

## Top Ten Grammar/Usage Errors

Rules for English usage can seem complex and intimidating, but the errors most people make are actually relatively few. Below are the ten most common usage errors that plague the average writer.

**1. Sentence Fragments (using only incomplete parts of sentences):** A sentence must express a complete thought and include both a subject (main noun or pronoun) and a predicate (main verb).

Partial Thought:	If he would only stop wearing bunny ears to work.
Corrected:	If he would only stop wearing bunny ears to work, he would get more respect.
Missing Subject:	Keeping in mind the dangers of chainsaw juggling.
Corrected:	Stanley kept in mind the dangers of chainsaw juggling.
Missing Predicate:	Nigel Hanson, the first man to arm wrestle a baboon.
Corrected:	Nigel Hanson is considered the first man to arm wrestle a baboon.

**2. Run-ons/Comma Splices (incorrectly connecting independent clauses):** Word groups that could stand alone as a complete sentence are called *independent clauses* and should either be expressed as separate sentences, or be connected properly. Conjunctions and semicolons are two options for joining independent clauses.

Fused Sentence:	Brad enjoys badminton he plays almost every day.
Corrected #1:	Brad enjoys badminton. He plays almost every day.
Corrected #2:	Because Brad enjoys badminton, he plays almost every day.
Comma Splice:	I like this peanut butter, it is exceptionally creamy.
Corrected #1:	I like this peanut butter. It is exceptionally creamy.
Corrected #2:	I like this peanut butter; it is exceptionally creamy.

**3. Subject/Verb Disagreement (using verbs that differ in number from their subjects):** Singular subjects take singular verbs, and plural subjects take plural verbs.

Disagreement:	Either the pirates or Aunt Edna are guarding the treasure.
Corrected:	Either the pirates or Aunt Edna is guarding the treasure.
Disagreement:	Each of the applicants seem qualified.
Corrected:	Each of the applicants seems qualified.

**4. Pronoun/Antecedent Disagreement (using pronouns that differ in number from their antecedents):** Singular pronouns replace singular antecedents, and plural pronouns replace plural antecedents.

Disagreement:	Somebody left their stromboli on the bench.
Corrected #1:	Somebody left his stromboli on the bench.
Corrected #2:	Somebody left a stromboli on the bench.

**5. Incorrect Pronoun Case (confusing nominative and objective case pronouns):** Nominative case pronouns like *I*, *he*, *they*, and *we* are used as the subjects of verbs. Objective case pronouns like *me*, *him*, *them*, and *us* are used as objects of verbs and prepositions.

Wrong Case:	Me and my friends are waxing our mustaches.
Corrected:	My friends and I are waxing our mustaches.
Wrong Case:	Let's keep this little fiasco between you and I.
Corrected:	Let's keep this little fiasco between you and me.
Wrong Case:	Do not attack, Cato, it is only me.
Corrected:	Do not attack, Cato, it is only I.*

*\*This may sound awkward, but it is indeed correct!*

**6. Misplaced Modifiers (placing modifying words or word groups so that they modify the wrong word):** Usually, modifying words, phrases, and clauses are placed as close as possible to the words they modify.

Misplaced Modifier: I would like a hot cup of coffee.  
Corrected: I would like a cup of hot coffee.\*  
*\*Think about it: do you want the cup hot or the coffee?*

Misplaced Modifier: The comic book is on the table that I read.  
Corrected: The comic book that I read is on the table.

**7. Dangling Participle (using a participial phrase that does not clearly modify anything):** A participial phrase usually begins with an –ing word. Make sure what it modifies is clearly expressed.

Dangling Participle: Staring out the window, Buddy's snowman melted.  
Corrected #1: As he stared out the window, Buddy's snowman melted.  
Corrected #2: Staring out the window, Buddy watched his snowman melt.

**8. Non-Parallel Comparison (making a comparison in which the items compared are not equivalent):** Be careful how you express your comparisons. What you mean is not always what you say.

Non-Parallel: I don't like Christmas fruitcake as much as Andy.  
Corrected: I don't like Christmas fruitcake as much as Andy does.

Non-Parallel: Roger is a better tuba player than any boy in his class.  
Corrected: Roger is a better tuba player than any other boy in his class.\*  
*\*Other makes it clear that Roger is also a boy.*

**9. Verb Tense Shift (arbitrarily shifting tenses):** Don't shift tenses (e.g., from past to present tense) without a good reason.

Tense Shift: The storm comes suddenly and left us wet and cold.  
Corrected: The storm came suddenly and left us wet and cold.

Tense Shift: We visit the flea museum in the morning and went kayaking in the afternoon.  
Corrected: We visited the flea museum in the morning and went kayaking in the afternoon.

**10. Double Negatives (using more than one negating word):** In English, a double negative equals a positive. Only use one negative word at a time.

Double Negative: We don't need no stinking badges.  
Corrected: We don't need any stinking badges.

Double Negative: They won't barely notice the hairy mole on your forehead.  
Corrected #1: They will barely notice the hairy mole on your forehead.  
Corrected #2: They won't notice the hairy mole on your forehead.

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