

Final Draft Editing Workshop Handout

Some time ago, Hairston, a college writing professor, conducted an attitudinal survey among business professionals (i.e., executives, lawyers, bank officers, real estate agents, small business owners, and engineers) in reaction to sentence errors. Each professional read sixty-five sentences, each containing errors, and were asked to rank the errors as “Does not bother me,” “Bothers me a little,” or “Bothers me a lot.” During this peer editing workshop, you will focus on looking for those errors in your draft that were the most objectionable to those respondents of Hairston’s survey. Eliminating these unintentional errors will improve the rhetorical effectiveness of your writing.

Keep in mind that errors often disappear as multiple drafts are written.

The more pride you have with your writing, the more likely you are to eliminate errors.

Errors may increase as the cognitive difficulty of writing assignments increases.

I. **Stage One:** Eliminate Status-Marking Errors (These received the strongest negative reaction from respondents.)

Beginning with the last paragraph, the second to last, and so on, read your draft out loud to another. The listener should keep in mind that a student’s spoken version may differ—many often unconsciously correct their draft during an oral reading— from the written version so he/she should let the reader know of any discrepancies, paying particular attention to “status-marking errors.”

- A. Nonstandard verb forms in past or past participle: “seen” instead of “saw,” “had went” instead of “had gone”
- B. Lack of subject verb agreement: “we was” instead of “we were,” “she don’t” instead of “she doesn’t”
- C. Double negatives: “never do nothing” instead of “never do anything”
- D. Objective pronoun as subject: “Tom and her” instead of “Tom and she” are going to the store.

II. Stage Two: Eliminate Very Serious Errors (These received the second strongest negative reaction from respondents.)

Have your peer read your draft out loud and pay particular attention to “very serious errors.” If the reader of your essay stumbles over a particular sentence, it may be an indication that there is a problem with fragments, run-ons, punctuation, or parallel structure. Make notes on those aspects of your essay that may need editing in these areas.

- A. Sentence fragments:
 - 1. Nonstandard: Because he has finished his homework. He will be able to attend the luncheon.
 - 2. Standard: Because he has finished his homework, he will be able to attend the luncheon.

- B. Run-ons:
 - 1. Nonstandard: Tamra will be at the party nonetheless she probably will not want to talk to Phillip.
 - 2. Standard: Tamra will be at the party; nonetheless, she probably will not want to talk to Phillip. Or Tamra will be at the party. Nonetheless, she probably will not want to talk to Phillip.
 - 3. Nonstandard: I met a student from UCLA last week, he told me that his football team would annihilate USC in their next conference game.
 - 4. Standard: I met a student from UCLA last week. He told me that his football team would annihilate USC in their next conference game. Or At UCLA last week, I met a student who told me that his football team would annihilate USC in their next conference game.

- C. Noncapitalization of proper nouns: “father” instead of “Father” (used as a name), “the internet” instead of “the Internet,” “monday” instead of “Monday,” “january” instead of “January”

- D. Non-status marking subject-verb agreement errors: Everyone one of the students “are going” instead of “is going” to the museum.

- E. Nonstandard uses of modals: “Would of,” “could of,” “should of,” “might of” instead of “would have,” “could have,” “should have,” “might have”

- F. Insertion of comma between the verb and its complement:
 - 1. Nonstandard: The workers that were on strike last week are, happy that their contracts have been renewed.
 - 2. Standard: The workers that were on strike last week are happy that their contracts have been renewed.

- G. Nonparallelism:
1. Nonstandard: Not only will students complete their research papers next week but will also give an oral presentation of their findings.
 2. Standard: Not only will students complete their research papers next week, but they will also give an oral presentation of their findings. Or Students will not only complete their research papers next week but will also give an oral presentation of their findings.
- H. Faulty adverb forms:
1. Kenneth did “good” instead of “well” on the test.
 2. The professor must ensure that the class runs “smooth” and “efficient” instead of “smoothly” and “efficiently.”
- I. Use of transitive “set” for “sit:” The family “set down” instead of “sat down” at the restaurant. Be careful of other word choice problems such as whether vs. weather, their vs. there, where vs. were, between and among, further and farther, and so on.

III. Stage Three: Eliminate Serious Errors (These received a negative reaction from respondents.)

During this third reading, number all paragraphs in the left-hand margin. Then read your draft silently beginning in the middle of the essay. Suppose you have ten paragraphs. You would begin reading paragraph five with the last sentence of that paragraph and would progress to the second to the last sentence, the third to the last sentence and so forth, until you have finished that paragraph. Then progress to paragraph four, three, two, and one in similar manner.

Use this same technique as you now read paragraphs ten, nine, eight, seven, and six. During this silent reading, pay close attention to any “serious errors.” Make notes on those aspects of your essay that may need editing in these areas.

- A. Verb form errors:
1. If I “was” instead of “were” you, I would talk to your boss.
 2. By the time we arrived, most of the guests “left” instead of “had left.”
- B. Dangling modifiers:
1. Nonstandard: The basketball player averaged of thirty-three points per game, voted most valuable player in the conference.
 2. Standard: Voted most valuable player in the conference, the basketball player averaged thirty-three points per game. Or The basketball player, voted most valuable player in the conference, averaged thirty-three points per game.
- C. “I” as object pronoun: Jake is going to the movies with Tom and “I” instead of “me.”

- D. Lack of commas to set off interrupters such as however:
1. Nonstandard: Selling off company stocks however is not the best way to proceed.
 2. Standard: Selling off company stocks, however, is not the best way to proceed.
- E. Lack of commas in a series:
1. Nonstandard: Georgia likes hiking swimming and boating.
 2. Standard: Georgia likes hiking, swimming, and boating.
- F. Tense switching: She said that she “will” instead of “would have” time to go. Also, be careful of inadvertently changing from past tense to present tense.
- G. Use of plural modifier with a singular noun: The professor said that he will use “these” instead of “this” criterion in grading our essay.

Editing Practice Exercises