

Step #1: Proofread. Pay special attention to spelling, capitals, and missing words.

Step #2: Consult the Fatal Five online tutorial, available from the COB homepage (click student resources, then communication resources) for help with these errors that may reflect poorly on your professional writing and your overall ability. The site suggests more resources for further help.

√ = acceptable X = needs work

Subject-Verb Agreement Error

__1. Plural subjects have plural verbs; singular subjects have singular verbs.

Hint: Identify the subject, and then substitute *it* or *they* to check your work.

He goes. They go. It does. We did. The committee is happy. The members are confused.

__2. Standard use of irregular verbs is particularly important in professional communication.

The car runs today. Yesterday it ran. In the past it has run. I write. I wrote last week. I have written the report.

__3. Company names, titles, and words used as words are singular and require singular verbs. (*It*, not *they*)

Jackson, Brewer, & Jones, Inc., has (not have) renewed its (not their) contract with us.

Fused sentence or comma splice

__4. Independent clauses (clauses that could stand alone as sentences) have appropriate punctuation separating them. A comma is not usually enough.

__5. A comma is not enough to join main clauses even with a conjunctive adverb. Use a semicolon, make two sentences, or rewrite the sentence.

Simon lost the checks; therefore, he cannot pay you.

Apostrophe Error

__6. In general, indicate possession with an apostrophe before an *s* for singular nouns and an apostrophe after the *s* for plural nouns.

__7. To form the possessive of plural nouns that do not end in *s*, add an apostrophe and *s* at the end of the noun.

women's (not womens')

__8. Personal pronouns do not add an apostrophe to form the possessive.

hers (not her's), ours (not our's), its (not it's) NOTE: it's = it is or it has

Confusing Pronouns

__9. Pronouns and their antecedents should be clear and should agree in number.

A college freshman should attend all their classes. (error)
College freshmen should attend all their classes. (better)

Incoherent sentences

__10. Use only complete sentences in professional writing; avoid fragments.

__11. Subjects and verbs should fit each other logically.

A famous story from American history is George Washington. (faulty predication)
A famous story from American history is George Washington's crossing the Delaware.