Numbered writing fault list

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This list has been prepared so that academic staff and Writing Consultants can highlight the types of faults in a document by placing the appropriate number beside the error, with or without correcting the text by rewriting it. Students can refer to Maguire (2014) for multi-layered explanations and examples of these faults. See Maguire (2008) for a justification of the usefulness of the numbered fault system (albeit an earlier version.)

The faults are listed below and a recommendation made to academic staff on highlighting which text is of concern. If the fault has subcategories, the annotations on the student's writing should reflect the specific fault e.g. **1(f)** for an error with a possessive, not just **1**. **Red numbers (1-7), (19-20)** indicate a specific error; **green numbers (8-18),** a way of improving style.

Numbered faults

1. **Incorrect spelling (highlight the word)**. This may be **(a)** a simple error or **(b)** confusion between two words with different meanings but the same or similar pronunciation or **(c)** confusion between Australian/UK and US spelling or **(d)** confusion among variations on the same word group or **(e)** use of an informal version of word(s) in formal writing e.g., "haven't" instead of "have not" or **(f)** an error in the use of possessives e.g., *team's* as the possessive form of *teams* instead of *teams'* or **(g)** no fault, just two well accepted versions of spelling the same word, to convey the same meaning or **(h)** use of a foreign word but a distinctive letter is incomplete.

2. **No subject/verb agreement (highlight both subject and verb)** i.e., a singular subject ("dog") requires a singular verb ("has" not "have") e.g., The *dog* near my house *has* fleas. A special case is where there is no verb in the sentence for the subject to agree with e.g., "The music loud." instead of "The music was loud." or where the only verb is in a clause "The loud music which *was played* by guitarists." (Verb = *was played*.)

3. **No noun/clause agreement (highlight both the noun & verb in the clause).** If a clause qualifies a noun in a sentence, the verb in the clause must be consistent with the noun in terms of being singular or plural e.g., The *dog* which *lives* near my house has fleas. Note that "which *lives* near my house" is just a clause and cannot be used as a stand-alone sentence in academic writing. However, some clauses do not qualify a noun e.g., When the time comes, my sons will move out of the family home. "When the time comes" does not qualify a noun and can be treated as a sentence within a sentence. Thus its subject is "time" (singular) so the verb "comes" is also singular.

4. **Mistake with an Article (fix some of the "the/a/an/no article needed" problems for the student and highlight others).**

5. **Tenses are mixed unreasonably (highlight relevant words)** e.g., The dog *has* long hair which *needed* combing (*has* is present tense and *needed* is past tense; *needs* would be correct).

6. **Parallel structure problem (highlight words).** Internal consistency is required with the forms of words in a sentence or a short series of dot points e.g., "The pathway to heaven is via praying, giving and forgiving" not "via prayer, giving and forgiving". A short list of dot points should all begin with the same type of word e.g. a noun; the short list for Fault 1 conforms to parallel structure, allowing for the use of articles; see Fault 4). This long list of 20 faults does not conform to parallel structure.

7. **Statement not referenced or there is a referencing error (highlight relevant statement or reference).**

8. **Same word used repeatedly (highlight each usage of that word).**

9. **These text sections have the same meaning (highlight each section).**

10. **Self evident text (highlight the text)** e.g., "The Introduction introduces the topic."

11. **Made this point already (put a line through the sentence/paragraph)**

12. **Add (a), delete or revise (b) a link word e.g., "however" (indicate position with an arrow head).**

13. **Add (a), delete or revise (b) a topic or transition sentence (ToTR)** to lead into the next topic in the new paragraph **(mark position with "→").**

14. **Add (a), delete or revise (b) an interpretive summary (ItS)**
to highlight the key issues and conflicts in a major section of text **(mark position with "→").**
15. Sequence of paragraphs is not logical. Indicate the appropriate sequence e.g., **a**, **b**, **c**, **d**. (The student will have to deal with any continuity issues e.g., jargon was used in paragraph **a,** but is now defined in paragraph **b**.)
16. An extra step is needed in this argument (**mark position with "→")** e.g., a significant assumption was made by the student but this was not included in the text.
17. Make descriptive text more concise (highlight the text) e.g., replace a clause, phrase or other words such as using "The happy dog…" instead of "The dog which is happy…".
18. Rewrite sentence/paragraph more directly (highlight key information words e.g., in bold and use a contrasting highlight for less important words). (Complement this by rewriting some of this text for the student.)
19. Inconsistency in the writing. This can take many forms. For example, the text does not match the table/figure e.g., an average of *22.3* given in the text but *23.2* was used in the table. **(Give table number (X) and highlight those data in text/table.)**
20. The sentence is incomplete and/or does not make sense e.g., a sentence without a verb. **(Mark position with "→".)**

Editing symbols
= Insert a space.
Ω = Delete space (hand write it as longer and narrower and without the arrow head).
^ = Insert text.
↗ = Combine sentences or paragraphs (as a curved symbol when I hand write it).
U = Link two words as one.
⌐ = Insert a paragraph break (use large symbol without arrow head if hand written).
⇊ = Insert a break into this excessively long sentence at this point.

A quick grammar lesson
In "The cat ate the rat", "cat" is a NOUN, i.e., it is a thing, person or place, and in this case is the SUBJECT of this sentence. The word "ate" is a VERB, i.e., a doing word, and "rat" is also a noun but is the OBJECT of the sentence.

In "The hungry cat ate the small rat", the descriptive words "hungry" and "small" are ADJECTIVES (these are usually singular). In "The cat ate the rat slowly", "slowly" is one of the most commonly used of all ADVERBS. These modify a sentence, a verb, adjective or another adverb. Students often confuse adjectives and adverbs e.g., "general" and "generally", respectively; we might say "The general trend is…" or "I was speaking generally..".

In "The cat in Jim's house ate a rat", "in Jim's house" is a PHRASE. Phrases begin with a PREPOSITION e.g., "in", "at", "on", "with", "to" and "for", and do not contain a verb. This phrase is "adjectival" i.e., it qualifies the noun "cat". Some are "adverbial" and relate more to the verb or whole sentence that they do to a noun e.g., "The rat ran in many directions", where "in many directions" is the phrase. Often it is possible to replace an adjectival phrase with an adjective e.g., replace "You should not leave the trails in national parks" with "You should not leave national park trails".

In "The cat which hangs around Jim's house ate a rat", "which hangs around Jim's house" is a CLAUSE. These often begin with "which", "who", "that", "why", "if", "although, or "when" and contain a verb. A clause is not a stand alone sentence although many students make this mistake in formal writing. Some of the words which begin clauses can be used to begin a question and these can be stand alone sentences e.g., "Which house does Jim live in?" (or, more appropriately, "In which house does Jim live?"). If you wish to expand your knowledge of grammar (and punctuation), try a good value book from the ECU Bookshop (Davidson, 2005). A more comprehensive and expensive text (held by our Library) is Oshima & Hogue (2006).

References

Davidson, G., 2005. How to Punctuate. Penguin Books, London, 292 p.

Maguire, G., 2008. Feedback strategies when editing student writing: Edit less and explain more.
http://www.ecu.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/193360/Editing-strategies.pdf

Maguire, G., 2014. Explaining the numbering system for highlighting writing faults.
http://www.ecu.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/193368/Explaining-numbered-writing-faults.pdf

Oshima, A. & Hogue, A. 2006. Writing Academic English (4th Ed.). Longman,White Plains, NY. (ECU Library, all campuses have at least one edition, 808.042 OSH)

(Version as at 10-3-2014)