, we find the narrator to be one of the few successful characters in terms of moral development. However, even the narrator, you soon realize, is seriously flawed.

**Correct:**

In Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, we find the narrator to be one of the few successful characters in terms of moral development. However, even the narrator, we soon realize, is seriously flawed.

# Error #3:

## Lacking variety

Essays with repetitive words or sentence structure are simply boring and monotonous to the reader. Being creative with your writing and varying your sentences and words will make your essays flow and while keeping readers interested.

*Example from a student's essay :*

Peter had been bullied by his friends. Many incidents had been bothering Peter. From his year at the kindergarten to his high-school life, Peter's life is more likely to be a story. Peter's friends had treated him badly throughout the years in high school. They hit, insulted and teased Peter but those didn't really make Peter shoot his friends. Peter was happy as long as he was with Josie. However there was an event that made Peter turn around everyone.

The mistake this student has made is repetitively using Peter as the subject. He does replace Peter with an alternate pronoun.

**Edited :**

Peter had been bullied by his friends. Many incidents had been bothering **him**. From his year at kindergarten to his high-school life, Peter's life is more likely to be a story. **His** friends had treated him badly throughout his years in high-school. They hit, insulted, and teased Peter. But that didn't really make Peter shoot his friends. **He** was happy as long as he was with Josie. However, there was an event that made Peter turn on everyone.

# Error #4:

## Shifts in Verb Tense

The tense of a verb indicates when an action takes place. Unnecessary shifts in verb tense is grammatically incorrect and will only create confusion.

*Examples:*

**Wrong:** Naming the five best movies of last year was easy. Ninety percent of the movies I see are lousy, and that leaves only a handful that are even worth considering.

Here, the sentence unnecessarily shifts from the *simple past* tense ("Naming . . . was easy") to *simple present* ("the movies I see") to *present progressive* ("are even worth considering").

**Correct:** Naming the five best movies of last year was easy. Ninety percent of the movies I *saw were* lousy, and that *left* only a handful that *were* even worth considering.

**Wrong:** Jane was ostracized by the rest of the team members. They believe that her behavior was an embarrassment to the entire team.

The verb *ostracized* is conjugated in past tense while *believe* is in the present tense.

**Correct:** Jane was ostracized by the rest of the team members. They **believed** that her behavior was an embarrassment to the entire team.

**Wrong:** The students hated the lecture by the art critic who has been the editor of Art magazine before he retired.

'Has been' indicates that the art critic is still continuing to be the editor of the magazine. Since he is retired, it should be conjugated as 'had been.'

# Error #5:

## Misuse of Words

The misuse of words and phrases in writing is, very likely, a result of a mistranslation between spoken English to written English. It is a transition from informal to formal language. Homonyms, words that sound similar but have different meanings, are often confused by students. Misusing words can change the overall meaning of a sentence, so it is very important to know which word to use and how to write a phrase correctly.

*Examples :*

**Accept, Except:** accept is a verb meaning to receive. Except is a preposition or verb meaning 'excluding' or 'to exclude.'

*Wrong :* I was excepted into Yale.

*Correct :* I was accepted into Yale.

Or ....I was excepted by Yale.

**Affect, Effect :** Affect is usually used as a verb, meaning 'to influence.' Effect is typically used a noun, meaning 'result.'

*Wrong:* What are the affects of global warming ?

*Correct :* What are the effects of global warming?

*Wrong:* Global warming effects the Earth in many ways.

*Correct:* Global warming affects the Earth in many ways.

**Allusion, Illusion:**

An *Allusion* is an indirect reference. An *illusion* is a misconception or false impression. *Did you catch my allusion to Shakespeare? Mirrors give the room an illusion of depth.*

### **Than, Then:**

*Than* is a conjunction used in comparisons; *then* is an adverb denoting time. *That pizza is more than I can eat. Tom laughed, and then we recognized him.*

Hints:

**Than** is used to compare; both words have the letter a in them.

**Then** tells when; both are spelled the same, except for the first letter.

### **Elicit, Illicit:**

*Elicit* is a verb meaning to bring out or to evoke. *Illicit* is an adjective meaning unlawful. *The reporter was unable to elicit information from the police about illicit drug traffic.*

### **Emigrate from, Immigrate to:**

*Emigrate* means to leave one country or region to settle in another. *In 1900, my grandfather emigrated from Russia. Immigrate* means to enter another country and reside there. *Many Mexicans immigrate to the U.S. to find work.*

Hints:

**Emigrate** begins with the letter E, as does Exit. When you **emigrate**, you exit a country.

**Immigrate** begins with the letter I, as does In. When you **immigrate**, you go into a country

### **Lie, Lay:**

*Lie* is an intransitive verb meaning to recline or rest on a surface. Its principal parts are *lie, lay, lain*. *Lay* is a transitive verb meaning to put or place. Its principal parts are *lay, laid*.

*Hint: Chickens lay eggs. I lie down when I am tired.*

### **Who, Which, That:**

Do not use *which* to refer to persons. Use *who* instead. *That*, though generally used to refer to things, may be used to refer to a group or class of people. *I just saw a boy who was wearing a yellow banana costume. I have to go to math next, which is my hardest class. Where is the book that I was reading?*

# Error # 6 : Parallelism

Also referred to as parallel structure, it requires for the grammatical or rhetorical framing of words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs to give structural similarity. Lists are a common form of parallel structure in writing. **The items in the list must be all nouns, all infinitives, all prepositional phrases, all gerunds, or all clauses.** Sometimes, students do not do this.

**Not Parallel:** The teacher said that he was a poor student because he waited until the last minute to study for the exam, completed his lab problems in a careless manner, **and his motivation was low.**

**Parallel:** The teacher said that he was a poor student because he waited until the last minute to study for the exam, completed his lab problems in a careless manner, **and lacked motivation.**

**Not parallel:** He likes **to play** tennis, **listening** to music, and **watching** movies.

**Parallel:** He likes playing tennis, listening to music, and watching movies

Or.....He likes to play tennis, listen to music, and watch movies.

**Not parallel:** The production manager was asked to write his report quickly, accurately, and in a detailed manner.

**Parallel:** The production manager was asked to write his report quickly, accurately, and thoroughly.

**Not parallel :** The teacher told the students that they should go to sleep early, that they should eat a healthy breakfast, and to arrive to the exam center on time.

**Parallel:** The teacher told the students that they should go to sleep early, that they should eat a healthy breakfast, and that they should arrive to the exam center on time.

Or.....The teacher told the students that they should go to sleep early, eat a healthy breakfast, and arrive to the exam center on time.

# Error #7 : Clichés

That phrase or expression you have heard or seen countless times is probably a cliché. It is overused, lacks your originality, and reveals your laziness as a writer. For this reason, clichés should ALWAYS be avoided in academic writing. However, because clichés are phrases so commonly used, it may be difficult to spot them in your writing.

*Examples :*

**Cliché:** Avoid clichés like the plague

**Original:** Clichés will make your writing bland and boring, discipline yourself and remove them.

**Cliché:** Dealing with clichés is as easy as pie

**Original:** Once you have recognized the effect clichés have on your work, rewriting with some originality becomes straight forward.

[Click here for more clichés that should NOT be seen in your writing!](#)



# Error # 8 : Subject/Verb Agreement

- Find the subject of each sentence.
- Find the verb that goes with the subject.
- The subject and verb should match in number, meaning that if the subject is plural, the verb should be as well and vice versa.

Example: Students at the university level usually is very busy.

Edited version: Students at the university level usually are very busy.

# Error #9 : Comma splice

A comma splice is the incorrect use of a comma to connect two independent clauses. (Recall that an independent clause is a phrase that is grammatically and conceptually complete: that is, it can stand on its own as a sentence.)

## *Tip*

- ~ replace the comma with a period, forming two sentences
- ~ replace the comma with a semicolon
- ~ join the two clauses with a conjunction such as "and," "because," "but," etc.

## *Example*

I like Sam, she is very kind. (Incorrect)

I like Sam. She is very kind. (Correct)

# Error #10 : Redundancy

Redundancy means repetition. There are some instances where redundancy is just plain wrong.

*Examples :*

And etc. Etc. is short for the Latin *et cetera* which means literally "and so forth." Therefore, when you say "and etc." you're really saying "and and so forth." This is clearly redundant. Just say "etc."

ATM Machine The letters ATM stand for "Automated Teller Machine." Therefore, when you say "ATM Machine" you're really saying "Automated Teller Machine Machine." This is obviously redundant. Just say "I'm going to the ATM."

PIN Number PIN stands for Personal Identification Number. Therefore you're saying "Personal Identification Number Number." Again, redundant. Just say "I need my PIN."

HIV Virus Human Immunodeficiency Virus.

SAT Test Scholastic Achievement Test.

# Error #11 : Ending a Sentence with a Preposition

Contrary to popular belief, there is no agreement on this one among English professionals. In general, especially if your audience is strict about rules, don't end a sentence with a preposition. Prepositions are little words that indicate position and such: with, at, by, from, etc. In general a preposition should come before ("pre"-position) the noun it modifies. So you should change

That's the warrior I must talk to

to

That's the warrior to whom I must talk.

However, if too many "to whom"s and "of which"s are making your writing unnecessarily wordy, end with the preposition, especially in informal writing. Remember the famous example (credited to Winston Churchill) that goes: "This is the kind of thing up with which I will not put!"

# Error #12 : Run-on Sentences

- 1) Review each sentence to see whether it contains more than one independent clause.
- 2) If there is more than one independent clause, check to make sure the clauses are separated by the appropriate punctuation.
- 3) Sometimes, it is just as effective (or even more so) to simply break the sentence into separate sentences instead of including punctuation to separate the clauses.
  - Example run-on: I have to write a research paper for my class about extreme sports all I know about the subject is that I'm interested in it.
  - Edited version: I have to write a research paper for my class about extreme sports, and all I know about the subject is that I'm interested in it.
  - Another option: I have to write a research paper for my class about extreme sports. All I know about the subject is that I'm interested in it.

# Error # 13: Apostrophes

- Skim your paper, stopping only at those words which end in "s." If the "s" is used to indicate possession, there should be an apostrophe, as in Mary's book.
- Look over the contractions, like you're for you are, it's for it is, etc. Each of these should include an apostrophe.
- Remember that apostrophes are not used to make words plural. When making a word plural, only an "s" is added, not an apostrophe and an "s."

# Error #14: Dangling Participles

A participle is a verb-form that ends in -ing. It is called "dangling" when it doesn't agree with its subject.

*Example*

While walking down the road, a tree caught Xena's attention.

*The subject of the sentence is "a tree," but it is not the tree that is doing the walking, therefore the participle "walking" is dangling. To correct the sentence, write:*

While walking down the road, Xena noticed a tree or A tree caught Xena's attention as she walked down the road.

**Remember that not all words that end in -ing are participles (e.g. thing) and some participles are gerunds depending on context. (A gerund is a participle that is functioning as a noun, e.g. "My favorite activity is sleeping.")**

# Error #15 : Semi-colon

It's a both what precedes and what follows a semi-colon need to be complete sentences that could stand by themselves. What follows a *colon* is usually short and not a sentence.

**Example:**

1) "I have learned a lot from my experiences; the types of trees, the birds, and all the animals of the forest."

What follows the semi-colon cannot stand as an independent sentence. The semi-colon should be turned into a colon. It should have been a single sentence.

2) I am going home; I intend to stay there.

This is a right usage of Semi-Colon.