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 (Two or more independent clauses joined with only a comma.)**
   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. **Its/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. Vague pronoun
   Ex. After power washing the whole house, she dried them [the windows] off with towels.

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

19. 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.

Citations

20. Documentation Omitted
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