

WRITING CENTER TIP SHEET

Improving Grammar in Writing

One of the most frequent complaints that people have about their writing is that they don't have good grammar, or are unsure how to find grammar mistakes. Chances are, you're better at it than you think. Here are five ways to check your own grammar:

1. Read your paper aloud, or have someone read it to you. Most of us speak with better grammar than which we write. Chances are, if something sounds funny to you when you read it, it's incorrect.
2. Grammar check is your friend. Most word processing programs (Microsoft Word, Word Perfect) have a grammar check option (check under "tools" on the menu bar). Use it. It will quickly find grammatical errors and offer you solutions.
3. Grammar check is not your *best* friend. Computers are machines incapable of understanding the nuances of language. There's a good chance that it's not going to catch everything, so double check your own work instead of relying on Microsoft to do it for you.
4. Be aware of basic mistakes. Grammar and spell check will miss the basics, which can cost you credibility in your papers. So know the difference between your/you're, there/their/they're, its/it's, whether/weather, where/wear. This will make a huge difference in your reader's perception of you as a writer.
5. When in doubt, simplify. If your writing is clear, simple, and direct, you have the best chance of having your point understood by your reader. Don't use flowery, overblown language. Reserve the thesaurus when you have used a word more than twice in a paragraph. Thesauruses are supposed to add variety to your language—not obscure it.

Visit the Writing Center for more grammar tips!