

The Top Twenty GSU Grammar Errors

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1. Missing commas to set off nonessential information
2. Unnecessary commas to set off essential information
3. Missing comma before a coordinating conjunction combining two independent clauses
4. Comma splice
5. Semicolon mistakes
6. Colon mistakes
7. Wrong word
8. Lack of parallel structure
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12. Unnecessary tense shift
13. Missing comma after introductory element
14. Lack of pronoun agreement
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of the sentence does not change significantly without the extra information, then the added words are nonessential

INCORRECT: The starting quarterback who won the writing contest is in my class.

If the reader can remove the phrase "who won the writing contest" and still know who the starting quarterback is, commas are needed.

CORRECT: The starting quarterback, who won the writing contest, is in my class.

If there is only one starting quarterback, the commas around "who won the writing contest" are necessary because this phrase is intended only to add extra information about him. If, however, there is more than one quarterback to whom the writer could be referring, the information is essential to identifying which one – the one who won the writing contest – so commas would not be needed.

CORRECT: The quarterback who won the writing contest is in my class.

2 Unnecessary commas to set off essential information

Commas are used to set off information that interrupts and does not significantly alter the meaning of a sentence. If the information is necessary to make the meaning clear, the writer should not set off these words or phrases in commas (this mistake is the opposite of missing commas to set off nonessential information).

INCORRECT: The student, who won the writing contest, is in my class.

The commas setting off "who won the writing contest" are incorrect because the information is necessary to understand the meaning of the sentence.

CORRECT: The student who won the writing contest is in my class.

No commas are needed because "who won the writing contest" is necessary to identify which student the writer is referring to.

Commas are used before coordinating conjunctions – for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so – if the coordinating conjunction is used to connect two complete sentences (independent clauses).

INCORRECT: I wanted to go to the beach but I couldn't afford to pay for a hotel room.

"I wanted to go to the beach" and "I couldn't afford to pay for a hotel room," are complete sentences joined with a coordinating conjunction, so a comma should be placed before the conjunction.

CORRECT: I wanted to go to the beach, but I couldn't afford to pay for a hotel room.

Another way to correct this error is to remove the subject of the second clause, if both subjects are the same:

CORRECT: I wanted to go to the beach but couldn't afford to pay for a hotel room.

"I wanted to go to the beach" is a complete sentence, but "couldn't afford to pay for the hotel room" is not. A comma should not be placed before the coordinating conjunction.

4 Lack of pronoun agreement

Use pronouns precisely and consistently. The pronoun must agree with the number, gender, and type of

6 Missing comma after introductory element

Commas help to separate an opening idea from the rest of a sentence. A comma follows an introductory word, phrase, or clause.

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"Furthermore" is an introductory word and should be followed by a comma to avoid possible confusion.

CORRECT: From his perch in the top of the tree, John could see the neighbor's dog chewing on the children's missing Frisbee.

"From his perch in the top of the tree" is an introductory phrase and should be followed by a comma.

"Even though he knew that his brother would be angry over the lost Frisbee" is an introductory clause and should be followed by a comma.

"Risking his life over a Frisbee" is the subject of the sentence, not an introductory phrase, and should not be followed by a comma.

A comma splice results when two independent clauses (two separate sentences) are joined with only a comma rather than with a period or semicolon. Writers often unintentionally create comma splices when using transitional words such as however, therefore, moreover, nevertheless, and furthermore. These conjunctive adverbs seem like coordinating conjunctions (for, and, nor, or, but, yet, so) but cannot be used in the same way.

Since "however" is not a coordinating conjunction, a comma is not enough to join the two sentences.

A semicolon before "however" is a correct replacement for the comma.

my major requirements.

"But" is a coordinating conjunction, so the comma is enough to join the two sentences.

Choosing the right word for the meaning you are trying to communicate takes some care and attention. Sometimes a writer chooses a wrong word because it sounds like another word. "Their," "there," and "they're" sound the same, but they have very different meanings. Contractions can also cause problems. "Should've" sounds like "should of," but the contraction is actually of the words "should have."

"You're" means "you are" and "your" is possessive. Both are used incorrectly in this sentence.

"You're" and "your" are used correctly in this sentence.

9 Misplaced modifier

A modifier – a word, phrase, or clause that describes something else – goes next to whatever it modifies. A misplaced modifier can confuse a reader because the modifier appears to describe the wrong element in the

INCORRECT: Jamie ate a sandwich wearing a GSU sweatshirt.

"Wearing a GSU sweatshirt" modifies Jamie, so the phrase should be next to Jamie in the sentence. This sentence suggests that the sandwich is wearing the sweatshirt.

CORRECT: Wearing a GSU sweatshirt, Jamie ate a sandwich.

"Wearing a GSU sweatshirt" clearly modifies Jamie in this sentence.

14 Lack of parallel structure

A list or comparison of equally significant ideas should use the same grammatical pattern. Nonparallel structure

