

Top 12 Grammar/Style Rules History Students Should Know

The following are a list of the top 12 writing errors and tips compiled from professors who have taught writing at Arkansas Tech for decades.

1. A complete sentence has a subject and a predicate and expresses a complete idea.
 - errors: sentence fragments and run-on sentences
2. Independent clauses separated by a conjunction need a comma before the conjunction.
 - error: comma splice
3. Self-reference and the use of the informal second person compromises your objectivity in non-fiction prose.
 - tip: Do not use I, you, or our.
4. Different academic disciplines have different citation formats.
 - tip: the standards for professional Historians are set in the *Chicago Manual of Style*
5. Words have precise meanings.
 - tip: use a dictionary more than a thesaurus; if you are unsure of the exact meaning of a word, look it up
6. Actions must have agency in non-fiction prose.
 - error: passive voice, conditional voice
7. Tense should not change in a written piece unless absolutely necessary.
 - tip: history is in the past; leave it there
8. The number of the subject determines the number of the verb.
 - error: subject/verb disagreement
9. All books and articles have a thesis.
 - tip: theses are answers to specific questions; they are arguments; they are not general descriptions of themes or special/temporal orientation
10. Apostrophes are used to indicate possession or in contractions.
 - tip: it's is a contraction of it is
11. The purpose of scholarly research and writing is not to entertain or express opinion.
 - tip: scholarly works present evidence to gain a consensus of support from an audience of experts

12. Use quotations accurately and sparingly.

-tip: do not borrow words or ideas without citing the source; paraphrasing is preferable to quoting