

Some Common Errors

Grammar

- Everyone is singular. Everyone cannot go with “their.” Everyone does his or her own work, not their own work. If it gets awkward, make the subject plural--”All students must do their own work.”
- The same holds for any singular subject. “They” or “their” shouldn’t turn up in sentences about “the student,” for example. The student is singular. The student cannot do their work. Students do their work or the student does his or her work. To avoid the awkwardness of using her/his all the time, try using plurals wherever possible. For example, instead of saying “The teacher must assess learning in his/her classroom,” say “Teachers must assess learning in their classrooms.”

Here is a corrected section from a student’s paper for this class:

“Assigning roles may hinder group participation. Each person may do ~~their~~ her or his role without interacting with other group members. The ~~artist~~ artists may draw what they think, the ~~recorder~~ recorders may write what they believe, and pretty soon everyone is working on ~~their~~ his or her own task without efficiently functioning as a group.”

- Commas and periods go inside a quotation mark.
- Most people overuse “which” when “that” is usually what they mean. Don’t use “which” if you can do without the clause it introduces.
- Don’t use “that” to indicate a person. The girl that came to dinner should be the girl who came to dinner.
- A two or three word phrase used as an adjective is hyphenated: Examples: Higher-order thinking, open-ended questions, sixth-grade classroom. If used as a noun, no hyphen is needed. Example: Problem solving is hard.
- Many writers use “since” when they mean “because.” [Notice the period inside the quotation marks.] Since implies the lapse of time, as in “Since my baby left me, I found a new place to dwell.” If you find yourself using “since,” replace it with “because” and see if the sentence is clearer.
- Many writers use “while” when they mean “although,” “whereas,” or “even though.” [Notice the period inside the quotation marks.]. While implies concurrent time—happening together.
- If a paragraph goes on for almost a page, find places to break it into two or more paragraphs.
- In the first page or two of your paper, I should find the words, “The purpose of this paper . . .” or “This paper addresses (considers, examines, investigates. . .) several questions. . .” or something that makes the focus explicit.
- Some writers use the word “researches” to mean studies or investigations, but this is wrong. English is a strange language. Study is a verb and there is a noun form (study or studies). Investigate is a verb and there is a noun form—investigations. Inquire is a verb and there is a noun form (inquiries). But there is no noun “researches.” Researches is a verb, as in “She researches before she makes a large purchase.”

APA Style

- You don't need page numbers in a citation unless you give a direct quote--but page numbers are allowed. When quotes are blocked and indented, no quotation marks are needed.
- When a source is used several times in a paragraph and is the only source for the paragraph, just cite it once, at the beginning or the end--don't cite after every sentence or point made.
- Italicize the volume number of a journal
- In all titles except journals (magazines, newspapers), only the first word of the title and the first word after a colon are capitalized.
- In the references, use only initials, not first or middle names.
- Use "and" in references outside parentheses. Use & for references inside parentheses.

Example:

If people evaluate themselves positively—if they “like what they see”—we say that they have high *self-esteem* (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). Self-esteem, though a popular topic among educators, may or may not have effects on achievement in school, depending on whether school achievement is a source of self-worth to the individual (Bandura, 1997). Self-concept, however, affects learning in school, for example, through course selection. Marsh and Yeung (1997) examined how 246 boys in early high school in Sydney, Australia

- When you cite several sources inside parentheses, they should be alphabetized based on the first author.

Example: Self-regulated learners have a combination of academic learning skills and self-control that makes learning easier, so they are more motivated; in other words, they have the *skill* and the *will* to learn (McCombs & Marzano, 1990; Murphy & Alexander, 2000).

- If the first author is the same, go to the second; if the second is the same, go to the third.

Example: Attribution retraining studies (e.g., Borkowski, Weyhing, & Carr, 1988; Borkowski, Weyhing, & Turner, 1986) have been successful in helping adolescents to adopt and use strategic behavior.

- Use p. inside parentheses to give a page number. Use pp. for more than one number.
- Example: Educational psychologists “study what people think and do as they teach and learn a particular curriculum in a particular environment where education and training are intended to take place” (Berliner, 1992, p. 145). The work of educational psychologists focuses “on the rich and significant everyday problems of education....” (Wittrock, 1992, pp. 132-3).
- Use a comma before “and” in a series of three or more.
- Write out numbers below 10 (nine, eight, seven, zero, etc.). Use a numeral for 10 and higher (10, 208, 18, 452, etc.), unless it is the beginning of a sentence—then write it out (Four hundred students...). In a series of numbers that includes 10 or higher, use all numerals (5 of the 22 students were male). Use % for percent with a numeral (45%) unless it is the first word of the sentence. Then it is; “Ten percent of the students....”