

## Tips from the Writing Center: Common Grammar Errors

**Comma splice**-Two complete sentences joined by a comma (with no conjunction)

**Suggestions:** break it into two sentences, add a semi colon, or add a conjunction (FANBOYS)

**EXAMPLE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Pronoun/Antecedent Disagreement**-A pronoun (it, he, she, they, them) refers back to noun you've already mentioned, which means they have to match in number (i.e. "A **student** should proofread **their** paper before turning it in" is wrong).

**SUGGESTION:** change the pronoun to match the number of the noun, change the noun to match the number of the pronoun, or just say the noun again instead of using a pronoun

**EXAMPLE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Vague pronouns**-A pronoun refers to a **specific** noun you've already mentioned, and it has to be clear which one. Pronouns like **it**, **this**, **these**, **that**, and **which** tend to cause this problem (i.e. "It is important to consider..." is wrong).

**SUGGESTION:** follow words like **this** and **these** with a noun, or just say the noun again instead of using a pronoun

**EXAMPLE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Subject/Verb Disagreement**-Sentence subjects and their verbs have to match in number (singular or plural) and person (first, second, or third). Most people know how this works, but the problem is that they lose track of what the subject of their sentence is (i.e. "**One** of the doors **are** closed" is wrong).

**SUGGESTION:** Identify the subject and make sure it matches the verb in number and person

**EXAMPLE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Misplaced Modifier**-A modifier is a word or chunk of words that describes something else. A misplaced modifier is exactly what it sounds like: it happens when your describer is in the wrong place, accidentally describing something else (so, "**After finishing my homework** (*this chunk is the modifier*), **the headache I had** (*this is what the modifier is describing*)..." is wrong).

**SUGGESTION:** Put the modifier closer to the thing that is being described (i.e. "**After finishing my homework, I...**")

**EXAMPLE:** \_\_\_\_\_

- The misplaced modifier is a close relative to the dangling modifier; a dangling modifier is what happens when your modifier (word or chunk or words describing something else) describes something that isn't even in the sentence (i.e. "Shopping in Manhattan at Christmas, the snowflakes were falling...").

**Verb Tense Inconsistency**-The St. Cloud State University website, <http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/grammar/tenses.html>, explains what verb tenses mean: "In English, there are three basic tenses: present, past, and future. Each has a perfect form, indicating completed action; each has a progressive form, indicating ongoing action; and each has a perfect progressive form, indicating ongoing action that will be completed at some definite time."

	<u>Simple Forms</u>	<u>Progressive Forms</u>	<u>Perfect Forms</u>	<u>Perfect Progressive Forms</u>
Present	<u>take/s</u>	<u>am/is/are taking</u>	<u>have/has taken</u>	<u>have/has been taking</u>
Past	<u>took</u>	<u>was/were taking</u>	<u>had taken</u>	<u>had been taking</u>
Future	<u>will/shall take</u>	<u>will be taking</u>	<u>will have taken</u>	<u>will have been taking</u>

If you mix up your verb tenses, your story seems to jump around in time, or certain meanings become unclear (Check out this example from [www.teachers.net](http://www.teachers.net): "I got up, ate breakfast and sat down to read the paper. As I was reading my dog comes into the room and starts to bark.")

**SUGGESTION:** Make sure all your verb tenses match, or, if your story needs to move around in time, make sure your tense shifts happen in a clear way, and are consistent throughout each separate time sequence.

**EXAMPLE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Comma Usage**-Commas seem to be a great mystery of the world to many writers; there are usually too few or far too many.

**SUGGESTION:** Follow the comma rules. **1)** Use one before a coordinating conjunction (see #1), **2)** Use them to set off sentence elements, like introductory words or word groups, **3)** Use them to set off parenthetical expressions or nonessential modifiers (basically, use them around chunks of words that aren't necessary for the sentence to be complete and have the same meaning), **4)** Use commas to separate items in a series, or to separate two adjectives describing the same item **5)** Use them properly with dates, names, titles, and quotations, and **6)** USE THEM TO MAKE YOUR SENTENCE MORE CLEAR (DON'T JUST SPRINKLE THEM AROUND LIKE LITTER).

**EXAMPLE:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### Quick Links for Grammar

Grammar Girl: Quick and Dirty Tips for Better Writing

<http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com/>

The Tongue Untied

<http://grammar.uoregon.edu>