

Grammar Tips for Common Mistakes



Below are five common grammar mistakes that you can avoid. If you'd like to know more about a topic, all linked text provides further reading!

1 Unclear [pronouns](#)

When there are two or more nouns in a sentence, make sure your reader knows which noun is linked to your pronoun. It'll get tricky for readers if pronouns are unclear!



Unclear: My car hit a plant, but thankfully it wasn't damaged.

Clear: Thankfully, the plant wasn't damaged even though I hit it with my car.

Here, it is unclear whether "it" is referring to the plant, or the car.

By re-arranging the sentence, readers now understand that "it" is referring to the plant.

2 Misplaced and dangling [modifiers](#)

Modifiers give a reader more information about nouns or verbs. They are not grammatically necessary in a sentence, but they can add meaning.

A **misplaced modifier** occurs when the modifier is placed far away from what it is modifying. This makes it confusing to know what word the modifier is affecting. To avoid this, place your modifier as close as possible to what it is modifying.

A **dangling modifier** occurs when a group of words attempts to modify someone or something that's not actually stated in the sentence. To avoid this, double check to make sure you've included the person or thing the modifier is affecting.



Example: Please join us for a discussion of human trafficking at Conestoga College.

It is unclear whether Conestoga College is hosting a discussion about human trafficking, or if the discussion is about cases of human trafficking at Conestoga College. Here is a sentence that has been re-arranged to clarify the matter:

Better: Please join us **at Conestoga College** for a discussion of human trafficking.

Example: My parents were expecting their third child at the age of eight.

The sentence above awkwardly implies your parents were expecting a child when they were eight years old. The sentence is missing the subject of the modifier – who in this case, is the speaker. Here is a sentence that clarifies the matter:

Better: **I was eight** when my parents were expecting their third child.

3 Incorrect subject-verb agreement

It can get confusing for readers when your verb ending does not match or “agree” with your sentence’s subject. Subject-verb agreement mistakes are common when:

- a Two singular subjects are joined by **and** (A and B) to form a plural subject.



Incorrect: The **high cost and low revenue** of the project **was** said to be the reason for its cancellation.

Correct: The **high cost and low revenue** of the project **were** said to be the reason for its cancellation.

- b There are other nouns between the sentence’s subject and verb.



Incorrect: The **need** for standardized tests in education **have** been challenged the past few years.

Correct: The **need** for standardized tests in education **has** been challenged the past few years.

- c The subject is a collective noun (a noun that refers to a group of people or things)

When members of the group are functioning as a **single entity**, use a **singular verb**.

When members of the group are functioning as **individuals**, use a **plural verb**.



Incorrect: The department **are** on their way here.

Incorrect: After work, the group **goes** their own ways.

Correct: The department **is** on its way here.

Correct: After work, the group **go** their own ways.

4 Run-on sentences

A run-on sentence occurs when multiple independent clauses* are put in a single sentence, without any punctuation or connection. Run-on sentences are both overwhelming and confusing for readers because they contain multiple independent ideas. Two of the easiest ways to fix run-on sentences are to: (1) separate the clauses into two sentences with a period, or (2) add a comma and a coordinating conjunction**.



Incorrect: People think social media has more cons than pros I think it really depends on the usage.

Correct: People think social media has more cons than **pros**. I think it really depends on the usage.

Correct: People think social media has more cons than pros, **but** I think it really depends on the usage.

* an independent clause is a group of words containing a subject and verb that could stand on its own as a sentence.

** coordinating conjunctions are parts of speech that connect words, phrases, clauses, and sentences. For example: “and”, “but”, and “or”.

5 Incorrect ordering of quotes, punctuation and citations

Sometimes there’s a lot going on at the end of a sentence and the correct order for quotations, punctuation, and citations can get confusing. While this error doesn’t have so much to do with clarity in your writing, this is something your academic readers may get critical about!

An in-text citation falls **after** the quotation marks and before the period.



Example: To integrate references, there are “three stages: signaling, situating, and synthesizing” (The University of Waterloo, 2020).

If there is no in-text citation and you are ending your sentence with a quote, the period falls **within** the quotation marks.

Example: My favourite learning resource to recommend people on how to use research in writing is “Integrating Evidence Effectively.”



The five issues above are only a few common errors that you may find in your writing! Grammar is a complex topic with many different areas to explore. If you are looking for answers to other grammar questions, or you’d simply like to learn more, you can check out the [mechanics](#) section of the Writing Center’s online resources or enroll in the [Grammar Studio workshops](#) available on LEARN. To enroll, click the **Self Registration** tab and scroll down to **WCC Workshops**. Click the course offering name to register. Once you’ve registered, **WCC Workshops** will appear as an enrolled course and you can participate in any workshops offered!

Need help with other things, like assignments, essays or brainstorming? Check out the Writing and Communication Centre website, or book a virtual one-on-one appointment. We’re here to help!