

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.

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