

**Xavier University's Writing Center presents...**  
**The Top Ten Grammar Errors**

**10. Missing Apostrophes:** An apostrophe is needed to form the possessive form of most words.

**Example:** The *dog's* toy was found under the deck.

Be sure to check a handbook for variations of this rule. Another common apostrophe error is the inclusion of an apostrophe when the noun is plural

**Incorrect Example:** Most Monday's I want to skip work.

**Correct Example:** Most Mondays I want to skip work.

**9. Dangling Modifiers:** A modifying clause must clearly and sensibly modify a word in a sentence. When there is no word that the phrase or clause can sensibly modify, the modifier is said to dangle.

**Incorrect Example:** *Carrying groceries, the bird* flew to its nest. (Can a bird carry groceries?)

**Correct Example:** *While carrying groceries, I* saw a bird fly into its nest.

**8. Pronoun Antecedent:** A pronoun should agree in number with the word to which it refers.

**Incorrect Example:** Anyone entering must show *their* ticket.

**Correct Example:** Anyone entering must show *his or her* ticket.

**7. Vague Pronoun:** A pronoun becomes vague when it does not explicitly refer back to a noun.

**Incorrect Example:** J.D. Salinger, Kurt Vonnegut, and John Steinbeck are three of my favorite authors. *He* wrote my all-time favorite book, East of Eden.

**Correct Example:** J.D. Salinger, Kurt Vonnegut, and John Steinbeck are three of my favorite authors. *Steinbeck* wrote my all-time favorite book, East of Eden.

**6. Subject/Verb Agreement:** Subjects and verbs should agree in number; that is, they must both be either singular or plural.

**Incorrect Example:** *Meg*, as well as her friends, *like* the Cubs.

**Correct Example:** *Meg*, as well as her friends, *likes* the Cubs.

**5. Mixed Tenses:** Whatever verb tense you use (past, present, or future), it should remain consistent in your writing.

**Incorrect Example:** She *went* to the store and *goes* to the bank.

**Correct Example:** She *went* to the store and the bank.

When writing about history, use past tense.

**Example:** There *was* much protest over the Vietnam War.

Also, when writing about literature, refer to texts in the present tense.

**Example:** Faulkner *writes* about the burden of history in The Sound and the Fury.

**4. Its/It's:** The "it's" (with the apostrophe) is short for it is. The "its" is possessive; it indicates that the "it" has ownership over something.

**Incorrect Example:** *Its* closing time at the local dive.

**Correct Example:** *It's* closing time at the local dive.

**3. Comma Splice:** A comma splice is created when a comma is used to join two independent clauses. Independent clauses must be joined by a coordinator (and, but, yet, so, etc.), by a full stop (a period, question mark, exclamation point, etc.), or by a semi-colon.

**Incorrect Example:** My dog likes to bark at birds, *she* howls when they come around.

**Correct Example:** My dog likes to bark at birds; *she* howls when they come around.

**2. Fragments:** A sentence consists of a group of words that contains a subject and a verb and expresses a complete thought. A fragment, therefore, lacks one or more of these conditions.

**Incorrect Example:** I saw Jake. *Leaving the Writing Center.*

**Correct Example:** I saw Jake *leaving the Writing Center.*

**1. Run-on Sentences:** A run-on sentence occurs when two or more independent clauses are improperly joined. A comma splice (see #3) is one example of a run-on sentence.

**Incorrect Example:** I went to the gym, but all the machines were occupied I decided to eat cake.

**Correct Example:** I went to the gym, but all the machines were occupied. I decided to eat cake.