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2024

Common Errors

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Recommended Citation

Craig Williamson and Raima Evan. (2024). "Common Errors".

<https://works.swarthmore.edu/tlc-digital-resources/3>

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Common Errors

1. Ambiguous Language: Avoid ambiguous words or expressions which may admit of unintended meanings.

Wrong: They ordered the police to stop drinking after midnight.

Right: They ordered the police to stop revelers from drinking after midnight.

2. Comma Clause Rule: With coordinating conjunctions (and, but, or, nor, for, so, and yet), (a) use a comma when the conjunction joins independent clauses; (b) do not use a comma when the conjunction joins predicate (verbal) clauses.

a) *Wrong:* The concert began at 7:30 and we arrived in time to see the opening.

Right: The concert began at 7:30, and we arrived in time to see the opening.

b) *Wrong:* She went to the library, and checked out several books on *Hamlet*.

Right: She went to the library and checked out several books on *Hamlet*.

3. Comma with Adverb Clause Rule: Dependent adverb clauses (beginning with *after, as soon as, before, because, if, since, unless, until, and when*) are followed by a comma at the beginning of a sentence; they are normally not preceded by a comma at the end of a sentence.

a) *Wrong:* After I finish doing my homework at noon I'm going to lunch.

b) *Right:* After I finish doing my homework at noon, I'm going to lunch.

a) *Wrong:* She left school, because she was having health problems.

b) *Right:* She left school because she was having health problems.

4. Clichés: Avoid trite or clichéd expressions.

Wrong: In the last analysis it stands to reason that the handwriting was on the wall for the stepsisters.

Right: Finally the stepsisters receive their deserved punishment.

5. Colloquial Language: Keep the tone of your essay relatively formal.

Wrong: Cinderella is a wuss because she lets her stepsisters diss her.

Right: Cinderella passively allows her sisters to slander her.

6. Crutch Words: Don't try to bolster an argument with words and phrases such as "clearly," "surely," "obviously," and "of course." Let your argument do the work of convincing the reader.

Wrong: Obviously the prince is clearly in love with Cinderella.

Right: The Prince is in love with Cinderella.

7. Comma Splice: Do not join sentences or independent clauses (clauses with both a subject and a predicate that can stand alone as sentences) with a comma. Use a conjunction with the comma or a semi-colon.

Wrong: Cinderella wanted to attend the ball, her sisters wouldn't let her.

Right: Cinderella wanted to attend the ball, but her sisters wouldn't let her.

Cinderella wanted to attend the ball; her sisters wouldn't let her.

8. Dangling Modifier: A dangling modifier is a modifier (often a participle) which appears from its place in the sentence to modify a word or phrase it cannot sensibly modify.

Wrong: Dressed in a beautiful gown, the carriage arrived for Cinderella.

Right: Dressed in a beautiful gown, Cinderella greeted the arriving carriage.

Wrong: She arrived at the scene singing a joyful song. (Without a comma, "singing" modifies "scene.")

Right: She arrived at the scene, singing a joyful song.

9. Deadwood: Pare your prose. Remove meaningless words. Don't overwrite!

Wrong: Indeed, it's eminently clear that he was of such a discerning nature that he was very conscious of the fact that she was really in a state of anguish.

Right: He was perceptive enough to see that she was suffering.

10. Faulty Agreement: There should be proper agreement between subject and predicate, or between pronoun and antecedent.

Wrong: Faulty grammar and inelegant style leads to sloppy writing.

Right: Faulty grammar and inelegant style lead to sloppy writing.

11. Hedging: Don't weaken your argument with qualifiers such as "somewhat," "possibly," "perhaps," "in a way," etc.

Wrong: In a way Cinderella is perhaps just as devilish as her stepsisters.

Right: Cinderella is just as devilish as her stepsisters.

12. Not Equivalent Categories: Do not equate non-equivalent categories or place them in parallel series.

Wrong: Cinderella's virtue is greater than the Prince.

Right: Cinderella's virtue is greater than that of the Prince

13. Passive Voice: Avoid habitual or excessive use of the passive voice; it hides the agent of the action and is only appropriate when the agent is unknown or when you desire a special emphasis.

Wrong: Cinderella is sought by the Prince, and the slipper is placed on her foot.

Right: The Prince seeks for Cinderella; he finds her and places the slipper on her foot.

14. Run-On-Sentence: Avoid sentences that are run together without proper punctuation and coordination. Also avoid sentences in which there are so many clauses that the style is awkward, and the meaning is unclear.

Wrong: Cinderella wonders if she should go to the ball she doesn't have a gown and can't find the right shoes which would be both beautiful and fit her.

Right: Cinderella wonders if she should go to the ball. She doesn't have a gown or beautiful, well-fitting shoes.

15. Series elements with comma: Separate elements in a series with commas: use a comma after each element in a series except the last one (Note: in British usage, writers separate each element except the last two).

Wrong: Cinderella loved dancing, dreaming and smiling. [It's ok in the UK]

Right: Cinderella loved dancing, dreaming, and smiling.

16. Sentence Fragment: Make sure your sentence has a subject and verb and expresses a complete thought that can stand alone meaningfully.

Wrong: Although he is a subtle writer of fairy tales.

Right: He is a subtle writer of fairy tales.

Right: Although he is a subtle writer of fairy tales, his characterization of the stepmother is stereotyped.

17. Shifting point of view: Keep a consistent narrative point of view. Avoid unnecessary shifts in mood, number, verb tense etc.

Wrong: The Prince comes to see Cinderella. Glances are exchanged. You could see that he loves her.

Right: The Prince comes to see Cinderella and exchanges loving glances with her.

18. Transitions: Make sure your transitions between sentences or ideas or paragraphs are clear.

Wrong: Cinderella suddenly flees from the ball. The carriage might turn into a pumpkin.

Right: Cinderella suddenly flees from the ball as the clock begins to chime twelve, because her fairy godmother has warned her that the magical carriage will turn back into a pumpkin at midnight.

19. Use Parallel Forms: Keep parallel forms in a series. Don't mix and match.

Wrong: Cinderella likes to dance, cooking, and teases the Prince

Right: Cinderella likes dancing, cooking, and teasing the Prince.