CMU Writing Center Quick Reference: 20 Common Editing Issues

Commas/Punctuation

1. Missing comma after introductory element
   Ex. After conceding that he was wrong[,] Arthur sat down.

2. Missing comma in a compound sentence
   Ex. Charles wanted to take his dog for a walk[,] but it started to rain.

3. Comma splice (comma used when)
   Ex. My dog was sick this morning [,] now he is better. Correct to: [:] [, and] [: Now…]

4. Missing comma with non-restrictive element
   Ex. The students need to bring extra clothes for gym class[,] which is a hassle.

5. Unnecessary comma with a restrictive element
   Ex. Jonathan Swift’s book [,] Gulliver’s Travels [,] is a good read. [delete commas]

6. It's/It's confusion (It's = it is)
   Ex. The cat licked its paws. It’s a good day to go to the park.

7. Missing or misplaced possessive apostrophe
   Ex. That is Samantha’s briefcase. The secretary was afraid of the associate’s wrath because they were quite picky. Harold and Samantha’s [correct] new house is beautiful. Jerry’s and Martha’s [correct] thoughts about the project were very different. My mother-in-law’s attitude is unbearable.

Verb Tense

8. Wrong or missing verb ending
   Ex. I walks [walk] to class in the morning. He walk[ed] to class in the morning.

9. Unnecessary shift in tense
   Ex. I was lost and did not know where to go. I gulp[ed] and take [took] a deep breath.

10. Wrong tense or word form
    Ex. I have [been gardening] for many years. (= Present perfect progressive); I will be running] the Boston Marathon next month. (= Future progressive); I [am talking] to you (= Present progressive); They will have been riding] in the car for ten hours by this time tomorrow. (= Future perfect progressive)

Sentence

11. Fused sentence (sometimes called “run-on”)
    Ex. Sign language is essential [, and] it is also fun.

12. Sentence fragments
    Ex. Being moved to the side of the stage. [The usher asked Mark to move to the side of the stage.]

13. Agreement – subject-verb
    Ex. A shortage of volunteers cause [causes] the work to get done more slowly. Neither Jack nor Sally want [wants] to leave.

14. Dangling Modifiers
    Ex. Entering the office to get some papers, a gust of wind blew through the room [When Tom entered the office to get some papers, a gust of wind blew through the room].

Word Usage

15. Word problem
    Ex. I did not think it was a significance decision. [significant]

16. Missing/incorrect preposition
    Ex. He is at [in] a meeting right now.

17. Agreement: pronoun and antecedent
    Ex. Each student had their [his or her] own belief.

18. Vague pronoun
    Ex. After power washing the whole house, she dried them [the windows] off with towels.

19. There/their/they’re confusion
    Ex. The book I need is over there. We got to their [this] house at noon. They’re calling me at 5 p.m.

20. To/too/two confusion
    Ex. Janet went to the office. There were too many people in the library. She read two books. I went to the library, too.