PERPLEXED BY PUNCTUATION? GLITCHES IN YOUR GRAMMAR?

THE WRITING CENTER “DOES” GRAMMAR AND PUNCTUATION HERE’S HOW...

Writers visiting the Writing Center typically ask for feedback on thesis, organization, and clarity. But while these “higher-order” concerns are paramount for most students who use the center, other writers are at a point where they want to focus on sentence-level issues. It’s really up to a writer to identify what s/he wants to work on during a conference.

We know proofreading your own writing is a tricky business. It can be really hard to catch your own mistakes. We want to make it easier for you to catch and correct those mistakes that you do make, and to show you how to write sentences that say what you mean in the way you want to say it. Above all, we want you to leave a conference knowing how to do something you didn't know before you came in. We don't just want you to have a stronger paper; we want you to be a stronger writer. Here's our plan:

1. If you bring in a paper and tell us you want to work on grammar and proofreading, **we'll work with you to identify any errors you make**, pointing out mistakes we see. **This is different than copyediting your entire paper for you.** We will collaborate with you and probably focus on just a couple of paragraphs during a single session to develop a sense of your pattern of error. If you want to work on longer chunks of text, plan ahead and make multiple appointments.

2. **You can help.** If you know you have trouble with a specific kind of sentence structure, or you're worried about a specific part of your paper, let us know. If English isn’t your first language, let us know, because sometimes there are different strategies that work better for non-native writers.

3. We will ask you to read your text aloud as a way to begin identifying grammar errors that occur more than once, because **any errors you make consistently and frequently will probably be the first ones we'll want to work on.** We probably won’t get to everything in one or two sessions, but this way, we'll get to the most troubling problems first, and by isolating the patterns, you'll learn to recognize them yourself much faster.

4. For any particular grammatical problem, we'll first work on **helping you understand the underlying rule or concept.** And we will show you how to use a writing handbook to identify errors and make the necessary revisions.

5. We'll help you explore your options for rewriting a sentence more clearly or correctly. We'll probably ask you more questions about the idea you want to get across, and **show you how different ways of restructuring a sentence have different effects on the reader.**

6. Only you can rewrite the sentence. Two reasons for this: 1) we can't really know exactly what you mean to say, and anything we would write would just be our best guess at what you intended; 2) it's your academic work.

For Writing Center hours and locations, visit our website:  
[https://apps.carleton.edu/campus/asc/writeplace/](https://apps.carleton.edu/campus/asc/writeplace/)

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