

Common Editing and Writing Problems

Dorothy I. Mitstifer

Although most publications have guidelines for authors and recommend a particular style manual, most editors find the following common problems in manuscripts. Authors should use these suggestions in editing their own work.

- Up – upon – In formal writing “upon” is preferred, although “on” is not wrong.
- While – Unless time specific, use “although.”
- Since – Unless time specific, use “because.”
- Who, That, and Which – Use “who” and “that” when referring to persons—“who” when the individual person and “that” for a class, species, or type. “Which” is used to introduce nonessential clauses and should be preceded by a comma. “That” is used to introduce essential clauses.
- Among and between – Ordinarily use “between” when referring to two persons or things and “among” when referring to more than two persons or things.
- Affect – effect – “Affect” is normally the verb and “effect” is the noun. In psychology, “affect” is used as a noun meaning feeling and emotion.
- Their – “Their” should be used with plural antecedents—not with a singular antecedent (even though most people do in conversation). “Its” often works with singular antecedents.
- Though – Use “although” in most cases.
- Unnecessary infinitive – Ex. The committee will begin to develop the report after the open forum. Better sentence: The committee will develop the report after the open forum.
- Agreement of subject and verb – the verb must agree in number (singular or plural) with its subject. Subjects ending in “a” often appear to be singular but are really plural – Ex. The data indicate that Terry was correct.
- Parallel forms of items in a series or list – all nouns, all verbs, or all complete sentences.
- Over-use of the same word in a sentence or paragraph or article.
- Misuse of better and best – Ex. The teacher gave some examples so that the class could better understand the concept. Better sentence: The teacher gave some examples so that the class could understand the concept (you either understand or you don’t).
- Use of “see” and “view” – Ex. In order to be seen as transformative, this chapter makes the case that Better sentence: In order to be viewed as transformative, this chapter makes the case that
- Not only but also – no comma and parallel form required – Ex. She is gifted not only as a painter but also as a sculptor.
- Both-and – parallel form required – We are flying both to Chicago and to San Francisco.
- Semi-colons – to separate two independent clauses that are not joined by a conjunction – to separate elements in a series that already contain commas.
- Paragraphs
 - no one-sentence paragraphs
 - no long, long paragraphs
- Commas in general – use the following rules:
 - Commas are used after long phrases but are not required for short phrases (although there are exceptions)
 - Use comma before “and” with words in a series – Always!!!

Questionable sources – limit use for credibility

- Wikipedia – This is a resource that can be changed at any time by interested parties.

- Internet – Overuse of Internet references raises issues of credibility. Anyone who wishes to post can do so, and those most gifted in positioning items on the Internet receive lots of citations in a search.

Ethics – author’s responsibility

- Quotations of less than 40 words should be incorporated in text with appropriate citation.
- Quotations of more than 40 words should be indented with appropriate citation.
- Quotation of more than 500 words from a work requires explicit permission from the author or copyright owner.
- Use of models, graphics, and pictures require explicit permission from the author or copyright owner. As an alternative to creating your own, there are inexpensive Internet sources for purchasing graphics and pictures.