

The Twenty Most Common Errors

adapted from *The Everyday Writer*

(a reference book written by Andrea Lunsford and Robert Connors):

1. Missing a comma after an introductory element

Incorrect:

Knowing he was about to be caught Cody hid behind the oak tree.

Correct:

Knowing he was about to be caught, Cody hid behind the oak tree.

2. Vague pronoun reference

Too vague:

The tournament rules prohibited professional players from competing, which many players appreciated.

What does “which” refer to-- the policy or professional players competing?

More clear:

The tournament rules prohibited professional players from competing, a policy which many players appreciated.

3. Missing a comma in a compound sentence

Incorrect:

The sailors gazed dreamily out at the calm waters and then the men began to sing solemn melodies about life at sea.

Correct:

The sailors gazed dreamily out at the calm waters, and then the men began to sing solemn melodies about life at sea.

4. Wrong word

Incorrect:

*The couple laughed as **there** children splashed in the shallow pool.*

Correct:

*The couple laughed as **their** children splashed in the shallow pool.*

(The following error is VERY, VERY common. BE AWARE!)

Incorrect:

*“**Your** going to be so happy when we arrive at Grandma’s house,” Dad said.*

Correct:

*“**You’re** going to be so happy when we arrive at Grandma’s house,” Dad said.*

5. Missing comma(s) with a nonrestrictive element.

Incorrect:

Peter a novice pianist slowly played chords on the grand piano.

Correct:

Peter, a novice pianist, slowly played chords on the grand piano.

Incorrect:

The wagon traveled slowly along the Appalachian Trail which was a treacherous path to follow.

Correct:

The wagon traveled slowly along the Appalachian Trail, which was a treacherous path to follow.

6. Wrong or missing verb

Incorrect:

*When I went to the grocery store, I **trip** on the sidewalk.*

Correct:

*When I went to the grocery store, I **tripped** on the sidewalk.*

7. Wrong or missing preposition

Incorrect:

*We sat **on** the boat and watched the fireworks explode in the sky.*

Correct:

*We sat **in** the boat and watched the fireworks explode in the sky.*

8. Comma splice

Incorrect:

As the raccoon crept toward the barnyard, the owner let his dogs out of the kennel, the hunt had begun.

Correct:

As the raccoon crept toward the barnyard, the owner let his dogs out of the kennel; the hunt had begun.

9. Missing or misplaced possessive apostrophe

Incorrect:

*The **boy's** heads bobbed back and forth with the beat of the music.*

Correct:

*The **boys'** heads bobbed back and forth with the beat of the music.*

Incorrect:

*The airplane began **it's** final descent into the rainforest.*

Correct:

*The airplane began **its** final descent into the rainforest.*

10. Unnecessary shift in tense

Incorrect:

*The hungry children scavenged for food; they **look** in the garbage cans and in the dumpsters.*

Correct:

*The hungry children scavenged for food; they **looked** in the garbage cans and in the dumpsters.*

11. Unnecessary shift in pronoun

Incorrect:

*If we knew the school didn't have the money to fund extracurricular activities, **you** could have done fundraising to finance the deficit.*

Correct:

*If we knew the school didn't have the money to fund extracurricular activities, **we** could have done fundraising to finance the deficit.*

12. Sentence fragment

Incorrect:

The young girl painting a mountain scene on the canvas.

Correct:

*The young girl **was** painting a mountain scene on the canvas.*

13. Wrong tense or verb form

Incorrect:

*The waitress has **broke** many dishes over the years.*

Correct:

*The waitress has **broken** many dishes over the years.*

14. Lack of subject-verb agreement

Incorrect:

*The team of builders **coordinate** with the architects.*

Correct:

*The team of builders **coordinates** with the architects.*

Incorrect:

*Mathematics **are** a complicated subject to master.*

Correct:

*Mathematics **is** a complicated subject to master.*

15. Missing commas in a series

Incorrect:

People enjoy reading journals, newspapers, magazines and other periodicals.

Correct:

People enjoy reading journals, newspapers, magazines, and other periodicals.

16. Lack of agreement between pronoun and antecedent

Incorrect:

*Each of the granddaughters loved **their** new doll.*

Correct:

*Each of the granddaughters loved **her** new doll.*

Incorrect:

*Neither Johnny nor Alec enjoyed **their** warm soda pop.*

Correct:

*Neither Johnny nor Alec enjoyed **his** warm soda pop.*

17. Unnecessary comma(s) with a restrictive element

Incorrect:

Paul's letter, to the Romans, is comprised of sixteen chapters.

Correct:

Paul's letter to the Romans is comprised of sixteen chapters.

18. Fused sentence

Incorrect:

It was a very cold night as I walked along the dock toward the ship, I could not stop shivering, nor could I feel my feet or my hands.

Correct:

It was a very cold night as I walked along the dock toward the ship. I could not stop shivering, nor could I feel my feet or my hands.

19. Misplaced or dangling modifier

Incorrect:

He new he was in trouble when he saw his dad's angry face.

Correct:

When he saw his dad's angry face, he knew he was in trouble.

20. Its/It's confusion

Incorrect:

*The mole burrowed in **it's** hole.*

Correct:

*The mole burrowed in **its** hole.*

Incorrect:

***Its** going to be a very hot day.*

Correct:

***It's** going to be a very hot day.*