

ASSIGNMENT SELF-EDITING CHECKLIST: Common errors

1. Sentence fragments. Make sure each word group you have punctuated as a sentence contains a grammatically complete and independent thought that can stand alone as an acceptable sentence.

Incorrect: The pollen of forty-eight plants native to Europe and the Middle East.

Revised: The cloth contains the pollen of forty-eight plants native to Europe and the Middle East.

Incorrect: 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. Incorrect use of capital letters. Capital letters are used at the start of a sentence and for certain nouns/adjectives; they should not be used simply to add emphasis.

Incorrect: The **Nitrogen** and **Phosphorus** cycles are critical for nutrient cycling.

Revised: The nitrogen and phosphorus cycles are critical for nutrient cycling.

3. Subject-verb agreement. A singular subject needs a singular verb; a plural subject needs a plural verb.

Incorrect: Anthropogenic **inputs** of nitrogen in biosphere and oceans **is** mimicked on an industrial scale by a chemical process that requires high temperatures, elevated pressures, and special catalysts.

Revised: Anthropogenic inputs of nitrogen in biosphere and oceans are mimicked on an industrial scale by a chemical process that requires high temperatures, elevated pressures, and special catalysts.

4. Comma splice. Do not link two independent clauses with a comma (unless you also use a coordinating conjunction - and, or, but, for, nor, so yet). Instead use a period or semicolon, or rewrite the sentence.

Incorrect: In 1952, Japan's gross national product was one third that of France, by the late 1970s it was larger than the GNPs of France and Britain combined.

Revised: In 1952, Japan's gross national product was one third that of France. By the late 1970s, it was larger than the GNPs of France and Britain combined.

Incorrect: Diseased coronary arteries are often surgically bypassed, however half of bypass grafts fail within ten years.

Revised: Diseased coronary arteries are often surgically bypassed; however, half of bypass grafts fail within ten years.

5. Superfluous commas. Unnecessary commas make sentences difficult to read.

Incorrect: 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.

Incorrect: The term "scientific illiteracy," has become almost a cliché in educational circles.

Revised: The term "scientific illiteracy" has become almost a cliché in educational circles.

6. Apostrophe errors. Apostrophes indicate possessives and contractions but not plurals. Caution: its, your, their, and whose are possessives (without apostrophes). It's, you're, they're, and who's are contractions.

Incorrect: In the current conflict **its** uncertain **who's** borders **their** contesting.

Revised: In the current conflict it is [it's] uncertain whose borders they are [they're] contesting.

Incorrect: During the **1960's**, environmental awareness started to increase.

Revised: During the 1960s, environmental awareness started to increase.

7. Sentence sprawl. Too many equally-weighted phrases and clauses produce tiresome sentences.

Incorrect: 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. **[There are no grammatical errors here, but the sprawling sentence does not communicate clearly and concisely.]**

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.

8. Unclear pronoun reference. Pronouns must clearly refer to definite referents [nouns]. Use it, they, that, these, those, and which carefully to prevent confusion.

Incorrect: Because Senator Martin is less interested in the environment than in economic development, she sometimes neglects it.

Revised: Because of her interest in economic development, Senator Martin sometimes neglects the environment.

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

Revised: Einstein, who was a brilliant mathematician, used his quantitative ability to explain the workings of the universe.

9. Pronoun agreement. Be sure that each pronoun agrees in number (singular or plural) with the noun to which it refers (its antecedent or referent).

Incorrect: When **a candidate** runs for office, **they** must expect to have their personal life scrutinized.

Revised: When candidates run for office, they must expect to have their personal lives scrutinized.

Incorrect: According to tenets of the "new urbanism," **everyone** needs to consider the relationship of **their** house to the surrounding community.

Revised: According to tenets of the "new urbanism," everyone needs to consider the relationship of his or her house to the surrounding community.

10. Easily-confused words. Effect is most often a noun (the effect) and affect is most often a verb. Other pairs commonly confused: lead/led and accept/except.

Incorrect: The recession had a negative **affect** on sales.

Revised: The recession had a negative effect on sales [(or) The recession **affected sales negatively**].

Incorrect: The laboratory instructor **choose** not to offer detailed **advise**.

Revised: The laboratory instructor chose not to offer detailed advice.

Incorrect: We must be careful not to **loose** the momentum we have gathered.

Revised: We must be careful not to lose the momentum we have gathered.

11. Generalizations. Be wary of generalizations that are unsupported by your evidence.

Incorrect: Use of the ocean to reach economy-driven targets has left the oceans over-exploited. [All oceans?]

Revised: Use of the ocean to reach economy-driven targets has, at least in some cases, led to over-exploitation.

12. Contractions. Avoid using contractions in academic writing.

Incorrect: The author **didn't** find evidence of a correlation between species richness and disturbance.

Revised: The author did not find evidence of a correlation between species richness and disturbance.

13. In-text citations. When citing a reference at the end of a sentence, the period should follow the reference and not precede it.

Incorrect: This relationship was conclusively proven in the study. (Wyatt, 2005)

Revised: This relationship was conclusively proven in the study (Wyatt, 2005).

14. Misplaced and dangling modifiers. Place modifiers near the words they describe; be sure the modified words actually appear in the sentence.

Incorrect: Covering most of Norway, the illustration shows that the glacier created thousands of lakes.

Revised: Covering most of Norway, the glacier created thousands of lakes, as shown in the illustration.

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

Incorrect: 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.

16. Omitted commas. Use commas to signal nonrestrictive or nonessential material to prevent confusion, and to indicate relationships among ideas and sentence parts.

Incorrect: When it comes to eating people differ in their tastes.

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

Incorrect: The Huns who were Mongolian invaded Gaul in 451.

Revised: The Huns, who were Mongolian, invaded Gaul in 451.

ADDITIONAL POINTS TO NOTE

1. Abbreviations. All abbreviations should be defined on their first usage in the text.

Example: The Minimum Viable Population (MVP) size needs to be established in order to determine appropriate quotas.

2. Figures and tables. All figures and tables need to be numbered, with a caption (and source if applicable); they also need to be explicitly referred to in the text.

Example: As shown in Figure 2, there is a correlation between nitrogen oxide emissions and vehicular traffic.

3. Formatting of technical nomenclature. Technical nomenclature should be appropriately formatted

Example: *Oxalis pes-caprae* [in italics] is a common species in the Maltese landscape.

Example: CO₂ [with 2 written as a subscript] is one of the greenhouse gases.