

LTL NOTES: Grammar Mistakes to Avoid

A guide to clear writing

Subject-Verb Agreement

Subject-verb agreement means that the verb in a sentence must agree in number (singular or plural) with its subject. This is a common area for errors, especially with compound subjects or when there are intervening phrases.

Example of Mistake: *The dog and cat is playing in the yard.*

Corrected Example: *The dog and cat are playing in the yard.*

Tip: Identify the subject of the sentence and ensure the verb matches its number. Watch out for phrases that come between the subject and the verb; they don't change the number of the subject.

Example of Mistake: *Each of the students have completed the assignment.*

Corrected Example: *Each of the students has completed the assignment.*

Tip: Words like *each*, *everyone*, *someone*, *anyone*, *nobody* are singular.

Incorrect Verb Forms

Using the correct verb tense and form is crucial for clear communication. Mistakes often occur with irregular verbs or when mixing tenses.

Example of Mistake: *I have went to the store yesterday.*

Corrected Example: *I went to the store yesterday.*

Tip: Memorize the principal parts of irregular verbs (present, past, past participle). Be consistent with verb tenses within a sentence and paragraph. If you start in the past tense, generally stay in the past tense.

Example of Mistake: *He is being here tomorrow.*

Corrected Example: *He will be here tomorrow.*

Misuse of Pronouns

Pronoun errors involve incorrect pronoun case (e.g., *I* vs. *me*), unclear pronoun reference, or disagreement in number or gender.

Example of Mistake: *Me and John went to the movies.*

Corrected Example: *John and I went to the movies.*

Tip: Use *I* when the pronoun is the subject of the sentence and *me* when it's the object. When using compound subjects/objects, try removing the other noun/pronoun. Would you say 'Me went to the movies?' No? Then it's 'John and I'.

Example of Mistake: *The manager told the employee that he needed to improve.*

Corrected Example: *The manager told the employee, "You need to improve."* (Direct quote) or *The manager told the employee that the employee needed to improve.* (Rephrased)

Tip: Ensure each pronoun clearly refers to a specific noun (its antecedent). Avoid ambiguity by rephrasing if necessary.

Punctuation Errors

Incorrect punctuation can drastically alter the meaning of a sentence. Common errors include missing commas, misused semicolons, and incorrect apostrophe usage.

Example of Mistake: *Let's eat Grandma.*

Corrected Example: *Let's eat, Grandma.*

Tip: Use commas to separate items in a list, to set off introductory phrases, and to join independent clauses with a coordinating conjunction (e.g., *and*, *but*, *or*).

Example of Mistake: *Its a beautiful day.*

Corrected Example: *It's a beautiful day.* (Contraction of "it is")

Tip: Use apostrophes to indicate possession or contractions. Distinguish between *its* (possessive) and *it's* (it is).

Commonly Confused Words

English is full of words that sound alike but have different meanings and spellings. Using the wrong word can lead to confusion and weaken your writing.

Example of Mistake: *They're going to fast.*

Corrected Example: *They're going too fast.*

Tip: Learn the differences between commonly confused words like *there/their/they're*, *to/too/two*, *affect/effect*, *your/you're*, *than/then*.

Example of Mistake: *I except your apology.*

Corrected Example: *I accept your apology.*

Tip: Keep a list of these words and review them periodically.

Conclusion

By understanding and avoiding these common grammar mistakes, you can significantly improve the clarity, accuracy, and professionalism of your writing. Review your work carefully, and don't hesitate to use grammar resources or seek feedback from others.