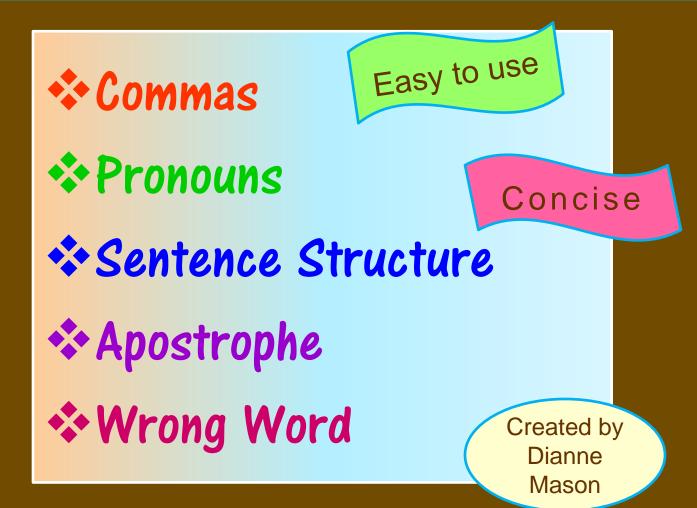
Most Common Grammar Mistakes



Notes to Teachers for "Most Common Grammar Mistakes"

I give this handout to students at the beginning of each composition and literature course. Since I teach grammar in mini-lessons throughout the semester, this is a handy guide for students as they edit their essays and research papers. It provides a quick reference to the most common grammatical errors even if we haven't discussed them in class yet. By focusing on only the most common errors, the handout makes it easy for students to immediately improve the readability of their work and to demonstrate command of the conventions of Standard English.

The handout is brief enough to be discussed in one or two class periods. However, research shows that mini-lessons are more effective in teaching grammar. Thus, by dividing the common mistakes into 5 categories, the handout makes conducting mini-lessons simple and easy.

Most Common Grammar Mistakes

With all the rules for English grammar, you might be surprised to learn that writers make the same types of grammar errors over and over again and that those errors fall into only 5 categories. Learn what the common errors are and how to correct them, and your writing will become clearer and easier to read.

CATEGORY 1 – COMMAS

- 1. No comma after introductory phrases. For example:
 - Not long after they got married Dan and Susan moved to a farm in Kentucky. (A comma should be placed after married.)
 - When the electricity failed during a storm and wasn't restored for two weeks they began to question the wisdom of their move. (A comma should be placed after weeks.)
- 2. No comma in compound sentences. For example:

Stress is usually portrayed as having negative health consequences but a new study shows that it can also aid in boosting the immune system, in the speed of brain processing, and improving memory. (A comma should be placed after consequences.)

- 3. **Comma splice** joining two sentences with only a comma. For example:
 - *Katydids are noted for their style of communication, the males scrape their wings together and create a song to attract a mate.*
 - *Females don't mate with just any male, they seek out the most powerful male around.*

There are 4 ways to correct a comma splice:

• <u>Separate the clauses with a period</u>. *Katydids are noted for their style of communication*. *The males scrape their wings together and create a song to attract a female*. *Females don't mate with just anybody*. *They seek out the largest, most powerful male around*.

- <u>Connect the clauses with a semicolon</u> instead of a period but only if the ideas are closely related and the relationship between them is clear. *Katydids are noted for their style of communication. The males scrape their wings together and create a song to attract a female. Females don't mate with just anybody; they seek out the largest, most powerful male around.*
- <u>Connect them with a comma and a coordinating conjunction</u> (and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet). *Katydids are noted for their style of communication. The males scrape their wings together and create a song to attract a female, but females don't mate with just anybody. They seek out the largest, most powerful male around.*
- <u>Restructure the sentence</u>. *Katydids are noted for their style of communication in which the males scrape their wings together and create a song to attract a female*. *Rather than mate with any available male, the female katydid seeks out the largest, most powerful male around*.

CATERGORY 2 – PRONOUNS

- 1. Unclear or ambiguous reference. For example:
 - Jeff and Elliott are brothers, but he is the taller of the two. (Who is taller? Jeff or Elliott?) Better: Even though Jeff is the older brother, Elliott is the taller of the two.
 - Larry told Curly that his pants were too long. (Whose pants were too long? Larry's or Curly's?) Better: Larry pointed out that Curly's pants were too long.

2. Who/whom.

- Larry is the person who knows the way.
- With whom are we going to the movies?

[I know this sounds stuffy and most of us don't speak so formally, but in writing, try to use "who" and "whom" correctly.]

TIP: An easy way to remember is to turn the sentence around and substitute *he* or *him* for *who* or *whom*. If *he* is correct, use *who*. If *him* is correct, use *whom*. (Notice both *him* and *whom* end in m.) So, the

first example would read, "He knows the way." The second example would read, "Are we going to the movies with him?"

CATEGORY 3 – SENTENCE STRUCTURE

1. **Fragments**. Most of the time, you should avoid sentence fragments. Remember, a complete sentence has a subject and a verb. However, sometimes it's okay to use sentence fragments to achieve a certain effect, but don't overdo it. For example:

The old woman sat on the park bench and slowly removed the contents of her shopping bag. A dog-eared book. A worn pair of gloves. A half-empty bottle of water.

- 2. **Run-on sentences**. As the name implies, these are sentences that run together without punctuation to sort them out. They are corrected the same 4 ways that you correct a comma splice.
- 3. **Dangling, misplaced modifiers.** Dangling modifiers, as the name suggests, just hang onto the sentence with nothing to modify. For example:
 - Driving to the store, several motorcycles passed by our car. Exactly who was driving to the store? The motorcycles? Perhaps the writer meant to say, *While we were driving to the store, several motorcycles passed by our car.* Now it's clear who was driving to the store.
 - As a college student, my professors gave hard exams and lots of writing assignments. Again, it's not clear who the college student is. Is it the professors? The writer meant to say, When I was a college student, my professors....

Misplaced modifiers simply mean they're not in the right place in the sentence. Consider this example: *We saw an ostrich on the way to my grandmother's house*. (Was the ostrich going to Grandma's?) Better to say, *While we were on the way to my grandmother's house, we saw an ostrich*.

CATEGORY 4 – APOSTROPHE

- 1. **Used to show possession.** *Jim's dog; the boys' coats; the boss's briefcase; the Jones's swimming pool*
- 2. **Its, it's.** This one is simple. Just remember that *it's* means *it is. Its* is possessive. [The confusion arises because most possessives use an apostrophe with the s. In this case, the apostrophe indicates a contraction, the same as *don't, aren't, let's, can't, etc.*] So, you would write the following: *It's impossible for a dog to scratch its back.*

CATEGORY 5 – WRONG WORDS

Most grammar handbooks have a list of commonly confused pairs of words. You can also find them on the internet. Don't rely on your computer's spell check function to make corrections. When in doubt, look it up! Here are a few of the most commonly confused pairs:

Accept/except Affect/effect A lot and alot Among/between Amount/number Farther/further Fewer/Less Good/well Lie/lay Loose/lose Than/then Your/you're



Thank you for purchasing this product. I'm an educator, just like you. I sincerely desire to provide products that are of high quality, because I know the importance of our shared profession.

Please honor the time and effort put into this product by not giving it away to others. Please read and abide by the copyright statement below. Your purchase allows you to return to your purchase page at Teachers Pay Teachers to purchase additional licenses at a reduced cost for your colleagues.

© Copyright 2014 Dianne Mason. All rights reserved. Permission is granted to copy pages specifically designed for student or teacher use by the original purchaser or licensee. Copying any part of this product and placing it on the Internet in any form (even a personal classroom website) is forbidden and is a violation of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA). Thank you.

If you have any questions or concerns about your product, please e-mail me at <u>diannehmason96@gmail.com</u>.

You may also be interested in the following products:

Activities for Essay Introductions

https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/5-Activities-for-Essay-Introductions-409145

Activities for Sentence Fluency, Word Choice, and Voice for High School English https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Activities-for-Sentence-Fluency-Word-Choice-and-Voice-for-High-School-English-491272

How to Write Powerful Thesis Statements

https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/How-to-Write-Powerful-Thesis-Statements-398042

Visit me!

https://www.pinterest.com/diannehmason/ http://anenglishteachersgarden.blogspot.com/ https://www.facebook.com/anenglishteachersgarden/

Copyright 2014 Dianne Mason

After you use this product, I would appreciate feedback regarding specific suggestions for additions or improvements. Every time you make a purchase on Teachers Pay Teachers and leave feedback, you earn credit toward a future purchase from any TPT store. How does it work? After logging in, go to My Purchases and find the <Provide Feedback button beside each product. Leave a fair rating and a comment about the resource, and you're done!

To see more of my products, visit https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Store/Dianne-Mason

Copyright 2014 Dianne Mason