Proofreading Guide

All papers should be proofread and edited to repair basic errors in grammar and punctuation. This is a checklist of the most common sources of error in first-year writing papers at Indiana University South Bend. It is not a comprehensive guide but a working guide for the final stage of the revision process – editing for basic errors. The grammar handbook assigned in your class will provide more information and examples related to each of these errors.

**Pronoun Usage: Reference, Point of View (I, you, we), Antecedent**

- **Vague Pronoun Reference:** Sentences that begin with this, these, they, it, he, or she often have vague pronoun references. You have to decide what the vague pronoun refers to and rewrite the reference to make it clearer.
  - **First Draft:** We feel we must own the latest car, the latest clothes, and the latest technology. This is created by the media.
  - **Revised:** We feel we must own the latest care, the latest clothes, and the latest technology. *This feeling* is created by the media.

- **Point of View:** The point of view of a text is the perspective of it: first person (I or we), second person (you), or third person (he/she/it/one, or they). Choose one point of view and maintain it throughout the paper.
  - **First Draft:** When people work to create justice in our nation, *you* need to be sure that everyone has the same idea of justice.
  - **Revised:** When people work to create justice in our nation, *they* need to be sure that everyone has the same idea of justice.

- **Pronoun Antecedent:** Pronouns often refer to something the writer has already named – an antecedent. The pronoun and its antecedent should agree in number and person.
  - Agreement in Number (Singular or Plural)
    - **First Draft:** The word “valid” must be defined by the reader. They determine what an acceptable meaning is.
    - **Revised:** The word “valid” must be defined by the reader. He or she determines what an acceptable meaning is.
  - Agreement in Person (First, Second, or Third)
    - **First Draft:** *His* theory was to avoid their rules by living *your* life under *your* own set of rules.
    - **Revised:** *His* theory was to avoid their rules by living *his* life under *his* own set of rules.

**Sentence Structure**

- **Sentence Fragments:** A fragment is an unattached phrase or dependent clause. Most fragments belong to the sentence that precedes or follows. The following example can be revised by simply changing the first period to a comma.
  - **Example:** We see Imogene through Marya’s point of view. A point of view that is somewhat altered or deranged.
Run-on or Fused Sentences: Run-on sentences contain two sentences brought together without punctuation. You must decide how you will revise the run-on, using a period or a conjunction.

- First Draft: There is no separation between the private and the public in American culture violation is always present.
- Revised: There is no separation between private and the public in American culture. Violation of privacy is always present. or There is no separation between the private and the public because violation of privacy is always present in American culture.

Comma Splices: A comma splice is two complete sentences joined together with a comma.

- Example: Miller writes about the African landscape, he fails to write about the people who inhabit it.

To revise, substitute a period for the comma or use a coordinating conjunction after the comma (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so).

Verb Usage

- Subject-Verb Agreement: Singular subjects take singular verbs. Plural subjects take plural verbs.
  - First Draft: The thoughts that a reader is thinking is only considered “great” when others know those thoughts.
  - Revised: The thoughts that a reader is thinking are only considered “great” when others know those thoughts.

Verb Tense Shift: Avoid unnecessary shifts from present to past, or past to present tense.

- First Draft: When Wideman had the conversation with his brother, Robby confesses to him that he did have a problem with drugs.
- Revised: When Wideman had the conversation with his brother, Robby confessed to him that he did have a problem with drugs.

Comma Usage

- Between the items in a series of words, phrases, or clauses:
  - Example: We all know that we are important no matter what we drive, but we also know that the automobile still causes jealousy, anxiety, and competition.

- Between two independent clauses joined with a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so).
  - Example: We judge people by their economic status, and in doing so we build a scale called the “social hierarchy.”

- On both sides of a non-restrictive clause (the clause often begins with who, whose, which, when, or where):
Example: The Shield soap commercial shows the wife, whose name is Gail, as the “handyman” in the house.

- **After an introductory phrase or dependent clause:**
  - Example: Once Imogene and Marya’s friendship begins, the reader constantly wonders how long it will last.

**Apostrophes to Show Possession**

- **Add an ‘s to singular and collective nouns to show ownership:**
  - Singular Noun Examples: Miller’s experience; the city’s budget
  - Collective Noun Examples: a society’s codes; the group’s work
  - When the singular noun ends in an s, and the’s and then say the word aloud (boss’s, Luis’s, Coles’s). If it sounds too awkward, drop the final s, but keep the apostrophe (Fuentes’ story).

- **To form the possessive of plural nouns ending in s, add only an apostrophe.**
  - Examples: consumers’ desires, students’ rooms

- **Don’t confuse personal pronouns (no apostrophe) with contractions (always an apostrophe).**
  - its = possessive pronoun  
    Example: Its leaves have fallen.
  - it’s = a contraction of it is  
    Example: It’s a confusing chapter.
  - You’re = a contraction of you are  
    Example: You’re right.
  - Your = possessive pronoun  
    Example: That is your main point for the paper.