

English 1301: Composition 1

Common Grammar Issues

All page numbers refer to *The Bedford Handbook, Seventh Edition*, Editor Diana Hacker.

A verb expresses *action*.

Linking verbs express a condition or
a state of being.

example:

The cook **is** the main suspect in the murder.

Passive verbs are 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 / must have
did	has (had) been	must have been

passive

He *has played* that song before today.



active

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

passive

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

active

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

passive

The fly ball *was caught* by Janice.

active

Janice *caught* the fly ball.

- **Shifts in point of view** p. 178-179

*Just as you want to maintain the same verb tense within a sentence, you want to retain the same **point of view** in an essay.*

A shift in point of view is a change from one subject to another within a sentence.

- **Shifts in point of view** p. 178-179

Like verb tense, you want to retain the same point of view in an essay. A shift in point of view is a change from one subject to another within a sentence.

wrong

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

•

correct

Students should choose books from the reading list so **they** can be sure of their being acceptable to the teacher.

- **Shifts in Tense** p. 180-182

Within a sentence, a shift in tense is a change from one verb form to another.

• Shifts in Tense p. 180-182

Within a sentence, a shift in tense is a change from one verb form to another.

active Zoe **finished** her math homework and then her composition
passive **was written**.

active Zoe **finished** her math homework and then
active **completed** her composition. } correct

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

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

active Volunteers **made** the dangerous journey after dark, } correct
active **but encountered** no wolves.

Within a paragraph, when collecting together various thoughts, they need to be told in the same tense. You don't start talking about a past event as a memory, then jump into present tense, describing it as an unfolding event:

past tense

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.

present tense

past tense

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.

past tense

or

present tense

As 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.

present tense

- **Make pronouns and antecedents agree.** p. 271-272

Often this becomes an issue when you attempt to avoid gender specific statements.

wrong:

Every **runner** must train if **he** wants to excel.

Every **runner** must train if **they** want to excel.

better

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

best

Every runner must train to excel.

•

wrong:

A medical **student** must study hard if **they** want to succeed.

better

A medical **student** must study hard if **he or she** wants to succeed.

best

Medical **students** must study if **they** want to succeed.

• **Indefinite pronouns** p. 273

These are pronouns, such as *any* or *some*. This type of pronoun does not specify the identity of its object, nor tell you quantity. Usually they sound as if they would need a plural verb.

In reality they are treated as *one group*, and therefore are considered a *single unit*.

Some common indefinite pronouns:

anybody anyone everybody each everyone

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.

- **Fragments p. 238**

A complete sentence consists of a subject and a verb which express a complete thought when brought together.

incomplete

After the flood the barn roof **lying** in the yard.

complete

After the flood the barn roof **lay** in the yard.

incomplete

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

complete

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

- **Run-On Sentences p. 248-57**

A clause is a word group that stands alone as a sentence.

Run-on sentences are two or more clauses that have not been joined correctly.

- When joining these constructions use a conjunction such as:
and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet.
- A dash can be used as well (—), or a semicolon (;) .
In some rare cases a colon will work too. (:)

These are more common than fragments. Students tend to try and shove as much information as they can into one sentence.

run-on /comma splice

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

various alternatives

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