

Commonly Made Mistakes in College Papers

Demonstrating your familiarity with the rules of standard written English will strengthen your writing and present readers with a sense of your competence and credibility.

- Avoid contractions and slang in formal papers. For instance: “She was left *holding the bag*.” Instead, a more appropriate statement might be: “She was left with having to take responsibility and resolve the problem.”
 - To make plurals, you *never* need an apostrophe. For example, it is correct to write: “We saw many things.” It is *not* correct to write: “We saw many thing’s.”
 - To show possession, as in “my father’s car,” use an apostrophe. For plural possession, the apostrophe comes at the end of the word: “the students’ papers.” In other words, the papers belong to many students, not just one. Watch out for plural nouns like children, which don’t have a final “s,” which should be written: “the children’s toys.” The one time you *do not* use an apostrophe is when you are talking about something belonging to it: “The dog wagged its tail.” *It’s* is a contraction meaning *it is*.
 - Watch for noun and pronoun agreement (also called pronoun antecedent agreement). In this sentence, “A student can find their information in the library,” there is a single student and a plural pronoun, *their*, is used instead of a singular pronoun, *his* or *her*.
 - Avoid using the outdated words *mankind* or *man* to mean *humankind* or *humans*.
 - Avoid comma splices. A comma splice is when you have combined two main clauses without using a conjunction between them. To separate two independent clauses, such as “he went to the store,” and “he bought some milk,” choose one of the following options:
 - 1) Make them two sentences: “He went to the store. He bought some milk.”
 - 2) Use a semicolon: “He went to the store; he bought some milk.”
 - 3) Use a conjunction and a comma: “He went to the store, and he bought some milk.”If you have an independent clause (meaning that it has a subject and verb and it can stand alone as a sentence), you must place a comma before the conjunction (the same rule applies to other conjunctions such as: for, nor, or, but, yet).
 - 4) Eliminate the second subject (he) and use a conjunction *without* a comma: “He went to the store and bought some milk.” Never put a comma before the conjunction if there is not a second subject.
- Use commas after introductory clauses and transitional phrases.

“Consequently, the character chose to...”