We all want good grammar.

We know we need it.

But we aren’t always sure how to recognize yucky grammar when we see it, or what to do about it.

http://www.pinstopin.com/yuck-meme/
Common grammar issues include:

- Vague pronoun reference
- Unnecessary verb tense shift
- Lack of subject/verb agreement
- Lack of pronoun/antecedent agreement
- Misplaced/dangling modifier

You were so attractive until you texted me with your hideous grammar.
Writers use pronouns in place of nouns to prevent the repetition of words.

Examples of pronouns include I, we, you, he, she, it, they, who, me, you, us, him, her, it, them, whom, anybody, anything, each, either, everybody, everything, neither, none, somebody, and something.

The noun the pronoun is replacing/referencing is called the antecedent, and it can be found in the same sentence or in a close or adjacent sentence. In a well-written sentence, the antecedent is clear:

*Despite the torrential rains, the college made the decision to keep its campus open.*

*Lisa poured Josh a cup of coffee from her coffee pot in the SRWC.*

*Robert had previously shared some Dunkin Donuts Jelly Donut coffee with the staff, and they loved it.*

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**Subject pronouns**

*I, you, he, she, it, we, and they are subject pronouns.*

Subject pronouns perform the action of a sentence:

*I wrote the book.*

*She read it.*

**Object pronouns**

*Me, you, him, her, it, us, and them are object pronouns.*

Object pronouns receive the action of a sentence:

*John kissed her.*

“She called me.”
But when pronouns can potentially refer to more than one noun (or antecedent), readers can easily be confused:

What goes into the bin: the poo, or the dog?

Multiple nouns in the sentence can confuse the reader, particularly when another noun comes close to the intended antecedent and its pronoun, as it did in this example.

**Revise the sentence to clarify what you mean:**

**Vague:** If your dog does a poo, please put it in a litter bin.

**Better:** Please put your dog’s poo in a litter bin.
1. Circle all pronouns in your draft and draw an arrow to their antecedent.
2. If you can’t find the antecedent or if it seems unclear, you can:
   • Replace the pronoun with a noun
   • Supply the missing antecedent
   • Use a possessive pronoun to refer back to a possessive antecedent
   • Place the pronoun so that the nearest noun is its antecedent

Follow these steps from Letourneau University’s OWL to avoid pronoun reference problems:

http://owlet.letu.edu/grammarlinks/pronouns/pronoun1s.html
The most commonly used tenses in academic writing include present and past. Usually, a consistent verb tense is used throughout writing:

The president **won** the election based on a promise, but then **ignored** his own commitment; he **vetoed** the bill.

The verbs in the sentence above are all past tense. Switching tense in this sentence could look like this:

The president **won** the election based on a promise, but then **ignores** his own commitment; he **vetoed** the bill.

Here, we have two verbs in past tense, and one in present. It must be clear to the reader when the action is taking place, and unnecessary tense shifts make that difficult to understand. Be careful when toggling back and forth between tenses: does it accurately reflect the time order of events?
Verb Tense Shift

- If the time frame of the action or state has not changed, then neither should the verb tense.
- If the time frame has changed, OR if multiple time frames are referenced, writers should carefully word their sentence so that the shift is clear to the reader.

An example of a necessary and correctly done tense shift:

The president won the election based on a promise, but now he is going back on his word. He plans to veto the bill tomorrow.

Multiple shifts are present in this sentence, but the reader can easily follow the chronological order because the writer has included important words like ‘now’ and ‘tomorrow’ to let the reader when actions have taken, or will take, place.

Special note when writing about literature

A writer may need to toggle back and forth in verb tenses when writing about literature; consult with your instructor for clarification.
Examples of Incorrect Tense Shift:

Last year the Texas government limited funding for public schools and increase funding for roads and highways.

While Professor Hart allows late assignments, Professor North refused them.

She planned to include that source for her paper but forgets the in-text citations when she revised the final draft.

It can also be easy to leave off or add an ‘s’ or ‘ed’ to verbs… pay close attention during revision for these sneaky errors 😊
Subject/Verb Disagreement

Subject verb agreement is not always simple to spot.

It gets complicated when you are dealing with

- Subjects joined by or, either/or, or neither/nor
- Subjects paired with modifying phrases
- Indefinite pronouns as subjects
- Collective nouns as subjects
Subject/Verb Disagreement

Subjects joined by or, either/or, or neither/nor

• When a compound subject is joined by or, either/or, or neither/nor, the verb must agree with the subject it is closest to:

Is it the yogurt or the eggs that are expired?

Is it the eggs or the yogurt that is expired?

Both of these sentences are correct, even though they use two different verbs.
Subjects linked to other nouns

- When a subject is linked to another noun with a phrase like *as well as*, *along with*, *or alongside*, or *alongside*, the verb still agrees with the subject:

  Ignore the **modifying phrase**.

Besides Duran Duran, Depeche Mode and Erasure are my favorite 80s bands.

Salmon, *alongside* rice and grilled asparagus, is my favorite meal.
Indefinite pronouns as subjects

- Most indefinite pronouns, such as *each, some, few, all, someone*, and *everyone*, are singular and agree with the singular forms of verbs:

  Each is a wonderful choice for a potential honeymoon.

- If *each* is modified by a phrase that includes a plural noun, the choice becomes less obvious:

  Each of the choices is wonderful for a potential honeymoon.
Collective nouns as subjects

• Collective nouns refer to groups and include words like audience, class, crowd, family, group, jury, team, etc.

When members of a group work together or are considered a unit, use singular verbs and singular pronouns:

The jury is back from deliberations and has reached its verdict.

Watch out for collective nouns that switch from singular in one context to plural in another; a collective noun is considered plural when the action of the group is reflective of individuals acting independently:

The jury have returned to their hotel to contemplate the day’s proceedings and get a good night’s sleep.
Modifiers are words or phrases that provide additional information about a noun or noun phrase.

When a modifier is not placed correctly, it can cause confusion for the reader and result in a sentence that has multiple interpretations.

The waiter served a piece of cake to the man with a cherry on top.

Why is there a cherry on my head!! This is all wrong!

This is much better!

An example of this would be the man to my left ordering dessert in a restaurant.

Misplaced modifiers are words or phrases that do not clearly point to the words or phrases they modify, in this way obscuring the meaning.
Rewrite the introductory phrase as an introductory clause to include the noun or pronoun:

Incorrect:
One morning I shot an elephant in my pajamas.

Correct:
One morning while still in my pajamas, I shot an elephant.
Preventing misplaced modifiers:

Insert the noun/pronoun being modified immediately after the introductory modifying phrase:

Incorrect:

Today I saw a man riding a motorcycle with a broken leg.

Correct:

Today I saw a man with a broken leg riding a motorcycle.

Look at the next slide and see if you can brainstorm ways to revise the modifier confusion…
Dangling or Misplaced Modifier

Don’t be one of those ‘darn writers’…watch your modifiers!
Why punctuation matters.
Some people find inspiration in cooking their families and their dogs.
Others find inspiration in cooking, their families, and their dogs.
WROTE AN ESSAY

PUT A COMMA BEFORE THE APPOSITIVE
Every time you use an apostrophe to make a word plural, a puppy dies.
“Yes, a winky face is correct... But in ancient times, the semicolon was actually used to separate archaic written devices known as ‘complete sentences.’”
Not that you don't think about our future, it's just we never have a serious conversation about it.

Like about us and our future baby

WAIT WHAT?

FUTURE BABY??!!!!

HOW

OMG! I meant to put a comma.
Attention Katy Perry. It's 'The One WHO Got Away' not 'The One THAT Got Away.'
Elizabeth told Amanda that she had a problem.

Who had a problem?
DIDN'T PROOFREAD?
HERE'S YOUR GRADE.
Revising for Wrong Word Choice

- Spellchecking software does not always recognize nuanced words or improperly used homonyms.
- Reading the paper aloud may not help because the words still ‘sound’ right.
- You don’t know the difference in meaning of the words because you have used a thesaurus.
- Consult with an SRWC tutor or other ‘reader’ to help spot the word choice errors that you aren’t able to catch after your own close reading.
Relying on a thesaurus can also result in a wrong word choice when words have slightly nuanced meanings, or connotations.
Wrong word choices happen easily, and to everyone, especially with the following homonyms:

- To, two, too
- Their, they’re, there
- Your, you’re
- Its, it’s
- Affect, effect

Every time someone types "to funny," I immediately picture them, fist in the air, going on a quest to find funny.
"That's all Folks!"