

Editing Checklist

Adapted from materials prepared by the University of Wisconsin Writing Lab.
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The following list includes brief examples and explanations intended for you to use as reminders while you are editing your papers for some of the most commonly occurring writing problems. If you would like to learn more, consider the following options:

- Consult the *Universal Keys for Writers* handbook for additional examples and complete explanations.
- Confer with your course instructor.
- Make an appointment to see a Writing Center consultant about your work.

1. Sentence Fragments

Make sure each word group you have punctuated as a sentence contains a grammatically complete and independent thought (subject + verb) that can stand alone as an acceptable sentence. For more information on correcting sentence fragments, please refer to the Writing Center's handout on *Common Sentence Problems: Run-on or Fused Sentences, Comma Splices, and Sentence Fragments*.

Original: Scientists report no human deaths due to excessive caffeine consumption. Although caffeine does cause convulsions and death in certain animals.

Revised: Scientists report no human deaths due to excessive caffeine consumption, although caffeine does cause convulsions and death in certain animals.

2. Sentence Sprawl

Avoid using too many coordinate (joined by *and, or, but*) and subordinate (joined by *which, that, who, where*) structures in a single sentence.

Original: The hearing was planned for Monday, December 2, but not all of the witnesses could be available, so it was rescheduled for the following Friday, and then all the witnesses could attend.

Revised: The hearing, which had been planned for Monday, December 2, was rescheduled for the following Friday so that all witnesses would be able to attend.

3. Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers

Place modifiers (adjectives, adverbs) near the words they describe; be sure the modified words actually appear in the sentence.

Original: Many tourists visit Arlington National Cemetery, where veterans and military personnel are buried every day from 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m.

Revised: Every day from 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m., many tourists visit Arlington National Cemetery, where veterans and military personnel are buried.

4. Faulty Parallelism

Be sure you use grammatically equal sentence elements to express two or more matching ideas or items in a series.

Original: The candidate's goals include winning the election, a health program, and education.

Revised: The candidate's goals include winning the election, enacting a national health program, and improving the educational system.

5. Unclear Pronoun Reference

Be sure all pronouns clearly refer to definite referents (nouns). Use troublesome pronouns (*this, that, these, those, which*) carefully to prevent confusion. For more information on pronoun usage and agreement, please refer to the Writing Center's *Pronouns* handout.

Original: Einstein was a brilliant mathematician. This is how he was able to explain the universe.

Revised: Einstein, who was a brilliant mathematician, used his ability with numbers to explain the universe.

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6. Incorrect Pronoun Case

Determine whether a pronoun is being used as a subject, object, or possessive in the sentence, and select the pronoun form to match.

Original: Castro's communist principles inevitably led to an ideological conflict between he and President Kennedy.
Revised: Castro's communist principles inevitably led to an ideological conflict between him and President Kennedy.

7. Omitted Commas

Use commas to signal nonrestrictive or nonessential material, to prevent confusion, and to indicate relationships among ideas and sentence parts. For more information on comma usage, please refer to the Writing Center's *Comma* handout.

Original: When it comes to eating people differ in their tastes.
Revised: When it comes to eating, people differ in their tastes.

8. Superfluous Commas

Avoid unnecessary commas, which make sentences difficult to read. For more information on comma usage, please refer to the Writing Center's *Comma* handout.

Original: Field trips are required, in several courses, such as, botany and geology.
Revised: Field trips are required in several courses, such as botany and geology.

9. Comma Splices

Do not link two independent clauses (complete sentences) with a comma unless you also use a coordinating conjunction (FANBOYS: *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, or so*). Instead, use a period or semicolon, or rewrite the sentence. For more information on correcting comma splices, please refer to the Writing Center's handout on *Common Sentence Problems: Run-on or Fused Sentences, Comma Splices, and Sentence Fragments*.

Original: Potassium cyanide caused many deaths among photographers, in the nineteenth century it was a stock chemical in every darkroom.
Revised: Potassium cyanide, a stock chemical in every nineteenth-century darkroom, caused the death of many photographers.

10. Apostrophe Errors

Be sure to use apostrophes to indicate possessives and contractions but not plurals. (Caution: *Its, your, their, and whose* are possessives but do not require apostrophes. *It's, you're, they're, and who's* are contractions, not possessives.) For more information on apostrophe usage, please refer to the Writing Center's *Apostrophe* handout.

Original: In the current conflict its uncertain who's borders their contesting.
Revised: In the current conflict it's uncertain whose borders they're contesting.

Original: The Aztecs ritual's of renewal increased in frequency over the course of time.
Revised: The Aztecs' rituals of renewal increased in frequency over the course of time.

11. Words Easily Confused.

Effect is most often a noun (the effect), and affect is almost always a verb. Other commonly confused word-pairs include lead/led and accept/except. Check a glossary of usage to find the right choice.

Original: The recession had a negative affect on sales.
Revised: The recession had a negative effect on sales.
(or)
The recession affected sales negatively.

12. Misspellings

Spelling errors are usually perceived as a reflection of the writer's careless attitude toward the whole project. Don't allow your hard work to be marred in this way. In addition to comprehensive dictionaries, you may want to use electronic spell checks, spelling dictionaries and the Writing Center's *Common Errors Spelling List* handout.