



WRITING TIPS FOR YOUR CAREER

“You’re Righting Errors” *(And How to Fix Them)*

Many students make common mistakes when writing; use this checklist while editing your cover letters, resumes, personal statements, etc. to craft the best, error-free document possible.

Faulty Fragments:

To be grammatically complete, a sentence must contain a subject section and a verb section- in other words, a noun must perform an action. Check that your sentences are independent thoughts that can stand alone, rather than incomplete phrases.

You can fix fragments by attaching them to other sentences, adding the missing noun or verb component, or rewriting the thought altogether.

I take a great interest in subjects across a variety of fields. Such as math, biology, and history.

I take a great interest in subjects across a variety of fields, including math, biology, and history.

Comma Conflicts:

Commas are used to:

- separate essential noun and verb phrases from additional phrases
- create a list of items
- indicate relationships between ideas

Make sure you put commas around phrases that are not vital to the sentence. Also avoid using unnecessary commas that link independent clauses together- instead, use a semicolon or period here.

1. When it comes to researching my expertise pertains mainly to data analysis.
2. Tiger Society which is a student organization has helped shape me as a leader.

1. When it comes to researching, my expertise pertains mainly to data analysis.
2. Tiger Society, which is a student organization, has helped shape me as a leader.

Pronoun Predicament:

Pronouns are intended to take the place of a noun so you don’t sound repetitive. A pronoun must agree in gender and number with the noun it replaces. Pronouns can act as a possessive term (ex. mine, yours), a subject (ex. me, you, she), or an object (ex. this, which, those).

Some pronouns, such as “it” and “this” often make weak subjects as they can be vague. Only use such pronouns if their meaning is crystal clear.

1. A leader is someone who takes their role seriously. (plural)
2. Because I prefer chemistry to math, I think this position will best hope me focus on it. (unclear pronoun)
3. My lab experience led to a great relationship between my professor and I. (incorrect case)

1. A leader is someone who takes his or her role seriously.
2. Because I prefer chemistry to math, I think this position will best hope me focus on science.
3. My lab experience led to a great relationship between my professor and me.

Apostrophe Affairs:

An apostrophe can indicate possession for a noun (“Doug’s dog,” “colleges’ directors,”) but are never used in possessive pronouns (its, theirs, whose). Note when the apostrophe goes before or after an “s.”

An apostrophe may also indicate omitted letters in a contraction. For example, “it is” may be written “it’s” and so on. Try to avoid using contractions in professional writing, however.

1. Our universitys quite proud of our ratings.
2. The project stemmed from an idea of our’s.
3. The classes emphasis was on lab ethics.

1. Our university’s quite proud of our ratings.
2. The project stemmed from an idea of ours.
3. The class’ emphasis was on lab ethics.

Misspelling Messes:

Always use spellcheck before submitting a piece of writing! Beware of words that sound alike but are spelled differently (principle/principal, whole/hole, compliment/complement, etc).

- affect (verb) ; effect (noun)
- lose (verb) ; loose (adjective)
- their (possessive) ; there (place) ; they're (they are)
- your (possessive) ; you re (you are)
- it's (it is) ; its (possessive)
- definitely (no A in this word)
- then (time) ; than (comparison)
- a lot (this is two words)
- write (verb) ; right (direction/ correct)

Remember the rule: "i" before "e", except after "c"

I take a great interest in subjects across a variety of fields. Such as math, biology, and history.

I take a great interest in subjects across a variety of fields, including math, biology, and history.

Parallelism Problems:

If a sentence is expressing two or more ideas of equal importance, parallel structure should be used to create similar patterns of words. This should happen at the word, phrase, and clause levels.

These parallel components can be joined using conjunctions like "and" or "or."

Particularly when making a list, ensure all elements are in the same format (present or past tense, singular or plural, verb or noun, etc).

3. When it comes to researching my expertise pertains mainly to data analysis.
4. Tiger Society which is a student organization has helped shape me as a leader.

3. When it comes to researching, my expertise pertains mainly to data analysis.
4. Tiger Society, which is a student organization, has helped shape me as a leader.

Run-On Riddles:

A run-on sentence contains two or more independent clauses (meaning separate full sentences) that are joined inappropriately. A run-on appears to be a longer sentence that sounds like it stumbles through too many ideas at once.

You can fix a run on by separating the two ideas into their own sentences, placing appropriate punctuation between them, or using a conjunction such as "and" or "or."

I love giving tours of our beautiful campus I have learned lots being a tour guide leadership, adaptability, and communication.

I love giving tours of our beautiful campus- I have learned many skills in my tour guide position, including leadership, adaptability, and communication.

Subject/Verb Scrapes:

The verb of a sentence must always agree in gender and number with the subject that is given. Many students will confuse a noun closest to a verb as the subject and will therefore pick a wrong verb form. Be sure you can correctly identify the main noun and verb of a sentence.

You can correct this mistake by recognizing and highlighting the subject of each sentence to check that you have chosen the correct verb to match.

A key part of my life goals have been to graduate from law school.
(plural verb does not match subject)

A key part of my life goals has been to graduate from law school.
(subject is "part," which is singular)

In addition to editing your work, don't forget to think about structure, content, flow, and style. Aim for a product that conveys your message in a concise, cohesive manner. Write, review, and revise until you are happy with your work. If you still need assistance with your professional writing, consider utilizing the Clemson University Writing Center on the top floor of the Academic Success Center.