

Composition Rules

*Resource for marking student writing (by number)

*Resource for teaching relevant grammar

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1. Don't change verb tenses unnecessarily. Use present tense when writing about literature.
2. Avoid run-on sentences.
3. Avoid sentence fragments.
4. Put commas between clauses of a compound sentence before the coordinating conjunction.
5. Avoid indefinite "you" and informal "a lot" in formal writing.
6. Lists and announcements are introduced with colons. Omit the colon after a being verb or when the list completes an independent clause.
7. "As" introduces clauses. "Like" introduces prepositional phrases.
8. The titles of long works are underlined. The titles of short works are punctuated with quotation marks.
9. Set off non-essential adjective clauses with commas.
10. Beginning adverbial clauses are set off with commas.
11. Beginning participial phrases and participial phrases that interrupt are set off with commas.
12. Set off all interrupting words, phrases, or clauses with commas.
13. Use possessives before gerunds.
14. Beginning infinitive phrases that are not subjects are set off with commas. Do not split infinitives.
15. Possible pronoun errors:
 - A. indefinite or vague pronoun reference
 - B. pronoun agreement with antecedent
 - C. nominative pronoun use (I, you, he, she, we, they, who) (subjects and predicate nouns)
 - D. objective pronoun use (me, you, him, her, us, them, whom)
 - E. possessive pronoun use
16. In American English, commas and periods always go inside quotation marks.
17. Use active rather than passive voice when possible.
18. Numeral usage varies. In most standard English, numbers one through ninety-nine are written as words.
19. Beginning prepositional phrases of three or fewer words generally are not set off with commas.
20. Hyphenate compound adjectives.
21. Use apostrophes for possessives.
22. Subject and verb must agree in number.
23. Subjunctive requires "were" and "had."