Common Grammar Errors –Examples and Explanations

Basic Terminology

Noun: names or identifies the person or object performing an action.

Verb: the word that identifies the action being done.

Tense: the form of the verb that tells the reader the time when an action occurred.

Subject: the object or person described/discussed in a sentence; the topic or theme of a sentence.

Clause: sentence or sentence part containing a subject and a verb.

1. Missing articles

(a) In order to gather business information today, user will generally download the required information from Internet. (b) User can then store this information for future use.

(a) In order to gather business information today, a user will generally download the required information from the Internet. (b). The user can then store this information for future use.

In English**, a/an** identifies <u>new </u>information, and **the,** <u>previously established </u>or <u>unique</u> information. In (a), the word 'user' is being mentioned for the first time, so **'a'** must be used in front of it. As the Internet is unique, so '**the'** must be used in front of it. In (b), because the word 'the user' has already been mentioned, so **the** is used to indicate that the information is no longer new.

2. Uncountable noun problems

The report contains many <u>informations</u> about the company.

The report contains a significant amount of information about the company.

Nouns in English are either <u>countable</u> (ie. can be made plural by adding -s) or <u>uncountable</u> (ie. cannot be made plural, eg., rice, sugar, knowledge, etc.). 'Information' is an uncountable noun.

3. Incorrect word form

A problem for the company is <u>ever-change</u> condition of the market.

A problem for the company is the /ever-changing conditions/ constant change in the conditions/ of the market.

An adjective or adjectival phrase needs to be used in the above sentence to make sense. Many word endings in English provide information about whether a word is a noun, a verb, an adjective or an adverb, so

attention to endings is important.

4. Faulty agreement

(a) This computer process information very quickly.

This computer process<u>es</u> information very quickly.

(b) The company is looking to improve their position in the marketplace.

<u>The company</u> is looking to improve <u>its</u> position in the marketplace.

When a singular noun is the subject of the sentence, the verb accompanying it must be singular too. In (a), because there is only one 'computer,' the verb, 'process,' must be made singular by adding the ending -es.

In (b), the word 'company' is regarded as **a singular entity,** regardless of how many people work in it. Therefore **'it'** and **'its'** are the appropriate forms to use.

5. Incorrect sequence of tenses

She worked in Silicon Valley as a programmer for several years before she become a web designer.

She worked in Silicon Valley as a programmer for several years before she be<u>came</u> a web designer.

Because the sentence is reporting a sequence of actions that happened in the past, the Past Tense must be used for both verbs. The regular Past Tense ending is -ed, but some of the most common and important verbs in English are irregular. Therefore, you need to learn them (is/was; become/became; go/went; does/did etc.).

6. Connective Problems

(a) Several team members may be needed on a project. Only one is likely to be team leader.

While/Although several team members may be needed on a project, only one is likely to be team leader.

OR:

Several team members may be needed on a project but only one is likely to be team leader.

To show the relationship between the two clauses, (that is, a contrast in meaning) a connective is needed. The type of connective used here is called a contrast marker. Other contrast markers include words such as *but, however* and *although.*

(b) Although the price of the product has been reduced but sales have not increased.

Although the price of the product has been reduced, sales have not increased.

In English, <u>only one</u> contrast marker (eg. but/ although/ while, etc.) is required to connect the two parts of a sentence. Do <u>not</u> separate the two parts into separate sentences (see (c) below).

(c) When writers give explanations. They usually offer examples to support their views.

When writers give explanations, they usually offer examples of their views.

Sentences beginning with words such as *because, when, while, although,* etc. need a second sentence part (clause) to complete their meaning. The best way to treat sentences like (c) is to join the two parts together with a comma.

7. Problems of parallel structure

The following actions were taken: advertise the product, improving quality control and down the retail price.

The following actions were taken: advertising the product, improving quality control and reducing the retail price.

In a list of items, each item must be written in the same grammatical form ie. all verb forms or all adjective forms, depending on how the sentence begins. In this case, all the actions are best put into the -ing (gerund) form. Other variations are also possible.

8. Sentence Structure Problems

(A) Verbless sentences

Typically, many computing documents are presented using LaTeX. For example, most journal articles written by FIT staff.

Typically, many computing documents are presented in LaTeX, for example, journal articles written in Information Technology.

All English sentences must contain a verb in order to be complete. The sentence beginning 'For example. . .' above needs to be joined to the previous sentence with a comma by a comma. It could also be changed into two freestanding sentences.

(B) Sentence fragments

A small program, but powerful enough to cover all the functionalities used in everyday document creation.

Gypsy <u>is</u> a small program, but powerful enough to cover all the functionalities used in everyday documentation.

Turn this into a complete sentence by creating a subject ('Gypsy') and adding a main verb ('is').

(C) Run-on sentences

Pascal has been used to improve some of the support programs however the demonstration program lacks realism.

Pascal has been used to improve some of the support programs; however, the demonstration program lacks realism.

OR,

Pascal has been used to improve some of the support programs. However, the demonstration program lacks realism.

The original sentence is in fact, two separate sentences. Because a comma is not strong enough, the 'however' clause must be separated by either a semi-colon (;) or a fullstop. Don't forget to insert a comma after 'however'.

AND, ONE REALLY ANNOYING ITEM . . .

9. Incorrect use of apostrophes

It's screen can display values for all the simulation activities.

Its screen can display the values for all the simulation activities.

It's (**apostrophe + s)** is short for '*it is*' and should not be confused with *its* **(no apostrophe)** the possessive form of it (= belonging to it). As you should not use contractions (ie. short forms like won't, isn't, etc.) in formal writing, there is no real need to use *it's* at all!