Common Grammar Errors

1. Spelling
   Always check your spelling because a spelling error is often embarrassing.

2. Subject-Verb Agreement
   Use singular verbs with singular subjects. The company has problems with network security. Use plural verbs with plural subjects. Most companies have problems with network security.

3. Plural versus Possessive
   A plural noun generally ends with an s. The computers crashed.
   A possessive noun generally ends with an apostrophe followed by an s. The company’s computers crashed.
   If a possessive noun ends with an s, the apostrophe follows the s. Texas Instruments’ financial position is solid.
   “It’s” is a contraction for “It is.” It’s a computer. “Its” is possessive. Its memory contains a parity error.

4. There/Their/They’re
   “There” refers to a location or relation. The computer goes over there. There are three errors in the computer program.
   “Their” refers to a group who possess something. Their office is on the third floor.
   “They’re” is a contraction for “They are.” They’re buying new computers.

5. Whether/Weather
   “Whether” deals with a comparison. It is debatable whether the wireless router will be secure enough.
   “Weather” addresses the atmospheric conditions outside. The weather outside is frightful.

6. Run-on Sentences
   A long sentence is difficult for the reader to understand, reducing the enlightenment that the reader may otherwise acquire from the material presented by the author in a complete, clear, and concise manner for the education of all who elect to take advantage of the material that the author puts forward in an entertaining and educational form such as an article summary. Does this make any sense?
   Break long statements into multiple sentences. Focus on one issue per sentence. Use short sentences.

7. Passive and Active Voice
   In a sentence written in the active voice the subject performs the action. The technician assembled the computer.
   In a sentence written in the passive voice the subject receives the action. The computer was assembled by the technician.
   Readers find active sentences easier to understand. Always write using the active voice!

8. Write, Set Aside, and Proofread
   Always give yourself time to set aside anything you write and proofread it later. You are more likely to spot errors this way. Also, remember that the only information communicated to your reader is what is actually in the written document; your reader does not know what you meant to say.
9. Write, Set Aside, and Proofread (Again!)

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10. Sentence and Paragraph Structure

Follow the KYSS! principle: Keep Your Sentences Simple!

Avoid flowery prose. Discuss the issue at hand in a direct manner.

11. Capitalization

Capitalize the first word in a sentence. The computers crashed.

Capitalize proper nouns, including names of people, places, and titles. Bill Gates is the head of Microsoft. That Dell computer was made in High Point, North Carolina.

12. A versus An

Use “a” if the next word in the sentence starts with a consonant sound. A computer may fail at any time.

Use “an” if the next word starts with a vowel sound. The boy saw an owl. It is an honor to serve you.

13. Where/Were/We’re

“Where” refers to a location. Where are you going?

“Were” is a past subjunctive verb form. This means that it is used to communicate a past-tense desire. I wish my computer were faster.

“We’re” is a contraction for “We are.” We’re going to build a new computer.

14. Then versus Than

“Then” indicates time or the consequence of a condition. They visited Microsoft and then Oracle. If the computer fails, then I will have to purchase a new computer.

“Than” delimits items in a comparison. My computer monitor is larger than my television.

15. Numbers, Dollar Signs, and Percentages

Spell out the numbers one through ten. Use numeric digits for 11 and higher.

Use dollar signs and commas where appropriate. I paid $1,500 for my computer.

Use the percent symbol when using numeric digits. Support requests increased by 15%.

16. Acronyms

Avoid the use of UUA (unexplained, unexpanded acronyms). The first time you use an acronym, include the expanded form of the acronym. I wrote a program to do a FFT (Fast Fourier Transformation). My computer’s random access memory (RAM) is failing.

17. Visit the Academic Services Center

If you have trouble writing clearly, visit the Academic Services Center and meet with an English tutor/fellow. Be sure to allocate time to make any corrections suggested. The Academic Services Center is on the lower level of the Smith Library.