

## Top 25 Flaws in Writing

and some ways to fix them  
Dr. Omar Ahmad  
Dr. Jeffrey Radel

### # 25. Paper is too short

- Be sure to know the specific expectations for the paper you are writing

### #24. Overuse of Cliches

- Don't use worn out expressions
  - Usually fairly easy to spot
  - Ask someone else to read your paper

### #23. Paper is too long

- Be sure to know expectations

### # 22. Verb tense changes

- Don't bounce back and forth between present and past tense in your writing.
  - WRONG: Alcott writes with a decidedly feminist point of view in Diana and Persis. She seemed to disapprove of women giving up their careers to marry.
  - RIGHT: Alcott writes with a decidedly feminist point of view in Diana and Persis. She seems to disapprove of women giving up their careers to marry.

### # 21. Lack of Parallelism

- Use parallel formats in lists of items
  - WRONG: Arbus and Neel had in common feeling depressed, thoughts of suicide, and trying to capture human psychology in their artwork.
  - RIGHT: Arbus and Neel had in common bouts of depression, thoughts of suicide, and the tendency to try to capture human psychology in their artwork.

## #20. Dangling Clauses

- Word or phrase that modifies a subject not clearly stated in the sentence, or is misplaced
  - A meticulously organized person, his suitcase could be tucked under an airplane seat.
  - Having finished the assignment, the TV was turned on.
  - Soaring above the harbor, Bob watched the great blue heron.
  - The North Cascades attract climbers with challenging peaks.

## #19. Overuse of jargon

- Too much jargon makes unclear writing.

## #18. Poor vocabulary

- If your writing lacks sophistication
  - Use a thesaurus
  - Read more

## #17. Failure to follow a style

- APA style is required by AJOT, for example
  - Learn the style
  - Follow the rules !

## #16. Short, choppy sentences

- Combine sentences
  - Saigon fell to the Communists in 1975. This disheartened many Americans.
  - Saigon fell to the Communists in 1975, disheartening many Americans.

## #15. Overuse of passive voice

- Active voice makes for more powerful writing; passive voice can be sluggish
  - Passive: Many Americans were disheartened by this event.
  - Active: This event disheartened many Americans.

#### #14. Vague pronoun reference

- Be careful about using *this*, *it*, or *these* in place of nouns
  - A new political climate developed when Saigon fell to the Communists in 1975, and many refugees escaped Vietnam in boats. This disheartened many Americans.
  - This *series of events* disheartened many Americans.

#### #13. Meaningless modifiers

- Don't use words that don't add meaning
  - Very, extremely, rather, little, basically
  - Read every modifier you use and ask yourself whether it adds meaning; if you can eliminate the modifier without changing the sentence meaning, you can probably get rid of it

#### #12. Subject & verb don't agree

- Make sure that nouns and verbs match - both singular or both plural
  - Every student, especially seniors, know the cafeteria's hours.
  - Every student, especially seniors, knows the cafeteria's hours.

#### #11. Overly wordy prose

- More words than are necessary are used, making sentences too long or complex
  - Write concisely

#### #10. Poor transitions

- Your paper lacks flow; your paragraphs are only weakly connected
  - Improve organization
  - Learn categories of transitions

#### #9. Comma splices

- A type of run-on sentence consisting of two sentences joined with a comma.
  - Learn correct use of comma
  - Learn correct use of conjunctions, semicolons, and colons

## #8. Poor punctuation

- Over-use or under-use of correct punctuation
  - Learn the rules of punctuation

## #7. Incorrect word use

- Learn the common confusions
  - Affect, effect
  - Less, fewer
  - Among, between
  - Farther, further
  - Lay, lie
  - Who, whom

## #6. Run-on sentences

- Make sure there is an appropriate conjunction or punctuation to join two clauses
  - Try reading your paper out loud. If you feel the need to pause, you should have a punctuation mark

## #5. Sentence fragments

- Incomplete sentences, without both a subject and a verb
  - Attach incomplete sentences to another sentence
  - Make fragments into clauses, and attach them to complete sentences

## #4. Confusing sentence structure

- Long sentences
- Complex constructions
  - Read your paper out loud; if something is difficult to read aloud, it could probably use some editing
  - Break long sentences into two
  - Cut out unnecessary modifiers

## #3. Misspellings and typos

- Use your spell-checker
- Allow enough time to proofread
- Have pride in your work

## #2. Failure to have a point

- Most writing is not stringing together facts
  - Academic writing has a thesis, which is supported through evidence and logic
- Providing information is not enough - there must be a point to your writing.

## #1. Poor organization

- Difficult to follow, point unclear
  - Organized paper should build an argument in support of a thesis statement
  - Organization accomplished through
    - Outlining
    - Using subheadings
    - Ask "so what?" after each paragraph