

# Tips for Mistake Free Grammar and Proofreading

A handy reference guide

# SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION

## **Two common errors are sentence fragments and run-on sentences:**

Sentence fragments may contain a subject and a verb but do not express a complete thought.

Run-on sentences are two or more complete ideas that are joined without punctuation. Readability studies show that sentences of fewer than 20 words are best for comprehension, with an average sentence consisting of 15 to 17 words.

## **Keys for sentence construction:**

Count the number of words, and shorten longer sentences.

Read the sentence out loud to hear the pace and rhythm. Read slowly.

Don't lose your train of thought in the middle of long sentences.

In compound sentences, read each of the complete ideas separately, and check for flow, relationship, and logic.

**Tip:** Know your audience

# SUBJECT/VERB AGREEMENT & USING THE ACTIVE VOICE

## Subject/Verb Agreement:

The subject and the verb must agree in number. A singular subject needs a singular verb; a plural subject needs a plural verb.

We (**subject**) are (**verb**) the best students in the country.

I (**subject**) am (**verb**) planning on writing my dissertation within two years.

## Using the active voice:

Create dynamic and powerful writing by using **active** rather than **passive** verbs.

When the sentence is written in the **active** voice, the **subject performs the action**.

When a sentence is written in the **passive** voice, the **subject is acted upon**.

# PASSIVE VOICE

## **Disadvantages of the passive voice:**

It is wordy and roundabout.

It muddles the meaning and hides responsibility.

It is unnatural and dull.

## **However, the passive voice is appropriate when:**

“Doer” is unknown:

The school *was* started 40 years ago.

“Doer” is unimportant:

Your books *were* shipped yesterday.

“Doer” is better left unsaid:

Your invoice *was* written for the wrong amount.

# INTERESTING FACTS!

It takes 21 days of continued use to make a habit.

We remember:

10% of what we hear

70% of what we write

94% of what we practice

# Punctuation

## When to use a comma:

To separate the subject from the verb.

After a long introductory prepositional phrase, or more than one introductory prepositional phrase.

**To complete her dissertation in time,** Mary had to prepare a schedule to follow each day.

After introductory verbal phrases.

**Working very diligently,** Mary completed her dissertation in time.

If there is a distinct pause.

To avoid confusion.

Between elements (including before *and* and *or*) in a series of three or more items.

in a study by Spencer, Girard, and Singh (2010)

## Do not use a comma:

After an introductory clause

to separate parts of measurement  
8 years 2 months

# PROOFREADING: CREATING A POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT

Clarify your schedule—know all timelines, due dates, and expectations. Ask if you don't know!

Proofread during your “prime time”—know when you're most alert

Limit distractions—avoid answering the phone. Close your door.

Clear your work space.

Proofread the second half of your manuscript or section first.

Have necessary reference materials within reach—dictionary, grammar manuals, templates or handbooks.

## **Overcoming the proofreading monotony:**

Rest; close your eyes every 10 to 15 minutes.

Check your posture.

Change your work pace or content.

Take short breaks.

**Tip:**  
Don't proofread at the same time every day. Varying your schedule will help you approach the task with a keener eye.

# PROOFREADING

Things to look for as you proofread:

- Punctuation
- Misspelled words
- Sentence structure
- Repetition/Omission

## **Tips\*:**

Read out loud

*Read out loud and slowly*

Onscreen: highlight text you are reviewing and enlarge the font to 18 point (return to normal when you have finished)

**\*97% of errors will be caught if you use the above tips!**



# PROOFREADING

## Tips for proofing keyboard errors:

Slow down your reading rate.

Look for repetition of short words, such as **the, an, to,** or **in** at the beginning of a line.

Picture each sentence written correctly.

Watch for omission of letters in long words – for example **inconvenience** as **inconvenence**.

Check for closing brackets, quotation marks, or parenthesis.

Confusion of suffixes can cause missed errors, and spellcheck may not catch these. Examples: **typed/types, former/formed**.

Proofread important and technical material at least twice

Read digits number by number

Be careful of confusing the sequence of numbers or letters: B, C, E, F or 21, 23, 24.

## Grammar tips:

List errors you spot over one month, or one quarter, to see if patterns exist.

Use a style sheet, template, sample page, or formatting manual.

# Tips for Mistake Free Grammar and Proofreading

Consult your dissertation handbook, writing manual, thesis handbook or reference guide often.

Be sure to update each academic year to the correct formatting guidelines and new handbooks, or writing manuals.

Ask for help!