COMMON ERROR TYPES: SENTENCES FOR PRACTICE

The following examples were taken from handbooks available in the Writing Center. Use these examples to practice identifying and correcting common types of errors.

- subject-verb agreement
- verb tense
- verb form
- singular and plural noun endings
- sentence structure

Consult the source under the appropriate asterisk for more information or to review the grammar rule.

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT ERROR

This error occurs when the verb does not match in number with the singular or plural subject of the sentence or clause.

1. INCORRECT: Vitamin supplements improves your love life.*
   CORRECT: Vitamin supplements improve your love life.

2. INCORRECT: There is only blue jelly beans left.*
   CORRECT: There are only blue jelly beans left.

3. INCORRECT: The Whale Shark, the largest of all sharks, feed on plankton.**
   CORRECT: The Whale Shark, the largest of all sharks, feeds on plankton.

VERB TENSE ERROR

The verb tenses with a piece of writing shift inappropriately from one time frame to another**:

1. INCORRECT: While Brazil looks to ecotourism to fund rainforest preservation, other South American nations relied on foreign aid and conservation efforts.
   CORRECT: While Brazil looks to ecotourism to fund rainforest preservation, other South American nations rely on foreign aid and conservation efforts.

An incorrect verb tense has been used in a sentence or clause***:

2. INCORRECT: Alex has sent out several job applications last month.
   CORRECT: Alex sent out several job applications last month.

3. INCORRECT: Today, Yosemite Park was one of the most popular of all the national parks.
   CORRECT: Today, Yosemite Park is one of the most popular of all the national parks.

(For a concise overview of all twelve verb tenses in English, see Understanding and Using English Grammar by Betty Azar, one of the resources available at every tutoring station.)


Special thanks to WCENTER tutor Sarah Rodriguez for the creation of this handout.
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VERB FORM ERROR

An irregular verb has been incorrectly formed:

1. INCORRECT: My comment hurted my roommate’s feelings.
   CORRECT: My comment hurt my roommate’s feelings.

2. INCORRECT: She flied to Los Angeles for Chinese New Year.
   CORRECT: She flew to Los Angeles for Chinese New Year.

A main verb or an adjective has been incorrectly used instead of [be + past participle]:

3. INCORRECT: I confuse about what you just said.
   CORRECT: I am confused about what you just said.

SINGULAR / PLURAL NOUN ENDINGS ERROR***

A countable noun is singular when it should be plural:

1. INCORRECT: The student in the class were asking question.
   CORRECT: The students in the class were asking questions.

A noncount noun has been made plural:

2. INCORRECT: You should seek advices when you are making an important decision.
   CORRECT: You should seek advice when you are making an important decision.

3. INCORRECT: Some of the milks has gone sour.
   CORRECT: Some of the milk has gone sour.

SENTENCE STRUCTURE ***

The verb to be is missing:

1. INCORRECT: [My cousin probably a very rich man] in Vietnam since he owned many houses and drove a fancy car.
   CORRECT: My cousin was probably a very rich man in Vietnam since he owned many houses and drove a fancy car.

The subject of a sentence has been unnecessarily repeated.

2. INCORRECT: [My roommate he] works a part-time job when he is not busy with his school work.
   CORRECT: My roommate works a part-time job when he is not busy with his school work.

Two clauses or a clause and a phrase have been used that do not fit together grammatically:

3. INCORRECT: [In the article, “Vitamin C Under Attack,” by Mario Nevares, explains some possible negative effects] of taking large doses of vitamin C.
   CORRECT: In the article, “Vitamin C Under Attack,” Mario Nevares explains some possible negative effects of taking large doses of vitamin C.

*** Lane, Janet & Ellen Lange. 1999; Writing Clearly: An Editing Guide, 2nd ed.: pg. 6-8 (verb tense).