

twenty different mistakes comprise 91.5 percent of all errors in student texts. If you can control these twenty errors, you will go a long way in creating prose that is correct and clear.

Below is an overview of these errors, listed according to the frequency with which they occur. Look for them in your own prose.

1. *Missing comma after introductory phrases.*

For example: After the devastation of the siege of Leningrad the Soviets were left with the task of rebuilding their population as well as their city. (A comma should be placed after "Leningrad.")

2. *Vague pronoun reference.*

For example: The boy and his father knew that he was in trouble. (Who is in trouble? The boy? His Father? Some other person?)

3. *Missing comma in compound sentence.*

For example: Wordsworth spent a good deal of time in the Lake District with his sister Dorothy and the two of ~~the~~ ~~distin~~ ~~guish~~ ~~is~~ ~~ar~~

h between a *restrictive* relative clause and a *nonrestrictive* relative clause. Consider the sentence, "My brother in the red shirt likes ice cream." If you have TWO brothers, then the information about the shirt is restrictive, in that it is necessary to defining WHICH brother likes ice cream. Restrictive clauses, because they are essential to identifying the noun, use no commas. However, if you have ONE brother, then the information about the shirt is not necessary to identifying your brother. It is NON-RESTRICTIVE and, therefore, requires commas: "My brother, in the red shirt, likes ice cream."

6. *Wrong/missing inflected ends.*

who/whom confusion, and so on. The term "inflected endings" refers to something you already understand: adding a letter or syllable to the end of a word changes its grammatical function in the sentence. For example, adding "ed" to a verb shifts that verb from present to past tense. Adding an "s" to a noun makes that noun plural. A common mistake involving wrong or missing inflected ends is in the usage of **who/whom**. "Who" is a pronoun with a subjective case; "whom" is a pronoun with an objective case. We say "Who is the speaker of the day?" because "who" in this case refers to the **subject** of the sentence. But we say, "To whom am I speaking?" because, here, the pronoun is an

Occasionally prepositions will throw you. Consider, for example which is better: "different from," or "different than?" Though both are used widely, "different from" is considered grammatically correct. The same debate surrounds the words "toward" and "towards." Though both are used, "toward" is preferred in writing. When in doubt, check a handbook.

8. *Comma splice.*

tapes, peace and love, and for all the world to be happy." If you are in the habit of using a comma before the "and," you'll avoid confusion in sentences like this one.

16. *Pronoun agreement error.*

Many students have a problem with pronoun agreement. They will write a sentence like "Everyone is entitled to their opinion." The problem is, "everyone" is a singular pronoun. You will have to use "his" or "her."

17. *Unnecessary commas with restrictive clauses.*

See the explanation for number five, above.

18. *Run-on, fused sentence.*

Run-on sentences are sentences that run on forever, they are sentences that ought to have been two or even three sentences but the writer didn't stop to sort them out, leaving the reader feeling exhausted by the sentence's end which is too long in coming. (Get the picture?) **Fused sentences** occur when two independent clauses are put together without a comma, semi-colon, or conjunction. For example: "Researchers investigated several possible vaccines for the virus then they settled on one"

19. *Dangling, misplaced modifier.*

Modifiers are any adjectives, adverbs, phrases, or clauses that a writer uses to elaborate on something. Modifiers, when used wisely, enhance your writing. But if they are not well-considered - or if they are put in the wrong places in your sentences - the results can be less than eloquent. Consider, for example, this sentence: "The professor wrote a paper on sexual harassment in his office." Is the sexual harassment going on in the professor's office? Or is his office the place where the professor is writing? One hopes that the latter is true. If it is, then the original sentence contains a **misplaced modifier** and should be re-written accordingly: "In his office, the professor wrote a paper on sexual harassment." Always put your modifiers next to the nouns they modify.

Dangling modifiers are a different kind of problem. They intend to modify something that isn't in the sentence. Consider this: "As a young girl, my father baked bread and gardened." The writer means to say, "When I was a young girl, my father baked bread and gardened." The modifying phrase "as a young girl" refers to some noun not in the sentence. It is, therefore, a dangling modifier. Other dangling modifiers are more difficult to spot, however. Consider this sentence: "Walking through the woods, my heart ached." Is it your heart that is walking through the woods? It is more accurate (and more grammatical) to say, "Walking through the woods, I felt an ache in my heart." Here you avoid the dangling modifier.

20. *Its/it's error.*

"Its" is a possessive pronoun. "It's" is a contraction for "it is."