

Paragraph Editing Marks English 151A

Proofreading Strategies – You will improve your sentence construction skills in part if you work on improving your proofreading strategies. Read your sentences back to yourself, aloud, slowly, backwards (read the last sentence first, then the sentence before that, etc.), multiple times – or have someone else you trust read it back to you while you look on another copy, marking errors as you hear them. You are trying to interrupt your brain’s tendency to gloss over the mistakes as you read and retrain it to “listen for” and then repair the awkward sounding phrases and sentences. You should also teach yourself to make multiple “sweeps” through your own work, start to finish, with the goal of identifying only one error pattern at a time to keep yourself from getting overwhelmed by looking for all error types at once. Read once through just for subject-verb agreement, then another time once through for pronoun reference, then another time through just for awkward and unclear phrasing, and so on. Finally, proofread your work on paper, not the computer screen, and you likely won’t miss so many errors in your own work. Our eye and brain tend to conspire to fill in the gaps and fix the errors on the screen as we read, particularly when it’s our own writing. Get off the computer and onto paper with pen or pencil in hand, in a quiet space free of distractions. Give yourself manageable tasks to complete as you gradually work to improve the sound and feel and correctness of your sentences. You’re a smart reader and thinker, and it would be nice to see your writing come up to the level of fluency and ease I believe you’re capable of.

VT inconsistency – Verb tense mixing. Do not mix verb tenses when discussing the text. Choose one tense only and stay in it consistently throughout your discussion.

SV agree – Subject-Verb agreement. Subjects must agree with their present tense verbs. For example, in the sentence “Myths defines a culture” the verb *defines* does not “agree” with its subject because it’s singular, yet the word *myths* is plural. Both words need to be either singular, or plural – this is called “agreement.” In this example, one or the other of those two words will have to drop its “s” in order to agree in number with the other word.

NP agree – Noun Pronoun agreement. Nouns must “agree” in number with all the pronouns that refer back to them. For example, “the reader” gets paired with “he or she,” not “their,” because “the reader” is singular, not plural. “Readers” would get a “they” or “their” pronoun, because both “readers” and “they” or “their” are plural words, and they need to match. If one is singular, the other must also be singular; if one is plural, then the other must also plural. Break the habit of writing like we speak.

2nd person speech – Eliminate 2nd person speech (*you, your, you’re*) from academic writing – 2nd person speech makes the writing feel less formal and it allows a writer to assume shared knowledge that the reader may not actually have. Keep the focus on the text, not on an invisible reader, and only refer to a general reading audience as “the reader,” “readers,” “we,” “us,” etc. Please reread the assignment description and note that 2nd person pronouns are not to be used in the formal essay writing for this class.

Subordinating conjunction Fragment – Watch sentences that begin with words like *which, while, whereas, also, as well as, although, unless, however, for example, because, though/although*: these are conjunction words - they are designed to join multiple whole thoughts together, not begin a partial thought that goes unfinished. If you begin a sentence with one of these kinds conjunctions, you must make sure to have two halves of whole thought in that sentence that are separated by a comma, like this: “**While** I type this sentence, I am also listening to music.” Otherwise, you end up with a **Fragment** like you have here.

CS – **C**omma **S**pliced run-together sentence. Commas may *only* be used to join complete sentences together when you use a coordinating conjunction (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*) with them. Otherwise, choose a different solution to bridge these sentence ideas, like a period or a semicolon or a subordinating conjunction (*after, although, because, that, as, while, when, etc.*) without a comma.

Commas & periods inside quotes – Unless there is a parenthetical citation following the quoted material, periods and commas *always go inside the quotation marks, not outside.*

Plurals vs. Apostrophes – Don't use an apostrophe to indicate plural things – apostrophes only show possession. So, *readers* = more than one reader, and *reader's* = something belongs to a singular reader and *readers'* = something belongs to many readers.

Apostrophes – an apostrophe (') is used to indicate possession or a contraction, but not a plural: something belongs to something else (*A **reader's** mission is to understand what she reads.*), or two words are being combined into one (***That's** the best pie in the world!*). Apostrophes are NEVER used to show something is plural. Plural nouns simply get an **-s** or an **-es** added to the word, *without* an apostrophe. This is true whether the original noun already had an **-s** at the end or not.

"For example," etc. introductions – When using this special kind of subordinating conjunction and/or adverbial phrase as the introductory phrase of a sentence, you *must* place a comma after it. Other transitions that follow this same rule include: *Otherwise, In addition, Therefore, However, For instance, Finally*, etc. If no comma is placed after the opening transition, the whole sentence becomes a **sentence fragment** rather than a complete, independent thought.

Empty speech – Avoid catch-all phrases and terms like *basically, overall, thinking out of the box, the bigger picture, on the edge of their seats, all in all, nowadays, in conclusion, last but not least*, etc., as this kind of language is vague and overused, and does not convey meaning that is useful in this context. Try to say this another way that is more clear and specific, focused and descriptive.

it's vs. its:

it's = contraction for **it is** (*It's going to rain tomorrow.*)

its = possessive form of **it** (*The dog scratches its ears.*)

there vs. their vs. they're

there = relative pronoun and place identifier

their = possessive *they*

they're = contraction for *they are*

"Also" – Do not begin statements with *also* – this is an informal speech pattern that does not belong in formal written analysis. It also uses the word incorrectly: *also* is an adverb – a word that modifies a verb – so it needs to be put directly before or after the verb it's attached to, not floating here on its own at the beginning of your sentence. Try not to write like you speak: keep your language more formal, less conversational.