

# Common Grammar Issues

I. Some consistent issues are popping up in your papers. First, an over abundance of **passive verbs**; you need to use more active verbs.

A. Passive verbs are weak; do not show action. From this point, I want you to consciously work on changing your writing habits to strengthen your voice on the written page.

B. There are three times you should (without question) use passive verbs:

1. stating your formal thesis in a research paper
2. when writing a formal document, such as a clinical scientific paper or a news article
3. or when you need to stress an important point in a paragraph

—otherwise, all other forms of writing need a strong *active* voice in your work.

Makes your work stand out.

C. A verb as you know is a word that expresses action or helps to make a statement.

Linking verbs do have a defined role in the sentence by expressing a condition or a state of being. example: *The cook is the main suspect in the murder.* In *this* particular example, it would be very hard to shift the statement around to avoid the passive verb.

Primary passive verbs are also considered linking or helping verbs.

am	have	can (may) be
are	had	could (would, should) be
is	can	could (would, should) have
was	may	will (shall) have been
were	will (shall be)	might / might have / might have been
do	will (shall) have	must
did	has (had) been	must have / must have been

D. Notice some of these are verb phrases, combination of helping (or auxiliary) verbs. There are times when a verb phrase is a crucial tool. But for personal creative essays the verb phrase weighs down the energy of the page.

He *has played* that song before today.

He continually played that same song, over and over, all day.

Notice the difference in the sentences. The second gives more descriptive details, moving beyond the passive voice's limitations.

The game *was won* when a final goal was kicked in by Luis.

Luis *won* the game when he kicked in the final goal.

<notice the stronger connection between the main sentence subject and the action

In *The SF Writer*, part 7 "Understanding Grammar" page 465 they have some examples. They refer to this as Passive and Active **Voice**. But it is the same thing. Use wisely.

## II. Verb Tenses / Shifts in Tense page 459

A. Within a sentence a shift is a change from one subject to another noun or from one form of a verb to a different form.

Rather quickly, let's review verb tense. It is important that you know how the various verbs operate in English. Page 459 lists the various forms of tenses available to use. This does take the tense structure into a over-clinical realm. Be aware there are numerous forms of action. Page 462 does break down the irregular verbs. I still refer to this with the verb lie and lay. They give me a headache. This will prove useful to you in the long run.

Otherwise, to simplify the other material here. There are important concepts to keep in mind when in the middle of the writing process.

- Within a paragraph, when collecting together various thoughts, your material needs to be related in the same tense. You don't start talking about a past event as a memory, then jump into present tense, describing it as a current unfolding event:

I walked to the corner store one fall day with my father. To my embarrassment, he keeps making bird noises trying to attract a blue jay's attention.

correct:

I walked to the corner store one fall day with my father. To my embarrassment, he kept making bird noises trying to attract a blue jay's attention.

or

I walk to the corner store during the fall with my father. To my embarrassment, he keeps making bird noises trying to attract a blue jay's attention.

Zoe **did** her math homework and then her composition **was written**.

Zoe did her math homework and then **completed** her composition.

B. Unnecessary shifts from one subject to another are often the result from active to passive voice.

Volunteers made the dangerous journey after dark, but no wolves were encountered.

Volunteers made the dangerous journey after dark, but encountered no wolves.

III. Pronouns page 469

- avoid ambiguous pronouns.

Typical sentence can have a subject with a referring pronoun.

**Jack and Isabel** went to downtown Houston on **their** first date.

But you need to be careful when it is unclear what the pronoun is representing in the sentence. See first example.

- Be specific when using pronouns: this, that, which, and it. You do not want to refer your pronouns towards a vague idea. **See example in book bottom of 469.**

Avoid using they or it for descriptions in sentences without antecedents. **page 470.**

- Pronoun Agreement, **page 471**

**A student** should choose books from the reading list so **you** can be sure of their being acceptable to the teacher.

**Students** should choose... so **they** can be sure...

- Indefinite Pronouns, **page 427**

**Here is a list of indefinite pronouns** which sound as if they would need a plural verb. In reality they are treated as *one group*, and therefore are considered a *single unit*.

wrong: When someone has been drinking, they are likely to speed.

better: When someone has been drinking, he or she is likely to speed.

best: When drivers have been drinking, they are likely to speed.

best: A driver who has been drinking is likely to speed.

*Where this becomes an issue, when you attempt to not use gender specific statements.*

wrong: Every runner must train if he wants to excel.

wrong: Every runner must train if they want to excel.

right: Every runner must train if he or she wants to excel.

**However:**

best: Every runner must train to excel.

#### IV. Fragments, **page 432**

A. A complete sentence consists of a subject and a verb which when brought together express a complete thought.      Jack ran. Jack ran to the store.

Incomplete: After the flood the barn roof lying in the yard.

In this case, the sentence is a fragment, due to the verb ending in -ing requires a helping verb to complete the thought. —or, it needs to be changed from a passive mode to an active verb category:

Complete: After the flood the barn roof lay in the yard.

If an -ing verb does not have a helping verb, it cannot be used as the verb in a sentence.

**Bottom of 433 has more info too.**

B. A sentence fragment, by definition, is a group of words that does not express a complete thought. **Page 432** examples show various different types of fragments.

1. phrase fragments: a group of words acting as a single part of speech which does not contain a verb and a subject team: **page 433 examples first.**

On the steps I saw Alice. Waiting for her mother to pick her up.

On the steps I saw Alice waiting for her mother to pick her up.

#### V. Comma Splices, **page 435** || Run-ons, **page 437**

- More often than not, a run-on simply occurs when a comma is inserted between two complete sentences. This is more common than fragments.
- A run-on itself occurs when students try to shove as much information as they can into sentence. If a sentence on your computer runs for three or four lines, chance are it can be a run on. Simplify your ideas into basic sentences. If you have a sentence that **has** to have two ideas to be joined as one sentence, use the following tricks:

(**Page 438** has similar ways of fixing your run-on sentences.)

Comma splic/run on

The choice of a digital camera is difficult, there are many good ones on the market.

Various correct:

The choice of a digital camera is difficult. There are many good ones on the market.

The choice of a digital camera is difficult; there are many good ones on the market.

The choice of a digital camera is difficult—there are many good ones on the market.

The choice of a digital camera is difficult because there are so many good ones  
on the market

Okay. Now for assignment #4 part one.

Part 2 will be given to you Monday.