





# Writing Style & Common Errors


# Find the writing style errors!


- Research indicates that a child will most likely molest others when they have been molested themselves.
- Research indicates that **children** will most likely molest others when **they** have been molested **themselves**. -OR-
- Research indicates that **a child** will most likely molest others when **he/she** has been molested **him/herself**.
- NOTE: Keep parallel forms of your nouns!!


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- Education has been the most important part of children's lives and was cited as the single most influential variable there is on a child's well-being.
  - Education **is** the most important part of children's lives and **is** cited as the single most influential variable there **is** on children's well-being.
  - NOTE: Keep verb tenses consistent!!

- A child is likely to grow bigger as he ages. This is a common observation seen as he moves from his elementary school years toward adolescence.
- A child is likely to grow bigger as **he/she** ages. This is a common observation seen as **he/she** moves from **his/her** elementary school years toward adolescence.-OR-
- **Children** are likely to grow bigger as **they** age. This is a common observation seen as **they** move from elementary school years toward adolescence.
- NOTE: Write in gender-neutral terminology!


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- Boys may act out more than girls. Although new evidence suggests this trend may be changing.
  - Boys may act out more than girls, **although** new evidence suggests this trend may be changing.
  - NOTE: an independent clause must have an object, verb, and subject to stand alone. Otherwise, it is a dependent clause and needs to be part of another sentence.
  - NOTE: Difference between although and though: though is always equivalent to however; although may be or may be a modifier.

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- Two researchers, Smith and Jones (1990), state that, all things being equal, including SES, ethnicity, and religion, residents of Oregon, compared to residents of Washington, do better on tests of achievement.

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- Smith and Jones (1990) compared Oregon and Washington residents on tests of achievement. The researchers controlled for SES, ethnicity, and religion and found that residents of Oregon did better on such tests than residents of Washington.
  - NOTE: Avoid too many clauses!!

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- Depression can affect millions of Americans each year. Depression can be difficult to diagnose and treat. Furthermore, medications have been useful in treating depression. What makes a person depressed?


- **Depression affects millions of Americans each year.** Studies have indicated that 20% of the adult population may experience depression sometime in their lifetime **(ref)**. Moreover, more women than men seem to be diagnosed with depression **(ref)**.
- **NOTE:** Have a topic sentence and then expand it in a given paragraph. Each paragraph should have between 4-6 sentences.
- **ANOTHER NOTE:** Always use a reference whenever you make a statement of fact.


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- A child, like Mike, that is treated for depression, may improve with prozac.
  - A child, like Mike, **who** is treated for depression, may improve with prozac.
  - NOTE: A person is a “who” not a “that,” “which,” or “it.”


- The researchers looked through a lot of records before selecting participants for the study.
- The researchers **examined many** records before selecting participants for the study.
- NOTE: Stay formal in your writing. A hint about this: a verb+preposition is colloquial not formal (e.g., “looked through,” “sent out,” “filled out,” “made up,” etc.). You can always find one verb to replace these two words that will make your writing more formal (e.g., “examined,” “distributed,” “completed,” “comprised”).

- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder effects between 5-30% of the population. It's affects are not widely known. Its a very complex subject to study.
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder **affects** between 5-30% of the population. **Its effects** are not widely known. **It's** a very complex subject to study.
- NOTE: “affects” means have an influence on; “effects” means results of something; “its” means the possessive; “it's” means “it is.” Spell check will not catch misspelled words that are homophones.


- 32% of smokers develop lung cancer in their lifetimes. But, this is changing.
- **Thirty-two percent** of smokers develop lung cancer in **their** lifetimes.  
**However**, this is changing. -OR-
- **Thirty-two percent** of smokers develop lung cancer in **their** lifetimes, **but** this is changing.
- NOTE: A sentence should not start with a numeral nor should a sentence start with a conjunction (e.g., and, but, or, so). Also, note the difference between “their,” “there,” and “they’re.”


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- Studies have found that fish get depressed, and that flies don't, this raises some interesting questions.
  - Studies have found that fish get depressed **and** that flies don't; this raises some interesting questions.
  - NOTE: Commas only precede “and” if what follows the “and” is a complete, independent clause. Semicolons are used, not commas, when two independent clauses occur in the same sentence and are not separated by a conjunction (e.g., and, but, or, so)

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- To err is human, to forgive, divine. What is it, though, that makes people make mistakes?
  - People are frequently in error. There are many reasons why people make mistakes.
  - **NOTE:** Avoid cliches in your writing. Also, isn't it better not to write in questions?

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- This theory asserts that it is not true that they are likely to be anxious.
  - The theory put forth by Hermann (2003) notes that individuals exposed to trauma do not always become anxious.
  - NOTE: Avoid vague referents in your writing (such as “this,” “it,” or “they”). Use the nouns to which the vague words refer.

- SES, that is related to one's education, predicts response to intervention.
- SES, **which** is related to one's education, predicts response to intervention.
- NOTE: Use “which” if the clause is optional; use “that” if the clause must be a part of the sentence
  - e.g., The theory that is under consideration does not have support– if you omit the clause “that is under consideration” you don't know to what theory you are referring. Therefore, the clause is needed and you should use “that.”

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- Since the data is inconsistent, it is not possible to determine which theory is correct.
  - **As** the data **are** inconsistent, it is not possible to determine which theory is correct.
  - NOTE: “Since” refers to a period of time that has passed (e.g., it has been twelve years since this theory was put forth). If you are not referring to a passage of time, use something other than “since”).
  - NOTE: The word, “data” is plural, not singular!

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- Since Miller (2003) proved that memories are indeed faulty, we can conclude that no memory can be trusted.
  - **As** Miller (2003) **provided evidence** that some memories are problematic, many previous studies may be called into question.
  - **NOTE: The best we can do is support or refute a theory or position! DO NOT USE A VARIANT OF THE WORD, “PROVE!”**

# General issues of which to be mindful...

- Avoid writing in absolutes (e.g., it is always true that...). It is rarely this clear in psychological research and almost always more appropriate to qualify your assertions.
- Define all relevant variables and terms
- Do not use quotes—paraphrase the literature in your own words
  - Be sure to cite source of information
  - Never lift text verbatim from a source
  - When in doubt, ask!