

Common Errors in English Writing

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Errors in number:

Incorrect	Correct
Many a times	Many a times time
One of the algorithm can be applied here.	One of the algorithm can be applied here.
The two firms had transactions worth \$5000. Out of this, only 1% accounted for Product X.	The two firms had transactions worth \$5000. Out of these , only 1% accounted for Product X. (Note: "these" refers to the transactions.)
Let X denotes a random variable.	Let X denotes denote a random variable.
equipments; aircrafts	equipments- equipment ; aircrafts- aircraft (Note: plural of aircraft/equipment is also aircraft/equipment)
Does 500 tons of steel satisfy their demand?	Does Do 500 tons of steel satisfy their demand? (Note: the verb "do" is related to tons, not steel.)
The five-years-old project	The five-years-old project five-year-old project (Note: we say the project is five years old, but when it becomes an adjective, "years" become "year".)

Incorrect use of article/missing article:

One rule of thumb: A noun used in the singular is usually preceded by "a" / "an" or "the." When used in the plural, usually, "the" is not used. And then, of course, sometimes these rules don't work.

Incorrect	Correct
This area of research is at the crossroads...	This area of research is at the a crossroads...
Most important point made by the supply chain manager was the lack of communication with the suppliers.	The most important point made by the supply chain manager was the lack of communication with the suppliers.
During the World War II	During the World War II
During Second World War	During the Second World War
It depends on how market responds to this strategy.	It depends on how the market responds to this strategy.
The focus here is on critical issues with algorithm.	The focus here is on (the) critical issues with the algorithm.
This is not in investor's interest.	This is not in investors' interest. OR This is not in

	the investor's interest.
Our firm has rejected the Ford group's proposals.	Our firm has rejected the Ford group's proposals. (Note: Usually, when there is the noun in the plural and it has a qualifier (or adjective) like Ford group's, the article "the" before the qualifier is dropped.)
These two nations have large volume of trade worth millions of dollars.	These two nations have a large volume of trade worth millions of dollars OR These two nations have large volumes of trade worth millions of dollars.
The firm reported income of \$25,000.	The firm reported an income of \$25,000.
National Science Foundation has announced...	The National Science Foundation has announced...
The firm has approved investment of \$50,000.	The firm has approved an investment of \$50,000.
The NSF has announced...	The NSF has announced...
The inventory turns index of the Smith Industries was 3.5.	The inventory turns index of the Smith Industries was 3.5. (Note: Smith Industries is a unique firm, not some type of firm. It would be okay to use the "the" before "software industries" for instance.)
NSF Chairperson has announced a new program.	The NSF Chairperson has announced a new program.
The report does not provide break-up of the revenues by category.	The report does not provide a break-up of the revenues by category.

Incorrect use of prepositions:

Incorrect	Correct
He has described about the algorithm's working mechanism.	He has described about the algorithm's working mechanism. (You worry "about" something, but you don't describe "about" or discuss "about" something; you describe/discuss something.)
He has questioned about the validity of this algorithm.	He has questioned about the validity of this algorithm. (Note: it is correct to say: He has questions about the validity of this algorithm.)
This phenomenon is called as oscillation. He called the joint venture as unethical.	This phenomenon is called as oscillation. (note: "known as" instead of "called as" would be correct here). He called the joint venture as unethical.
Managers found out raising prices of the product needed an accompanying improvement of quality.	Managers found out that raising prices of the product needed an accompanying improvement of quality. (Note: You can even remove the "out" here, but "out" can't play the role of "that." "That" is needed here.)
Responsibility of our actions	Responsibility of for our actions (usually, I've seen "for" being used, and "of" sounds awkward here.)
This agency has noticed a declining trend for this brand since the last five years.	This agency has noticed a declining trend for this brand since for the last five years.
The article stresses on the need for...	The article stresses on the need for ...

The complaint was disposed off unceremoniously by the firm. He decided to wash his hands off the firm.	The complaint was disposed off of unceremoniously by the firm. He decided to wash his hands off of the firm.
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Loose/Lose; affect/effect

Incorrect	Correct
The algorithm will loose its effectiveness at such small step sizes.	The algorithm will lose its effectiveness at such small step sizes.
The affects of this phenomenon are not well-known.	The affects effects of this phenomenon are not well-known.
This technique is known to effect the process.	This technique is known to affect the process. (Note: “effect” is a noun, while “affect” is a verb)

Miscellaneous:

Incorrect	Correct
The company executive has directed all employees to show up for work at 8 AM tomorrow. He has planned this in advance.	The company executive has directed all employees to show up for work at 8 AM tomorrow. He had planned this in advance. (Note: it is perfectly acceptable to have two successive sentences within the same paragraph in different tenses.)
The survey shows that not more than 10% of the respondents use the bus service.	The survey shows that not no more than 10% of respondents use the bus service.
The unpardonable long shutdown of machines caused the firm to miss many deadlines.	The unpardonable unpardonably long shutdown of machines caused the firm to miss many deadlines. (Note: in order to use the word “unpardonable” as an adjective for shutdown, one would have to say “long, unpardonable shutdown.” Alternatively, “unpardonable” must describe “long” here, and must become “unpardonably.” Alternatively, you can say “unpardonable and long shutdown,” but that means something else because the word “unpardonable” does not have anything to do with “long” here.)
There is no service road in most part of the section connecting X to Y.	There is no service road in most part much of the section connecting X to Y.
The organization is in a crisis due to machine breakdowns on one end and the senior management ignored this for years on the other.	The organization is in a crisis due to machine breakdowns on one end (“end” sounds better than “end”) and the senior management having ignored this for years on the other.
This is a real good outcome.	This is a real really good outcome.
The company has high cash reserves...	The company has large cash reserves... (Note: we do say “record high cash reserves,” but the “high” there is associated to “record”)

Wrong Use of Commas, Hyphens, and Dashes:

When there are two objects with a joining “and”: a comma is NOT used after the first object.

When there are three or more objects to be joined, a comma is used after each object in American English. In British English, you can drop the last comma.

Incorrect: The algorithm, and its working mechanism are complicated.

Correct: The algorithm and its working mechanism are complicated.

Incorrect: The contributions of this paper are twofold: a new algorithm, and its applications in engineering.

Correct: The contributions of this paper are twofold: a new algorithm and its applications in engineering.

Also correct: The contributions of this paper are threefold: a new algorithm, its applications in engineering, and the software programs needed for running the algorithm.

Incorrect: The algorithm, its working mechanism and its code were discussed (Note: this is correct in British English).

Correct: The algorithm, its working mechanism, and its code were discussed.

Compound sentences: When you have two or more independent (standalone) sentences joined by “and”: You need a comma.

Very common error:

Incorrect: Unfortunately, product quality is often unobservable and typically a consumer survey plays the role of a valuable tool for potential buyers.

Correct: Unfortunately, product quality is often unobservable, and typically a consumer survey plays the role of a valuable tool for potential buyers. (Note: if (and only if) the sentence is very short, you can drop that comma.)

Sometimes a comma is needed in order to help the reader:

Incorrect: At a time when there are questions about the independent viability of US Airways and XYZ Airlines have gone bankrupt, CEOs of small airlines need to take a deep breath and bring new ideas.

Correct: At a time when there are questions about the independent viability of US Airways, and XYZ Airlines have gone bankrupt, CEOs of small airlines need to take a deep breath and bring new ideas.

When commas are used as separators with “when,” “which,” “who,” “where” etc:

Generally, these commas are used to separate sentence fragments which are not essential.

Incorrect: The table’s first row, which contained the actual figures was full of errors.

Correct: The table’s first row, which contained the actual figures, was full of errors. (Note: If you want to drop the comma, drop both commas; but that usually makes the sentence more difficult to read.)

When “that” is used, separating commas are not used:

Incorrect: The table’s first row, that contained the actual figures, was full of errors.

Correct: The table’s first row that contained the actual figures was full of errors.

Sometimes, the separating commas cannot be used at all.

Incorrect: The algorithm, which took the most time, was not used in the final product.

Here the sentence fragment “which took the most time” is essential, and cannot be dropped. The sentence “The algorithm was not used in the final product” means something completely different. Hence, there are two correct versions:

Correct 1: The algorithm that took the most time was not used in the final product.

Correct 2: The algorithm which took the most time was not used in the final product.

Appositive: When you have a phrase renaming someone/something, that phrase is often placed within separating commas:

Incorrect: Thomas Black, the CEO of the organization provided the figures to the press.

Correct 1: Thomas Black, the CEO of the organization, provided the figures to the press.

Correct 2: The CEO of the organization, Thomas Black provided the figures to the press.

(Note: “CEO of the organization” is an appositive for Thomas Black. If the appositive appears *after* the noun it is renaming, the comma is needed before and after the appositive (see Correct 1); if the appositive appears *before* the noun it is renaming, there is no comma after the noun (see Correct 2).)

Use of commas within and after adjectives made of dates:

Incorrect: The September 11, 2001, attacks disrupted the airline business.

Correct: The September 11, 2001 attacks disrupted the airline business.

Use of dashes: Usually, dashes, like separating commas, go in pairs (unless the fragment is the last part of the sentence):

Incorrect: For an in-depth discussion on these issues – which, by the way, can be time consuming you can also read the latest book on this topic.

Correct: For an in-depth discussion on these issues – which, by the way, can be time consuming – you can also read the latest book on this topic.

Compound adjectives and hyphens: Usually compound adjectives are connected via hyphens (although many Britishers don’t care for hyphens):

one to one correspondence → *one-to-one correspondence*

so called method → *so-called method*

Use and placement of verbs in sentences that end with question marks:

Present tense: Oftentimes does/do is missing:

Incorrect: Why the manager seeks to implement a new policy?

Correct: Why does the manager seek to implement a new policy?

Past tense: Verb is often misplaced:

Incorrect: Where the CEO was when the ratings from JD Power & Associates were going south?

Correct: Where was the CEO when the ratings from JD Power & Associates were going south?