

# 15 Shocking Student Writing FAILS

## Top 15 Most Common Errors in Student Writing

### 1. Missing comma after introductory element

Try to get into the **habit of using a comma after every introductory element**, be it a word, a phrase, or a clause.

### 2. Vague pronoun reference

Pronouns **should refer clearly to a specific word or words** elsewhere in the sentence or in a previous sentence, so that **readers can be sure whom or what the pronoun refers to.**

he it  
they she  
that who  
which

### 3. Missing comma in a compound sentence

When **two or more sentence parts are joined by and, but, so, yet, nor, or for**, insert a comma to indicate a pause between the two thoughts.

it but

### 4. Wrong word

Avoid **mixing up words** that sound somewhat alike, using a **word with the wrong shade of meaning**, or using a word with a **completely wrong meaning**.

word

### 5. Missing comma with a nonrestrictive element

**Start and end** a non-restrictive clause **with a comma**



### 6. Wrong or missing verb ending

It's easy to forget the **verb endings -s (or -es) and -ed (or -d)** because they are not always pronounced clearly when spoken.

-s  
-es  
-ed  
-d

### 7. Wrong or missing preposition

Check your draft by **circling all the prepositions and making certain they are the ones you meant to use**, because specific prepositions express specific relationships.

prepositions

### 8. Comma splice

To correct a comma splice, you can **insert a semicolon or period, add a word like and or although after the comma**, or restructure the sentence.

semicolon or period

### 9. Missing or misplaced possessive apostrophe

noun

's

To make a noun possessive, you must **add either an apostrophe and an -s** (Ed's book) **or an apostrophe alone** (the boys' gym).

NOTE: "it" is not a noun so the rule does not apply

### 10. Unnecessary shift in tense

All the **verb tenses** in each of your sentences **should work together appropriately**

verb tenses

### 11. Unnecessary shift in pronoun

This occurs when a writer who has been **using one kind of pronoun** to refer to someone or something **shifts to another pronoun for no apparent reason.**

you  
one  
I

### 12. Sentence fragment

Check your draft for sentence fragments by **reading it out loud, backwards, sentence by sentence.**



### 13. Wrong tense or verb form

**Errors of wrong tense or wrong verb form** include using a verb that does **not indicate clearly** when an action or condition is, was, or will be completed.

walked → had walked  
will go → will have gone

### 14. Lack of subject-verb agreement

A **verb must agree with its subject** in number and in person.



### 15. Missing commas in a series

When **three or more items appear in a series**, they should be separated from one another with commas.

red blue yellow green

## How to Reduce Errors in Writing



WRITE FIRST  
AND EDIT LATER



GIVE YOURSELF  
TIME



PRINT YOUR  
PAPER OUT



FIND YOURSELF  
A PROOFREADER



READ LOTS OF  
WELL-WRITTEN PROSE



FOCUS ON  
ONE ERROR  
AT A TIME

## Trends and Statistics on Student Writing



**Four** out of five students are not proficient writers



**only 27%**

of students were able to write essays that were **well-developed and used proper language and grammar**

People who **cannot write and communicate clearly** will not be hired and are unlikely to last long enough to be considered for promotion.



**80%**

or more of the companies in the service, finance, insurance, and real estate sectors **assess writing during hiring**