Common Writing Errors of ResU Students

Missing or Misplaced Possessive Apostrophe

To show ownership, either an apostrophe and an –s or an apostrophe alone is added to the word representing the thing that possesses the other. An apostrophe and –s are used for singular nouns, indefinite pronouns, and plural nouns. For plural nouns ending in –s, such as siblings or mothers, only the apostrophe is used.

Examples:

An over worked nurse may cause accidental harm to a patient’s health.

The patient in room 105 was causing all of the nurses’ stress levels to accelerate.

Its / It’s Confusion

The word “its” means “of it” or “belonging to it”. It’s is the shortened form of “it is” or “it has”.

Examples:

The empty hospital bed rolled down the hallway, slammed into the wall, and fell over on its side.

It’s a clear, red liquid.

It’s been lying there for two days.

Missing Comma in a Series

A comma is required between three or more parallel words, phrases, or clauses that appear consecutively in a sentence.

Examples:

The patient consumed most of his chicken, rice, and banana.

To be the best nurse one can be, you must have compassion, patience, strength, and a little bit of humor.

Missing Comma after an Introductory Element

If there is a small pause between the introductory element (word, phrase, or clause) and the main part of the sentence, the pause is most often signaled by a comma.
Examples:

In the first round, the researchers discovered that their questionnaire was only completed 75% of the time.

Also, the study method incorporated nosocomial infection rates from infection control practitioner logs and patient medical charts.

**Mislabeling Subjects**

When talking about a person in a sentence, many students seem to follow the pronoun with “that”. It should be who.

Examples:

The stability of nine premature infants, that who were hospitalized in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU), improved dramatically.

An increase in milk production was found in the mothers that who were part of the experimental group.

**Two Spaces After a Period? The Old Way**

Here's the deal: Most typewriter fonts are what are called mono-spaced fonts. That means every character takes up the same amount of space. An "i" takes up as much space as an "m," for example. When using a mono-spaced font, where everything is the same width, it makes sense to type two spaces after a period at the end of a sentence to create a visual break. For that reason, people who learned to type on a typewriter were taught to put two spaces after a period at the end of a sentence.

**One Space After a Period? The New Way**

But when you're typing on a computer, most fonts are proportional fonts, meaning that characters are different widths. An "i" is narrower than an "m," for example, and putting extra space between sentences doesn't do anything to improve readability.

Although how many spaces you use is ultimately a style choice, using one space is by far the most widely accepted and logical style.

**They’re/Their/There**

As silly as this may seem, students still mix these up! Here is the explanation that should sort them out:
They’re = is a contraction of “they” and “are”. They are going to check on the patient together. They’re going to check on the patient together.

Their = is used to indicate possession by more than one person. Their medications were haphazardly mixed on the tray.

There = is when one is referring to a place. It can be concrete or abstract. The nurse went over there by the station. It must have been difficult for the patient over there.

**Personal Pronoun in Papers**

Students continue using personal pronouns (I, myself, we, us, etc.) in academic papers. This is not acceptable. The only time when personal pronouns are allowed in papers is when your instructor tells you to compose a reflection piece. That’s it. Fin.

**Contractions**

No, not the labor kind. 😊

Grammar contractions are the shortened version of written and/or spoken forms of words or phrases, created by omitting internal letters.

Examples:

Cannot = Can’t
Have not = Haven’t
Should have = Should’ve

**CONTRACTIONS SHOULD NOT BE USED IN ACADEMIC WRITING!**

Contractions are considered informal language: thus, a language you would use with a friend or family member. Contractions should not be found in academic papers, even reflection pieces.

**Words Easily Confused**

*Effect* is most often a noun (the effect) and *affect* is most often a verb.

Other pairs commonly confused: lead/led and accept/except.

**Incorrect**: The recession had a negative affect on sales.
**Correct**: The recession had a negative effect on sales. (or) The recession affected sales negatively.