20 Common Writing Errors

In 1988, Robert Conner and Andrea Lunsford, two prominent scholars in the field of rhetoric and composition, collected and analyzed 3,000 college essays around the U.S. They discovered twenty common errors that students make in their writing, which we have listed below.

1. **Missing a comma after an introductory element**
   Incorrect: For spring break Leslie took her daughter to New Orleans.
   Correct: For spring break, Leslie took her daughter to New Orleans.

2. **Vague pronoun reference**
   Incorrect: After Ben took the radio out of the car, he sold it. (Did Ben sell the radio or the car?)
   Correct: Ben sold the car after he took the radio out of it.
   Incorrect: Despite the long wait, they say that the new Thai restaurant is excellent. (Who is “they?”)
   Correct: Despite the long wait, all my friends say that the new Thai restaurant is excellent.

3. **Missing comma in a compound sentence**
   Incorrect: Carla's best friend is getting married in three months so she put in a request for time off.
   Correct: Carla's best friend is getting married in three months, so she put in a request for time off.

4. **Wrong word**
   Incorrect: For some people, the biggest side affect of drinking too much coffee is nervousness.
   Correct: For some people, the biggest side effect of drinking too much coffee is nervousness.

5. **Missing comma(s) with a nonrestrictive element**
   Incorrect: The house down the street which has been boarded up for a few months was finally sold.
   Correct: The house down the street, which has been boarded up for a few months, was finally sold.

6. **Wrong or missing verb ending**
   Incorrect: Our team place last in the semi-finals.
   Correct: Our team placed last in the semi-finals.

7. **Wrong or missing preposition**
   Incorrect: My parents love to have people for Sunday brunch in their home.
   Correct: My parents love to have people over for Sunday brunch at their home.

8. **Comma splice**
   Incorrect: We returned from our trip to Greece yesterday, we miss it already.
   Correct: We returned from our trip to Greece yesterday, but we miss it already.
   Correct: We returned from our trip to Greece yesterday; we miss it already.

9. **Missing or misplaced possessive apostrophe**
   Incorrect: The teachers strike lasted for two weeks.
   Correct: The teachers’ strike lasted for two weeks.
10. Unnecessary shift in verb tense
Incorrect: They planned to go camping with us, but they back out at the last minute.
Correct: They planned to go camping with us, but they backed out at the last minute.

11. Unnecessary shift in pronoun
Incorrect: If you want to perform well on an exam, one should get enough rest the night before.
Correct: If you want to perform well on an exam, you should get enough rest the night before.

12. Sentence fragment
Incorrect: I didn’t have time to eat breakfast. On the morning of my driver’s test.
Correct: I didn’t have time to eat breakfast on the morning of my driver’s test.

13. Wrong tense or verb form
Incorrect: Lou had wrote the best paper in the class.
Correct: Lou had written the best paper in the class.

14. Lack of subject-verb agreement
Incorrect: Jim’s grandchildren loves to swim in the nearby lake.
Correct: Jim’s grandchildren love to swim in the nearby lake.

15. Missing comma in a series
Incorrect: Mike prefers listening to music that is melodic, complex and unpretentious.
Correct: Mike prefers listening to music that is melodic, complex, and unpretentious.

16. Lack of pronoun-antecedent agreement
Incorrect: A dedicated musician should practice playing their instrument every day.
Correct: A dedicated musician should practice playing his/her instrument every day.
Correct: Dedicated musicians should practice playing their instrument every day.

17. Unnecessary comma(s) with a restrictive element
Incorrect: Cast members from the television series, Heroes, appeared at the Comic-Con two years ago.
Correct: Cast members from the television series Heroes appeared at the Comic-Con two years ago.

18. Fused (or run-on) sentence
Incorrect: Maria excels at learning new languages she is fluent in seven.
Correct: Maria excels at learning new languages; she is fluent in seven.

19. Misplaced or dangling modifier
Incorrect: Sitting on the kitchen counter, the dog devoured the apple pie.
(Was the dog sitting on the counter?)
Correct: The dog devoured the apple pie that was sitting on the kitchen counter.

20. Its/It’s confusion
Incorrect: The editorial board will make it’s final decision next week.
Correct: The editorial board will make its final decision next week.
Incorrect: Even though its sunny outside, the forecast calls for heavy rain later today.
Correct: Even though it’s sunny outside, the forecast calls for heavy rain later today.