

## **Grammar: Common mistakes on student papers**

Research shows these are some of the common mistakes on college student papers.

### **1. Comma use.**

They help your reader understand what you mean. They reflect that you are a literate person who knows what a basic sentence is.

#### *Commas with conjunctions:*

Commas are used to connect two complete sentences with conjunctions, such as “and” or “but.”

Subject + verb, (and/but) subject + verb.

Incorrect: He left home when he was 21 and he didn't return for many years.

Correct: He left home when he was 21, and he didn't return for many years.

#### *No comma if conjunction joins a sentence and incomplete phrase*

Subject + verb (and/but) verb.

Incorrect: He left home, and didn't return.

Correct: He left home and didn't return.

#### *Unnecessary commas:*

You do not add commas like pixie dust—or every time you pause in a sentence.

Incorrect: He said that, he wanted to take the class.

Correct: He said that he wanted to take the class.

Incorrect: Most of use took English, because it was required.

Correct: Most of us took English. It was a required subject.

#### *Comma vs. semicolon:*

A semicolon separates two complete sentences--not parts of a sentence.

Incorrect: She was a born leader, she was elected president.

Correct: She was a born leader; she was elected president.

Or: She was a born leader. She was elected president.

### **2. Misplaced or dangling modifier:**

Incorrect: Jumping down the street, the pencil fell out of my pocket.

Correct: Jumping down the street, I lost my pencil.

### **3. Parallel construction needed:**

Incorrect: His goals include changing schools, improving government, and national health insurance.

Correct: His goals include changing schools, improving government, and passing national health insurance.

#### **4. Lack of agreement:**

Incorrect: If a student parks on campus, they need a sticker.

Correct: If students park on campus, they need a sticker.

#### **5. Run-on sentence:**

Two sentences are jammed together without correct punctuation

Incorrect: Gestures are a way to communicate, they are essential for the deaf.

Correct: Gestures are a way to communicate, but they are essential for the deaf.

Incorrect: I told the paramedic my arm was hurt he cut off my shirtsleeve.

Correct: I told the paramedic my arm was hurt. Then he cut off my shirtsleeve.

#### **5. Sentence fragments: Incomplete sentences**

An incomplete sentence does not have a subject and a verb.

Incorrect: You may think what follows is a sentence. Because it had a period at the end.

Correct: You may think what follows is a sentence, and you are right.

#### **6. Unclear pronoun reference:**

Incorrect: Tom told James that he had won the lottery.

Correct: Tom told James that James had won the lottery Or Tom told James, "You have won the lottery."

#### **7. Wordy or overly complex sentence structure.**

Sentence uses too many words or unwieldy grammatical structures obscure your meaning.

*Wordy phrases:*

Incorrect: He went to the city in order to get a better job.

Correct: He went to the city to get a better job.

*Wordy or overly complex sentence structure:*

Incorrect:

There is another book that tells the story of Charles Darwin and introduces the theory of evolution which explains how we are descendants from apes.

Revision:

Another book relates the story of Charles Darwin and introduces the theory of evolution. According to this theory, human beings are descendants from more primitive forms, such as apes.

**And finally: Spell check! Spell check! Spell check!**