

Grammar Tips

1. Read the entire sentence first and decide (if you can) where the problem lies. You may find the answer immediately. If not, then proceed through the following checklist.
2. For each clause underline the subject and the verb.
 - Is the verb missing?
 - Do the subject and verb agree in number (singular/plural)?
 - If there is a pronoun subject, does it agree with the verb (e.g., I do, you do, he/she/it does)?
 - Does the tense (present/past/future) of the verb match the rest of the sentence?
 - Passive voice: whenever possible, avoid “non-active” uses of verbs; e.g., “I drove the car” (active) rather than “The car was driven by me” (passive).
3. Circle each pronoun and its antecedent (if one exists) and connect with a line.
 - Does the pronoun match its antecedent in number (singular/plural)?
 - Does the pronoun have the right case (subject/object)? (e.g., he vs. him, we vs. us, they vs. them, etc.)
 - For interrogative pronouns (who, what, etc.) make sure they match the type of antecedent noun
 - Who → person, what → thing, where → place, when → time, why → reason, etc.
 - Are pronouns used consistently – e.g., you ... you, one ... one?
4. Parallel constructions – with a list of two or more items
 - Parallel verb forms:
 - writing a book, placing a bet, and joining a club
 - to read a book, place a bet, and join a club or to read a book, to place a bet, and to join a club
 - wrote a book, placed a bet, and joined a club
 - Parallel prepositional phrases:
 - past the mountain, across the bridge, and by the lake
 - Parallel adjectives, adverbs:
 - She was a brilliant, provocative, and interesting student.
 - He performed vividly, artistically, and emotionally.
 - Parallel comparisons and relationships:
 - His problem was related **more** to preparation **than** to skill.
 - She **not only** studied for the test **but also** helped others with their studying.
5. Misplaced (dangling) or incorrect modifiers
 - If there is a long, descriptive, introductory phrase, then the noun that is described should usually immediately follow the phrase.
 - Although he was killed in 1865, Abraham Lincoln affected future Americans.
 - Remember: adjectives describe nouns (which, what kind of, etc.); adverbs describe verbs (how, why, when, where, how often, how much) and other adjectives/adverbs – most adverbs end in –ly.
 - Special cases: good (adjective) vs. well (adverb), less (amount) vs. few (number)
 - For comparative adjectives, **two/both** tells you to use better, worse, more; for **more than two** tells you to use best, worst, most.

6. Run-on sentence – when there are two primary sentences without a break between them
 - Connect with a semi-colon (“;”) if they are two related thoughts.
 - Connect with “and” or “but” if they are two independent thoughts.
 - Connect with a colon (“:”) if the second thought expands upon the first.
7. Tricky words
 - Lie – lay – lain (to recline) vs. lay – laid – laid (to place or set)
 - “Between A and B” vs. “among A, B, and C”; and “...traveled from Washington to Chicago...” (not “traveled between...”).
 - Like (preposition) vs. as (used as a conjunction with a following clause containing a subject and verb); e.g., “He looks like a prince.” and “He looks as a prince would wish to look.”
 - They’re (“They are”) vs. there (“over there”) vs. their (“it was their book”)
 - It’s (“It is”) vs. its (“that is its last chance”)
 - If (used when there is a condition to answer: e.g., “Let me know if the train ever arrives”) vs. whether (used when there is doubt: e.g., “I don’t know whether to hug him or hit him”)
 - Different from (e.g., “the style of Monet is different from the style of Picasso”) vs. different to or different than (both wrong)
 - Plurals of compound nouns (e.g., chairman of the board → chairmen of the board; attorney-general → attorneys-general; maid-of-honor → maids-of-honor; passer-by → passers-by)
 - Principal (“she was the principal speaker” or “she was the high school principal”) vs. principle (“that sutra describes a principle of Buddhism”)

Writing Tips

1. Standard essay format
 - Intro paragraph with thesis sentence and overview of examples to be presented; preferably, the thesis sentence should be the first or last sentence in the paragraph
 - 2 body paragraphs, each with topic sentence and 3 – 4 discussion sentences
 - Concluding paragraph to summarize and elaborate upon the thesis (tie together themes discussed in the preceding paragraphs)
2. Basic essay approach
 - First 3 – 5 minutes:
 - Read the Assignment statement; if needed or useful, read the think box as well
 - Brainstorm and make a decision (yes or no; agree or disagree)
 - Identify several examples that might be pertinent to your thesis; prioritize
 - Identify details for the 2 highest priority; either write a) a brief outline; b) a brief list of notes; or c) a content web (visual) for each high-priority example
 - Sketch the thesis sentence and draw a block around it – you’ll refer back repeatedly.
 - Next 18 – 20 minutes:
 - Write the intro paragraph on the answer sheet, including a final revised version of the thesis sentence (preferably as the first or last sentence in the paragraph). The intro paragraph should introduce (in some fashion) the upcoming high-priority examples you’ve picked.
 - Write two body paragraphs using your brainstorming/outline/web/notes.
 - If 10 minutes remain, write a short 3rd paragraph (if you have another example to discuss); update the intro paragraph as necessary. Writing the 3rd paragraph must not interfere with writing the concluding paragraph.
 - When 5 minutes remain, write a concluding paragraph that restates ***and elaborates upon*** the thesis sentence.
 - Final 2 minutes (if time permits).
 - Edit/correct – line out errors neatly.
 - General tips:
 - Be specific: don’t talk about general, abstract examples, events, people, etc. Instead, pick detailed items involving real people, real events, etc.
 - Be forceful: don’t “...believe that something is true...” or “...think that something is true...” Instead, state the information as if you were arguing for someone’s life in court.
 - Be consistent with your thesis: constantly review the thesis sentence as you a) find examples and b) write the paper. Always ask yourself “is the example/sentence I’m writing helping to defend my thesis?” If not, remove the example/sentence. Note: it is acceptable (although difficult) to bring up ideas that contradict your thesis – as long as you forcefully show how those contradictions are not valid.