

Common Writing Errors

You are going to learn about the fourteen biggest mistakes that people make when they write.

Why are we doing this?

- ◆ If you learn about these common mistakes, and don't do them, your writing will improve significantly

When you're finished, you will:

- ◆ Be familiar with the most common mistakes in English
- ◆ Write with fewer mistakes

Scoring:

1. There are 13 total exercises with 3 points possible for each (39 total points). For each one:

3 points: completely correct

2 points: more than half correct

1 point: at least one correct

0 points: no attempt to complete



Would you wear this shirt? Of course not. It has a big stain on it that makes it look bad. Grammar mistakes are like stains. They make your writing look bad.

The 14 biggest mistakes — Introduction

Here are fourteen sentences. Each sentence, from #1 through #14, illustrates a different common English mistake. How many can you identify? (Circle the mistakes in each sentence.)

1. I have alot of work to do.
2. Be sure that you don't loose your keys like you did last week.
3. The store's in the mall have lots of toy's for sale.
4. i think that i'll get some ice cream after dinner tonight.
5. Do u want to go with me? Rly? Y not?
6. Your too smart to make grammar mistakes. Be proud of you're good grades!
7. Their are too many mistakes on papers. Students need to learn there grammar.
8. Check it, brutha: I gotta go talk to dem gurlz.
9. Marcia and Peter live in a nice home they have their own room I like their house
10. I should of been nicer to Peter last week. He could of helped me with my project.
11. We where going to take the car, but we didn't know were Sam left the car keys.
12. It started to rain. Making lots of puddles. I always take an umbrella. When it rains.
13. Yesterday my niece and I walk to the store. We bought some milk and talk all day.
14. Its a good thing that the cell phone has it's own music player built in!

Error: Spelling “a lot” as “alot”

There is no such word as “alot”.

It must be spelled out as two words: **a lot**.



Exercise

Rewrite these sentences so they're correct:

I want alot of respect from my friends.

I have alot of work to do.

My friend Marissa talks alot, but it's alot of fun listening to her.

I will pay alot of attention to my writing.

It takes alot of time to get alot better at something.

Error: Confusing “loose” and “lose”

lose

rhymes with “news”
verb

means: you can't find something
or: the opposite of “win”

Don't lose your keys.
I hope we don't lose too much time.
We will lose if we don't practice more.

People who steal things are losers.

loose

rhymes with “goose”
adjective

means: not tight

Your pants are too loose.
My wedding ring is too loose.
Is your phone not charging because of a
loose connection?
Your belt needs to be looser; it's too tight.

More examples

You will lose your ring if it is too loose on your finger.
The team will lose the football game if they catch the ball loosely.
The handcuffs were too loose, so the police lost the suspect.
In every game, there are winners and losers.
The woman played the violin better with a looser grip on the bow.

Exercise

Write lose, loser, losing, loose, or looser in the blanks.

1. Be careful not to _____ your wallet.
2. The forgetful little boy is always _____ his toys.
3. We need to make our dog's leash _____ because he's getting bigger.
4. I think I am going to _____ control if I see one more pair of _____ pants.
5. Don't make the engagement ring too _____ or I will _____ it!
6. If you play hard but _____ the game anyway, you're not a _____.

Error: Using apostrophes to show plurals

Never use an apostrophe (') to show a plural.

NO! 
all shoe's on sale

Always use an apostrophe to show possession
(John's car, Susan's house, the cat's claws).

vocabulary: **ADJECTIVE**

plural

When there's more than one of something.

Wrong

I have three pencil's in my bookbag.

The girl's played with their toy's.

My mother's friend's are nice.

Those shoe's are Jill's.

Tommy's sister likes flower's.

The flower's petals are beautiful.

Gift basket's are all on sale!

I have three cousin's.

Correct

I have three pencils in my bookbag.

The girls played with their toys.

My mother's friends are nice.

Those shoes are Jill's.

Tommy's sister likes flowers.

The flower's petals are beautiful.

The bird's wings are six feet long.

My cousin's house has three bedrooms.

Circle the mistakes:

Lot's of times people make mistakes with their writing. My mother's friend always said that you need to practice in order to get better at it. Book's and newspaper's sometimes have mistake's in them, but you need to try to spot the author's mistakes when you can. My brother's friend once made some signs, and the sign's writing had mistakes. His friend's name is Will, and Wills writing is so sloppy that his teacher used to cry when he read Wills paper's.

Error: Not capitalizing "I", "I'm", and "I'll"

Always capitalize these words:

I

I'm

I'll

I'd

I've

Never write this:



Wrong

i want to go home.

If only i had known about that!

Tell him that i'm not interested.

Tomorrow i'll help my sister fix her car.

Chantal and i really love Chopin's music.

Correct

I want to go home.

If only I had known about that!

Tell him that I'm not interested.

Tomorrow I'll help my sister fix her car.

Chantal and I really love Chopin's music.

Exercise:

Rewrite this sentence so it's correct:

i know i'll always pay attention to what i'm doing from now on.

Error: “Texting” instead of writing

Only use texting abbreviations when you are texting someone.

Never use texting abbreviations when you are writing anything else. This includes e-mails, letters, essays, and everything else except a text message. (And, if you have a keyboard on your phone, you should not abbreviate your text messages.)

Wrong

U shld not do this. It makes u look rly silly. CUL8R.

Correct

You should spell out everything you write so your writing looks good. See you later!

Error: Confusing “your” and “you’re”

your

belongs to you

Your car is beautiful.
Tell me your favorite story.
Give it your best shot.
Your face reminds me of a friend.

you’re

same as “you are”

You’re a very funny person.
You’re going to make me laugh again.
Remember that you’re the best.
I think that you’re a good student.

More examples

You’re going to lose your balance and fall if you’re not careful.
Your dog will bring you your paper if you train him right.
Your best bet is to remember that you’re always in control of your learning.
You’re not going to believe this!
You’re forgetting one thing—you’re not old enough to remember your grandmother.

Exercise

Write your or you’re in the blanks.

1. _____ dog just bit my adorable little girl!
2. _____ the best student that I ever had in class.
3. Remember to treat _____ friends kindly or you’ll have no friends.
4. I wish I had _____ money; that would be the good life!
5. Don’t tell me that _____ going back to her house again.

Error: Confusing “there”, “their”, and “they’re”

there

not here / there is/are

There are my keys!
Put your book over there.
There is not enough love
in the world today.
There are two kids playing.

their

belongs to them

Their car is beautiful.
Give them their money.
Look at their cute little puppy.
I want you to see the looks
on their faces!

they’re

same as “they are”

They’re going with us.
They’re here already!
Do you know they’re not
ready to go yet?
They’re always late!

More examples

The tree over there fell on their house and damaged their roof.
All the kids are playing in front of their house, and they’re all laughing.
There is their dog! Over there by the bushes!
They’re going to walk to the park. Then, from there, they’re going back to their house.

Exercise

Write there , their, or they’re in the blanks.

- _____ dog just bit my adorable little girl!
- _____ the best group of students that I ever had in class.
- _____ are too many mosquitos on a warm summer night.
- Give the kids _____ toys back or _____ all going to start crying.
- Put the groceries over _____ on the table.
- Do you know whether _____ going to the birthday party?
- _____ house needs a new coat of paint.
- Do you know _____ address? _____ is no record of it in our files.
- Joanie, Rich, and Rolando are all going on _____ first hike this Saturday.
- _____ needs to be more pride in correct grammar!

Error: Writing non-words

Know how to write correctly

There's a difference between how we speak and how we write. There's nothing wrong with speaking in slang to your friends, and there's nothing wrong with writing text messages full of abbreviations. But, you must remember to write in Standard English if you want to look like you have a brain between your ears.

Write like you have a brain, because you do.

LEARNING PLAN

1. There are no such words as "gotta" and "gonna".
2. English plurals end in "s" or "es", not "z".
3. It's "because", not "cuz".
4. All sentences start with a capital letter and end with a punctuation mark.

Wrong: I **gotta** go

Correct: I **have to** go.

Wrong: I'm **gonna** go get some milk

Correct: I'm **going to** get some milk.

Wrong: Yo! Did you see them **girlz**? Dey had nice **smilez**, yo

Correct: Did you see those **girls**? They had nice **smiles**!

Wrong: I'm **gonna** get in trouble **cuz** my grammar **skillz ain't** makin it.

Correct: I'm **going** to get in trouble **because** my grammar **skills aren't** making it.

Wrong: **hey** dude **im** a teen so **i** dont **gotta rite rite im gonna** make thick **bux** anywayz.

Correct: **Hey**, dude, **I'm** a teen so **I don't have to write right. I'm going** to make thick **bucks anyway**.

Sentences end with punctuation marks! Do it!

Exercise:

Rewrite this sentence so it's correct:

yo dude whazzup me n da boyz gonna be leavin early cuz my momz freakin also i gotta get up early 4 work

Error: Run-on sentences

Each sentence must have a period at the end of it. When you run your sentences together without using periods, you create run-on sentences. Here's an example, and then the same sentence broken down into periods so it's not a run-on sentence.

This is a run-on sentence you did not use a period to stop one sentence and start another it is very difficult to read this sort of writing.

This is a run-on sentence. You did not use a period to stop one sentence and start another. It is very difficult to read this sort of writing.

Sentence length is not important

You can have a short sentence that's a run-on:

I like dogs John likes cats. (should be: I like dogs. John likes cats.)

You can have a long sentence that's not a run-on:

Suddenly, the soft glow of the sun exploded in a brilliant fireball on the horizon, flooding the forest and the sea and the air with a splendid orange incandescence that uplifted the spirit of everything within its energizing path.

Exercise

Put a period after each sentence in this long, confusing run-on sentence.

The giant tree was hit by lightning the little family of birds that was living in the tree was instantly thrown to the ground the parents told their little chicks that it was time to fly the coop and find a better nest the next day they all flew into a giant poplar tree that had a beautiful nest they moved in and were very happy the nice thing about their new home was its location they were close to a large field with an endless supply of worms the little babies were fed a steady diet of worms and grew up happy and chirping their parents were glad they moved their children to a better home the end.

Error: Writing "could of", "would of", "should of"

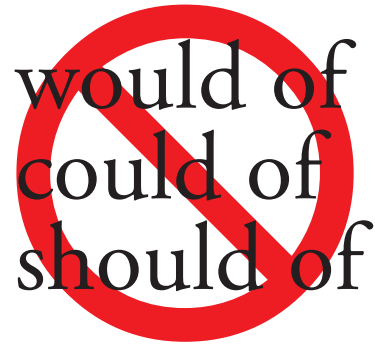
The correct words are:

would **have**

could **have**

should **have**

would of
could of
should of



Exercise

Rewrite these sentences so they are correct:

I could of been somebody important if I worked harder.

I should of known better than to trust someone like him.

I would of won that race if I had practiced more.

Error: Confusing “where” and “were”

where

rhymes with “air”

Where are my keys?
They are probably where you left them.
Tell me where I should look.

were

rhymes with “fur”
past tense of “are”

I wish we were in English class.
They were having lots of fun there.
All of us were glad to go.

More examples

Where were you last night?
You were not where you said you would be.
Were you lying to me when you said you'd be at the movies?
I went to the movie theater, but you were not there.
Were your friends lying too? Were you with them?
Where is this relationship going, anyway?

Exercise

Write where or were in the blanks.

- _____ did I leave my wallet?
- It's not _____ I normally put it.
- My friends _____ over last night; maybe they can help me remember.
- Hey Bill, do you know _____ my wallet is?
- Well, you _____ with Jane and me yesterday.
- You should know _____ it is! You _____ with us!

Error: Sentence fragments

A fragment is a part of something. If you would drop a glass jar, it would break into fragments. A sentence fragment is part of a sentence, but not a complete sentence.

A sentence fragment, read by itself, doesn't really say anything and makes you think, "What?"

Every sentence must have a subject and then the rest of it (the "predicate"). If one or the other is missing, you have a fragment.

Here are some good sentences. The subject is underlined, and the predicate is in green.

John likes cats.

The table collapsed under the weight of all the boxes.

The hungry dog was last seen running down the street.

Here are some sentence fragments. They are incomplete and make you think, "What?"

Running down the street. (There's no subject!)

Always wants to go. (There's no subject!)

Juan and Steve, every Tuesday. (There's no predicate!)

Fragments can be short or long

You can have a short fragment:

Likes lots of money.

(Who likes lots of money? There's no subject.)

You can have a long fragment:

Every morning, before the morning dew evaporates, before the sun gets up and the fog burns off and the roosters start crowing, the little pony.

(What does the little pony do? There's no predicate.)

Solving the problem:

Either:

1. Combine two fragments into one sentence. You might have to add or subtract words so everything makes sense.

Wrong (there's a fragment):

I have a little goldfish named Sammy. He is mostly gold, but he also has black flecks. With silver flecks, too.

Better (fragment combined):

I have a little goldfish named Sammy. He is mostly gold, but he also has black and silver flecks.

Wrong (there's a fragment):

I heard people yelling and looked to my left. A mother and daughter. Yelling at each other.

Better (fragment combined):

I heard people yelling. I looked to the left, and I saw a mother and daughter yelling at each other.

-or-

2. Add something to the fragment so it makes sense.

Huh? All of a sudden all the people.

Oh, OK. All of a sudden, all the people **ran toward the exit.**

Huh? Screaming, running, and jumping.

Oh, OK. **The children were all** screaming, running, and jumping.

Let's see if you can identify and fix sentence fragments.

Find and fix the sentence fragments:

Instructions: Find the sentence fragments in the following paragraph. To do this, read each sentence by itself and think, “does it make sense”? If it doesn’t, it’s probably a fragment. Use your brain to add words, change punctuation, etc., so that each sentence makes sense by itself. Mark up the corrections above each line, like you’re the English teacher. The first few corrections are done for you already, in red.

LEARNING PLAN

Two men ~~x~~ carrying briefcases ~~x~~ ^w ~~w~~alked into the bank. The people in line and the tellers eyed them nervously. They didn’t look like they were there to open an account for Grandma. They slowly walked up to the manager’s office. One of the men had brown gloves on. Slowly reached into his coat. He pulled out a long-handled gun. Two customers in line screamed. Ducked for cover. The man with the gun looked around nervously as his arm. Kept pulling out the gun. Suddenly, everyone laughed. The man leaned on the black metal cane that he had just removed from his coat. Everyone had a good laugh. It turns out. They actually were there to open an account for their grandmother. Who was waiting in the lobby.

Error: Mixing past and present tense verbs

In most cases, when you write, you're in the past. When you're in the past, stay in the past.

Don't do this:

past tense



present tense



I **saw** my little cousin playing. I went up to him and we **talk** for a long time.

When you said that you "saw", you put the narrative in the past. You must then use "talked", not "talk", because "talk" is present tense:

past tense



past tense



I **saw** my little cousin playing. I went up to him and we **talked** for a long time.

Past tense "ed"

In most cases, verbs in English end in "ed" when they're in the past tense. Here are some, and there are many, many more:

Walked, talked, cleaned, washed, dried, kissed, hugged, watered, polished, mowed, painted, drilled, cemented, composed, trimmed, plugged, tickled, fried, baked, twisted, squeezed, and so on. (Some past tense verbs don't end in "ed", like "ate", "saw", "ran", "gave", "fell", etc. They're called irregular verbs.)

Find and fix the verb tense errors:

Tim couldn't find his cat. He look^{ed} and look but couldn't find her. Finally, he walk to the car, open the door, and saw little Fluffy sitting behind the wheel. Tim laugh when he saw that! Little Fluffy jumped into Tim's arms and they both run back to the house where little Suzy had cook some tacos, wonton soup, and blintzes.

Error: Confusing “it’s” and “its”

it’s

the same as it is

It’s raining outside!
Check the door to make sure it’s closed.
It’s always nice to see a friend.

its

belongs to it

The baby is looking at its mother.
The cat saw its reflection in the mirror.
Our tree dropped its leaves late this year.

Should it be it’s or its?

If you can say “it is”, then write “it’s”. If not, write “its”.

Examples of the “it’s=it is” test

It’s nice to see you again --> **It is** nice to see you again --> sounds right
I don’t think **it’s** going to work --> I don’t think **it is** going to work --> sounds right
The cat licked **it’s** paws --> The cat licked **it is** paws --> no good, use **its**
The puppy opened **it’s** eyes --> The puppy opened **it is** eyes --> no good, use **its**

Tip

“It’s” is usually the first word in a sentence. If you’re not sure whether to use it’s or its, and it’s the first word, use “it’s”.

Exercise

Write it’s or its in the blanks.

1. _____ snowing outside. Look! _____ beautiful!
2. _____ true that a good country is always kind to _____ citizens.
3. They say that a good thing about love is that _____ patient.
4. Your hamster would love it if you would clean out _____ cage.
5. The lawn mower broke _____ blade when it hit that big rock.
6. _____ important to finish that job now before _____ too hot to work.
7. You now know that _____ important to write correctly.

Name: _____ Date Due: _____

English Homework: Common Errors: 1 of 3

Instructions:

Each of these 10 sentences has at least one error (there may be more). Rewrite each sentence so it is completely correct.

Examples:

1. You have alot of work to do.

You have a lot of work to do.

1. Alot of people make mistakes.

2. Don't loose your keys or you'll be a loser.

3. He lost his wedding ring because it was too lose.

4. Make the belt loser; it's too tight.

5. Wow! Look at all the bird's in the sky!

6. There are alot of cow's on that farm.

7. My mothers car is blue.

8. i think ill go for a walk later.

9. The boys swim team never loses a meet.

10. Alot of dog's loose their toy's when playing.

blank

Name: _____ Date Due: _____

English Homework: Common Errors: 2 of 3

Instructions:

Each of these 10 sentences has at least one error (there may be more). Rewrite each sentence so it is completely correct.

Examples:

1. You're grades are improving!

Your grades are improving!

1. OMG, more homework! i love it!

2. Your learning more lately.

3. Hand me my books? Their over their.

4. Your going to make alot of money some day.

5. They're getting in they're car to go shopping.

6. You're dog just bit me.

7. yo lissen i hate crazy dog'z

8. You're dad seems like a decent guy.

9. My friends just got thrown out of there house.

10. They're are alot of crazy gurlz i've met lately.

blank

Name: _____ Date Due: _____

English Homework: Common Errors: 3 of 3

Instructions:

Each of these 10 sentences has at least one error (there may be more). Rewrite each sentence so it is completely correct.

Examples:

1. You could of done better.

You could have done better.

1. I would of helped you if i could.

2. You should of listened so i could of helped.

3. Were did you go last night?

4. We where waiting for you.

5. You where not where you said you where.

6. I forgive you because. i like you.

7. My brother went into the army. Last month.

8. My buddy just got promoted, so we celebrate.

9. its important to read what u write.

10. The tree dropped it's leaves and i have 2 clean it up.
