

## FIX-ITS

Use these for every formal essay to eliminate common grammatical and stylistic errors.

### I. BAD WORDS

#### 1. you/yourself/yours etc.

Do not use "you" in writing unless your audience is stated (ex: a letter has a stated audience-- "Dear Grandma").

The understood "you" (ex: Imagine a place...") is also not acceptable.

#### 2. I think/I feel/I believe/to me/in my opinion

Since you are the author, the reader knows that these are your thoughts, feelings, beliefs, etc. Also, these phrases weaken your position by making you seem apologetic.

NO: I think that we should build a new park.

YES: We should build a new park.

#### 3. contractions (don't, it's, etc.)

Acceptable in informal writing/speech, contractions do not belong in formal writing.

#### 4. thing/something/anything/nothing etc.

Each "thing" has a specific name. Make your writing more exact by using specific words.

NO: I like everything on the menu.

YES: I like every dish on the menu. -or- I like the entire menu.

#### 5. there is / are / was / were etc. and here is / are / was / were etc.

The subject of a sentence should come before its verb. These represent lazy writing.

NO: There are several examples of this theme in the novel.

YES: The novel has several examples of this theme.

#### 6. a lot/lots

A lot is a piece of land or an amount of product for purchase. It carries no specificity in describing an amount. Use more specific language.

NO: Jerry has lots of dogs.

YES: Jerry has 14 dogs. -or- Jerry has enough dogs to open a pet store.

#### 7. uses/is used/used etc.

This verb is wildly overused! Choose more vivid, specific language.

NO: Austen uses diction to create the mood in the story.

YES: Austen's diction creates mood in the story.

#### 8. really/very/nice/neat/great/greatly/greater etc.

These words are too vague to be meaningful. Choose more specific adverbs and adjectives.

NO: Meredith is really mean.

Chris is greatly talented.

YES: Meredith is horribly mean.

Chris is magnificently talented.

#### 9. overusing a thesaurus to "sound smarter."

Students often use the thesaurus to replace small or simple words. However, when you do this, you run the risk of using a word out of context, which has the opposite effect.

### II. THE VERBS

#### 10. Use a consistent verb tense throughout your writing.

Do not switch back and forth between verb tenses.

#### 11. Avoid passive voice in your writing.

The "do-er" of the action should be the subject of the sentence. NO: The ball was hit by Jake. YES: Jake hit the ball.

#### 12. Eliminate the use of progressive tense.

Progressive tense is unnecessarily wordy and easy to fix.

NO: The writer is stating that progressive tense is not preferable.

YES: The writer states that progressive tense is not preferable.

#### 13. When you write about literature (fiction), use the literary present.

Since every time you open the book to page 14, Shelia is conceited, use literary present.

NO: Jem tried to protect Scout (261).

YES: Jem tries to protect Scout (261).

*Why? Because every time we open the book to page 261, Jem is there, trying to protect her. Art, literature, and film, exist in the "eternal present."*

### III. NOUNS AND PRONOUNS

#### 14. Pronouns must replace nouns.

Every pronoun in your writing must have a clear antecedent.

NO: **She** told **him** about **his** birthday party. **She** told **him** that **she** loved **him**!

YES: **Sally** told **Mark** about **Tom's** birthday party. **Alice** told **Tom** that **she** loved **Mark**!

#### 15. Do not use the word "it" unless "it" has a clear antecedent.

Avoid this common error! Instead, say what "it" is.

NO: It is clear that Sheila is pretty. It is fun to run.

YES: Sheila is clearly pretty. Running is fun.

### IV. AND...

#### 16. Do not abbreviate within the text of your essay.

NO: We watched **t.v.** today.

YES: We watched **television** today.

#### 17. Avoid dangling modifiers.

Place modifiers next to the words they modify.

NO: The girl waved from the **doorway smiling at me**.

YES: The girl, smiling at me, waved from the doorway.

*\*can doors smile?*

#### 18. Write out numbers 1-20 and multiples of 10, except:

-with abbreviations or symbols (3%, 2:45 p.m.) -in dates (7 April 2005)

-in addresses (209 Winding Way) -in page references (page 7)

-in decimal places (3.14)

#### 19. The reason is "that," not "because."

NO: Greg is different **than** Josh..

YES: Greg is different **from** Josh.

#### 20. Different is "from," not "than."

A reason is a noun, not an adverb, so you need a noun clause, not an adverb clause.

NO: The reason I went was **because** I had to.

YES: The reason I went was **that** I had to.

### V. FINALLY...

#### 21. Do not join two complete sentences with only a comma.

That is a comma splice, which is a form of run-on sentence. Instead, use a comma + conjunction, a semicolon, or a semicolon + conjunctive adverb + comma.

NO: I like candy, cake is better.

YES: I like candy, **but** cake is better.

-or- I like candy; cake is better.

-or- I like candy; **however**, cake is better.