



Proofreading and Revising Checklist

Revising a paper includes more than just recopying it; it means **rewriting, correcting,** and **improving.**

Use this checklist to help revise common grammatical errors.
One must start with a complete rough draft.

- **Do all verbs agree with their subjects and all pronouns with their antecedents?**

The **subject** will usually be the first **noun** (person, place, thing, or idea) in a **clause** (a phrase in the sentence that contains a noun and a verb). The subject is the most important noun in the clause.

Ex: *Sally drove her car to Albertson's to buy groceries.*

In this sentence, the nouns are: Sally, car, Albertson's, and groceries.
The subject is Sally because Sally is who (or what) the sentence is about. Therefore, Sally is the subject of the sentence, much in the same way that one's essay might be the subject of one's conversation.

Circle the subject in every clause and draw an arrow to the verb. If the subject is singular, the verb must be singular; if the subject is plural, the verb must be plural. Generally, if the subject ends with "s," the verb will not; if the subject does not end in "s," the verb usually will (See Subject-Verb Agreement Handout).

The **pronoun** is a word that is used in place of a noun. For example, the noun "Sally" might be replaced with the pronoun "she." Some common pronouns used in academic writing are: he, him, she, her, it, and they. The **antecedent** is the noun to which the pronoun refers.

Ex: *Because Sally was almost out of gas, **she** stopped at a service station on **her** way home.*

In this sentence, the pronouns are **she** and **her**. The noun these pronouns are referring to is **Sally**. Therefore, Sally is the antecedent.

Ex: *When **a student** comes by the office, **he or she** should sign in at the desk.*

In this sentence, the pronouns are **he** and **she**. The antecedent is **a student**. Be careful to not use **their** when referring to a singular noun.

Draw a square around each pronoun and an arrow to its antecedent (the noun to which the pronoun refers). Each pronoun must have an antecedent. Sometimes, it will begin the sentence (It was dark). In that case, there is no antecedent, but the sentence could be improved by removing it (The evening was dark).

- **Are all sentences complete and correct?**

Beware of sentence fragments! A sentence must contain both a subject and a verb in order to be complete. Sentence fragments must be corrected.

- **Fragment Warnings:**

Also	For example	So that	Whenever
Although	For instance	Such as	Where
As	How	That	Whether
As if	Just	Though	While
As long as	Like	Until	Who
As soon as	Once	What	Whoever
Because	Provided	Whatever	Whomever
Especially	Since	When	Whose

Incomplete: Although the child acted well.

Complete: Although the child acted well, she did not receive a part in the play.

- **Beware of comma splices!**

Remember that a comma is not an end mark of punctuation. It does not separate complete sentences, unless used with a conjunction. It is usually placed to indicate a pause, to avoid confusion, or to separate a list of items. A semicolon CAN separate complete thoughts, but both a subject and a verb must come before and after the semicolon.

The structure looks like this:

Complete thought; related complete thought.

Ex: *Joan and Jill both like dogs; Bill likes cats.*

- **Beware of the run-on or fused sentence.**

The run-on sentence has no punctuation between complete thoughts. This fault must be corrected.

To find run-ons, try these hints:

- Read the paper aloud. When one's voice stops or drops check for a period.
- Read the paper in reverse order—from the last sentence to the first. This helps spot incomplete thoughts.
- The best way to avoid the run-on sentence is to memorize these run-on stop sign words:

- **Run-on Stop Signs:**

Consequently	Now	Than
Finally	Moreover	There
However	Suddenly	Therefore

(If one of these words opens or begins a complete thought, the word must be preceded by either a period or a semicolon.)

- **Are there too many ideas in one sentence?**

Beware of the loose, stringy compound sentence. In other words, do not string main clauses together with *and, so, that, which, or but*. For example, the following sentence is too long:

The stagecoach rounded the bend, but the two masked horsemen blocked the road, and they covered the driver with their rifles, and they ordered him to raise his hands, so he put down the reins, and he raised his hands, and he and his passengers got out and awaited their fate.

- **Are all words spelled correctly?**

Use a dictionary to look up any words one is not sure about. Do not rely upon a computerized spell check to catch all spelling errors.

- **Are all proper words capitalized?**

Use a dictionary when needed (See Capitalization Handout).

- **Are there too many verbs in the passive voice?**

Circle all passive-voice verbs with a different ink color. Try to change as many as possible to the active voice. The active voice is much more direct and clear than the passive voice. It places the emphasis on the “doer” of the action. However, some verbs should remain in the passive voice if they sound awkward otherwise, if one wants to place emphasis on the receiver of the action rather than on the doer of the action. For example:

PASSIVE: *The clothes were washed by Laura.*

ACTIVE: *Laura washed the clothes.*

In this case, the active is much more direct and clear.

PASSIVE: *The computer was programmed to print the checks with a click of the mouse.*

ACTIVE: *The programmer programmed the computer to print the checks with a click of the mouse.*

In this case, the passive is much more appropriate because the program and its function is the focus, not the programmer.

- **Has one omitted or repeated any words?**

Please keep in mind that these are only a handful of the many ways one can better compose or revise one’s papers.