Writing Tip #3
The 10 Most Common Writing Errors

1. Missing comma after an introductory element.
Check your sentences to see which ones open with an introductory word, phrase, or clause. When the introductory element is very short, you don’t always need a comma after it. But you’re never wrong if you do use a comma.

   Although we started later, we were able to catch up.

Check your draft for clear backward reference of pronouns: words such as he, she, it, they, this, that, which, and who that replace another word so that it does not have to be repeated. Pronouns should refer clearly to a specific word or words (called the antecedent) elsewhere in the sentence or in a previous sentence, so that readers can be sure whom or what the pronoun refers to.

3. Missing comma in a compound sentence
Check to see how many of the sentences in your draft are compound sentences: sentences made up of two or more parts that could each stand alone as a sentence. When the parts are joined by and, but, so, yet, nor, or, for, insert a comma before the conjunction.

4. Wrong words (their/there; its/it’s; etc.)
Wrong word errors come in many varieties. They can be among the hardest errors to check for, because you may not be able to see what’s wrong. They can involve mixing up words that sound somewhat alike, using a word with the wrong shade of meaning, or using a word with a completely wrong meaning. Many “wrong word” errors are due to the improper use of homonyms—words that are pronounced alike but spelled differently, such as their or there.
5. Missing comma(s) with a nonrestrictive element
A nonrestrictive element is one that is not essential to the basic meaning of the sentence. You could remove it from the sentence and the sentence would still make sense. Check your draft to be certain you’ve used commas to set off any part of a sentence that tells more about a word in the sentence but that your reader does not need in order to understand the word or sentence.

6. Sentence fragment
A sentence fragment is part of a sentence that is written as if it were a whole sentence, with a capital letter at the beginning and a period, question mark, or an exclamation point at the end. A fragment may lack a subject, a complete verb, or both. A fragment may depend for its meaning on the sentence before it.

7. Wrong or missing preposition
Check your draft by circling all the prepositions and making certain they are the ones you meant to use, because specific prepositions express specific relationships. Many words in English are regularly used with a particular preposition to express a particular meaning. Proofread carefully, and check a dictionary when you’re not sure about the preposition to use.

8. Comma Splice
Check all the commas used in your draft for comma splices, which occur only when a comma separates clauses that could each stand alone as a sentence. To correct a comma splice, you can insert a semicolon or period, add a word like and or although after the comma, or restructure the sentence.

9. Missing or misplaced possessive apostrophe
Check all of your nouns ending in -s to see if any of them are possessives. To make a noun possessive, you must add either an apostrophe and an -s (Ed’s book) or an apostrophe alone if the word is already plural or ends in –s (the boys’ gym). Possessive personal pronouns, however, do not take apostrophes: hers, his, its, ours, yours.

10. Lack of subject-verb agreement
A verb must agree with its subject in number and in person. In many cases, the verb must take a form depending on whether the subject is singular or plural: The old man is angry and stamps into the house, but The old men are angry and stamp into the house. Lack of subject-verb agreement is often just a matter of leaving the -s ending off the verb out of carelessness, or of using a form of English that does not have this ending. Sometimes, however, this error results from particular sentence constructions.
For more information visit us at:

coe.unm.edu/current students/coe-graduate-student-writing-studio.html