Proofreading Guide

All essays should be proofread and edited to repair basic errors in grammar and punctuation. This is a checklist of the most common sources of error in essays. It is not a comprehensive guide but a working guide for the final stage of the revision process—editing for basic errors.

Sentence Grammar


   The thoughts that a reader is thinking is only considered “great” when others know those thoughts.
   --> The thoughts that a reader is thinking are only considered “great” when others know those thoughts.

2. Verb Tense Shift: Avoid unnecessary shifts from present to past, or past to present tense.

   When Wideman talked to his brother, Robby confesses that he did have a problem with drugs.
   --> When Wideman talked to his brother, Robby confessed that he did have a problem with drugs.

3. Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement: Pronouns often refer to something the writer has already named—an antecedent. The pronoun and its antecedent should agree in number and person.

   Agreement in Number (Singular or Plural)
   The word “valid” must be defined by the reader. They determine what an acceptable meaning is.
   --> The word “valid” must be defined by the reader. He or she determines what an acceptable meaning is.

   Agreement in Person (First, Second, or Third)
   His theory was to avoid their rules by living your life under your own set of rules (a shift from third person—his, to second—your).
   --> His theory was to avoid their rules by living his life under his own set of rules.

4. Vague Pronoun Reference: Often found in sentences beginning with this, these, they, it, she, or he. The writer has to decide what the vague pronoun refers to and rewrite to make the reference clear.

   We feel we must own the latest car, the latest clothes, the latest technology. This is created by the media.
We feel we must own the latest car, the latest clothes, and the latest technology. This feeling is created by the media.

Sentence Integrity
Make sure that your thoughts do not fall apart into fragments or slide together into run-on sentences and comma splices.

1. Sentence Fragments: A fragment is an unattached phrase or dependent clause. Most fragments belong to the sentence that precedes or follows. The following example can be revised by simply changing the first period to a comma.

We see Imogene through Marya's point of view. A point of view that is somewhat altered and deranged.

2. Run-on or Fused Sentences: Run-on sentences contain two sentences brought together without punctuation. The writer must decide how he or she will revise the run-on, using a period or a conjunction:

There is no separation between the private and the public in American culture, violation of privacy is always present.

There is no separation between the private and the public in American culture. Violation of privacy is always present or There is no separation between the private and the public because, in American culture, violation of privacy is always present.

3. Comma Splices: the writer uses a comma instead of a period.

Miller writes about the African landscape, he fails to write about the people who inhabit it.

To revise, substitute a period for the comma or use a coordinating conjunction after the comma (and, or, nor, but, for, yet).

Punctuation
1. Comma

A. Between the items in a series of words, phrases, or clauses.

We all know that we are important no matter what we drive, but we also know that the automobile still causes jealousy, anxiety, and competition.

B. Between two independent clauses:

We judge people by their economic status, and in doing so we build a scale called the “social hierarchy.”
C. On either side of a non-restrictive clause (the clause often begins with who, whose, which, when, or where):

The Shield soap commercial shows the wife, whose name is Gail, as the “handyman” in the house.

D. After an introductory phrase or dependent clause:

After Imogene and Marya's friendship begins, one constantly wonders how long it will last.

2. Apostrophe to Show Possession

A. Add an "s" to singular and to collective nouns to show ownership:
singular nouns--Miller's experiences, the city's budget
collective nouns--a society's codes, the group's work

B. When the singular noun ends in an "s," add the "'s" and then say the word aloud (boss's, Luis's, Coles's). If it sounds too awkward, drop the final s, but keep the apostrophe (Fuentes' story).

C. To form the possessive of plural nouns ending in s, add only an apostrophe (consumers' desires, students' rooms).

D. Don't confuse personal pronouns (no apostrophe) with contractions (always an apostrophe).
its = possessive pronoun (Its leaves have fallen.)
it's = a contraction of it is (It's a confusing chapter.)
your = possessive pronoun (your pen, your paper, your words)
you're = a contraction of you are (You're right.)