

Sentences: Checking for Six Common Problems

The list of questions below is not all-inclusive, but it suggests some of the common problems that may arise in sentences. You should add to this list any additional problems that you typically encounter when you write.

Is the sentence complete?

- Is there a subject?
- Is there a verb?
- What if there's more than one verb?

Are any words missing, or are any words inadvertently repeated?

- Read the sentence out loud to help spot missing or extraneous words.

Is the sentence punctuated correctly?

Are verbs used correctly?

- Does each verb agree with its subject?
- Does the verb tense correctly express when the action takes place (past, present, future, etc.)?

Are pronouns used correctly?

- What noun phrase does the pronoun represent? How close together are they? Are there any other noun phrases in between the two?
- Do the pronoun and the noun it refers to agree? (Are they both plural or both singular?)

Is everything spelled correctly?

- Run a spell check.
- Remember to check for commonly confused words that computer spell-checkers miss (it/it's, their/there, etc.). Also, keep in mind that computers often don't "know" technical terms and recently invented words, so you'll have to check those yourself.