

Although different forms of English exist, we still are judged by our ability to recognize and use the formal rules and conventions of the language. Grammatical correctness at the university is not merely about being right or wrong; knowing the rules of the English language is a way to establish proficiency and credibility as a writer in and outside of the classroom.

Pattern “errors” common to novice writers involve the following items listed below. For more information on these concerns, please consult the pages numbers listed after each term in *Keys for Writers*; copies of the book can be found at SVSU’s Writing Center.

Sentences

Sentence Fragment: an incomplete thought missing the subject, verb, or both (430-33)

Fused Sentence or Run-ons: two sentences joined together incorrectly (433-36)

Comma Splice: two sentences joined together incorrectly by a comma (433-36)

Mixed Construction: a sentence with parts that do not match grammatically (436-37)

Lack of Parallel Structure: a sentence with words, phrases, or clauses that do not use similar grammatical construction (442-43)

Misplaced Modifier: a modifier that is placed far from the word it modifies, a modifier whose placement changes the meaning of a sentence, or a split infinitive (437-38)

Dangling Modifier: a phrase or clause (often using “-ed” or “-ing”) that is not correctly attached to the object it describes (438-39)

Verbs

Subject/Verb Agreement: subjects and verbs must agree in number (singular vs. plural) and person (first, second, third); problems arise with collective nouns, when the subject follows a verb, with indefinite pronouns, or with words like “each,” “every,” “neither,” etc. (463-73)

Verb Tense Shifts: moving between tenses (from present to past, for example) inconsistently (457-61)

Non-Standard Verb Form: using irregular verbs (444-48), auxiliary and modal verbs (449-51), or past tense and participles (455-56) incorrectly

Nouns and pronouns

Vague Pronoun Reference: leaving your reader unsure as to what noun a pronoun refers (478)

Pronoun/Antecedent Agreement: making sure that a pronoun agrees in number with the noun to which it refers (479-81)

Relative Pronoun Usage: using “who” for humans or “that”/“which” for nonhumans (492-93), using “that” and “which” appropriately for restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses (493-94), or avoiding

¹ Adapted from Ann Raimés and Susan Miller-Cochran, *Keys for Writers*, 7th ed. (Mason, Ohio: Cengage Learning, 2013).

dangling prepositions and agreement issues with relative pronouns (494-95)

Adjectives and adverbs

Faulty Adjective/Adverb Forms: using adjectives as adverbs or vice versa (486-87), making faulty comparisons with “than” (491), or confusing irregular forms (490)

Faulty Use of Conjunctive Adverbs: using words like “however,” “moreover,” or “therefore” as conjunctions (488)

Double Negatives: using two negatives in connection with one idea (489)

Punctuation

Comma: used to separate parts of sentences including clauses, nonrestrictive information, some introductory phrases, some lists, and some transitions, or with some quoted material (500-08)

Semi-colon: used to link related independent clauses or within lists that use appositives (516-17) Colon:

used with some lists to elaborate, explain, or define, or to introduce some quotes (517-19) Apostrophe:

used to show possession and to make contractions (508-12)

Word Choice

Passive Voice: explaining what was done to an object/person rather than what a object/person did (395, 461-63)

Redundancy: using words/phrases that essentially say the same thing (392-93)

Wordiness: using more words than necessary (392-93)

Homophones: words that sound alike but have different meanings (e.g., “to” vs. “two” vs. “too,” “effect” vs. “affect,” “than” vs. “then,” “since” vs. “sense,” etc.) (587-601)

If you are unfamiliar with these terms, please consult the glossary in Keys for Writers, as well as the page numbers listed above.