

WRITING FOR SUCCESS

by Betty La France

Effective writing is thorough, yet concise. It is well organized, unambiguous, written in the active voice, and engaging. A manuscript that exemplifies good writing is free of distractions (i.e., grammatical and spelling errors). These types of errors can detract substantially from the effectiveness of the text. You should purchase a writing manual (e.g., *The Gregg Reference Manual*, American Psychological Association) to avoid the common mistakes noted below:

The most common issues:

1. The group is an “it.” Its members are “they.”
2. “There” is a place. “Their” is possessive. “They’re” is a contraction for they are.
3. Active voice focuses on the actor (e.g., The assassins shot the President.). Passive voice focuses on the recipient (e.g., The President was shot).
4. Subject/verb agreement: “The people were” not “the people was.”
5. Who is used to refer to people. That and which are used to refer to objects. Additionally, that is used in essential clauses; which is used in nonessential clauses.
6. Know when to use who versus whom. Use who whenever he, she, they, I, or we could be substituted in the who clause. Use whom whenever him, her, them, me, or us could be substituted as the object of the verb/proposition.
7. Do not split verbs (Wrong: We were gently riding. Right: We were riding gently).
8. “Its” is possessive. “It’s” is a contraction.
9. Know that affect is the cause and effect is the consequence.
10. A comma is used immediately before a conjunction that separates two independent clauses. Two commas should surround a dependent or nonessential clause. A comma also should be used to separate items in a list.
11. A semicolon is used to separate two main clauses that are not joined by a conjunction.
12. He/mankind/man/men are not generic terms for all people. Use other terms such as firefighters, police officers, postal carriers, etc.
13. “Should of” is not correct. “Should have” is correct.
14. Do not use “of” or “that” if the sentence makes sense without it.
15. Pay close attention to pronoun/antecedent (the word for which the pronoun stands) agreement. The person was able to give their example effectively—is not correct grammatically.
16. A paragraph consists of a main point and evidence that supports that main point.
17. Effective writing is efficient. Write efficiently; if it can be said in fewer words then say it in fewer words.
18. Since is used only when referring to time. Because is used when supplying a reason or noting an effect (due to).
19. While is used only when referring to time. Although is used as a nonessential clause that usually introduces a dependent clause.
20. Periods and commas ALWAYS go inside the closing quotation mark. Semicolons and colons ALWAYS go outside the closing quotation mark.
21. Run-on sentences should be avoided.
22. Introductory clauses are ended with a comma.
23. (i.e., means in other words) (e.g., means for example)
24. Spell out numbers from one through ten. Use numeric figures for numbers 11 and above (unless it begins a sentence, then spell out the number).
25. Then refers to a consequence. Than refers to a comparison.
26. Complete sentences contain a subject and a verb.
27. A student should know how to spell his/her professor’s name.
28. Anyone refers to anybody. Any one refers to any one person in a group.
29. Do means to perform. Due means owing.
30. To complement means to complete something or someone. To compliment means to give a flattering statement.
31. Sight refers to vision. Cite refers to quoting.
32. Conscience is the sense of right and wrong. Conscious means that one is aware.
33. Subconscious means that one is operating without awareness. Unconscious means that one is not operating.