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Patterns of Error Worksheet (intro)

When you say “writing” to many people, the things that spring to mind are grammar, spelling, and punctuation. In fact, focus on this “tip” can so eclipse the rest of the writing iceberg that people in the field of composition have been at pains to shift focus away from sentence-level error as the meaning of writing itself. Yet there are good reasons and productive ways to help students move toward sentence-level correctness that do not detract from a richer sense of what writing is. I work to talk about how sentence-level elements contribute to the many ways that writing can signal “insiderness” or “outsiderness” and the very different context and reasons that people read. I like to share the example (true) of a friend who, in a very tight job market, wrote a cover letter that said, “please except my letter of application.” Needless to say, they did.

Some faculty find themselves obsessively correcting sentence-level errors, only to find themselves correcting the same errors in the next draft as well. You may find that using a patterns of error worksheet gives you permission to “read past” the sentence-level errors and to see whether students are improving skills from draft to draft. Using a patterns of error worksheet can also help English as an Additional Language Learners (EAL), whose sentence-level errors often fall into predictable patterns based on the transition from their first to the additional language. What I observe is that EAL students often have levels of insecurity about their writing that are incommensurate with the issues in their work. In other words, even if their conceptual work is quite sophisticated, they may assess themselves harshly for incorrect use of articles or pronouns. Again, encourage them to keep improving their language skills, and assure them that fluency isn’t achieved in a term. Also know that the more significant things that EAL students struggle with often have to do with the rhetorical construction of stance or authority, when and how to cite sources, and even expected relationships with advisors—all of which may differ significantly from their home academic culture.

If possible, transfer this to a Google doc shared by professor and student. Keeping a copy helps you track whether these skills are being incorporated from draft to draft.

Patterns of Error Worksheet

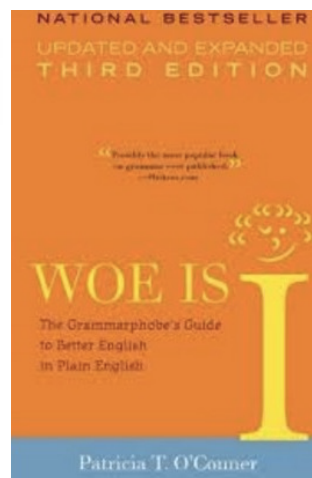
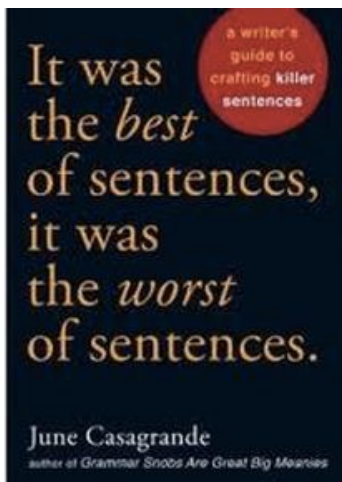
Student Name:

Faculty Name:

I have checked off some of the sentence-level errors that show up repeatedly in your work. I have corrected a few examples for you and expect you to correct the others in your next draft. I am happy to explain any of these. Additionally, here are some great resources for understanding the use of syntax and punctuation:

Grammar Girl <http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/grammar-girl>

Two useful, humorous books on English grammar and usage. There are also great books on academic writing specifically.



_____ Problems with contraction / possession (it's/its; there/they're/their, etc.)

_____ Stay consistent in tense

_____ Stay consistent in singular vs. plural

- _____ Stay consistent in first, second, or third person perspective within sentences
- _____ Comma splices
- _____ Run-on sentences
- _____ Dependent clauses
- _____ Incorrect use of articles (a, an, the)
- _____ Spelling / spellcheck issues
- _____ Need stronger topic sentences
- _____ Provide evidence for your arguments
- _____ Avoid using passive voice / Please use passive voice
- _____ Paragraphs are too long (need to be divided logically)
- _____ Paragraphs are too short (not complete units of thought)
- _____ Format and punctuate quotations and parenthetical citations correctly
- _____ Avoid using informal or colloquial phrases
- _____ Avoid repeating major words within sentences (small words are ok)
- _____ In-text citations not formatted correctly
- _____ End-of-text (references or works cited) not formatted correctly
- _____ Other: