

Correction Symbols

Note: with the number of students in classes, it's impossible to mark every paper in detail, so I and other professors use convenient symbols. Use the corrections in the body of the paper to indicate what you should work on in future papers.

The following are symbols that usually appear next to mistakes on your papers. You can look up how to correct the problem in any grammar book. There are also handouts available in the Writing Center, as well as tutorial assistance. Feel free as well to ask in class about anything that isn't clear. Probably other people have the same question.

Whatever grammar book you're using, check the table of contents and/or the index at the back to find information on the following.

cs. = comma splice. You've used a comma between two separate sentences instead of a period or semi-colon

fs = fused sentence (also referred to as a run-on) You omitted the punctuation that should separate independent clauses (a period or semi-colon). Note: an independent clause is one that can stand by itself as a sentence; it has a subject and a verb, and it is not a dependent clause, which has a subject and verb but cannot stand by itself as a sentence.

f = sentence fragment The group of words you punctuated as a sentence lacks an independent clause (necessary for a complete sentence). Your fragment could be a phrase (doesn't have both subject and verb), or it could be a dependent clause, which needs to be combined with an independent clause for a complete sentence.

w = wordy. You used more words than you needed. Writing should generally be as efficient as possible. So, use as few words as possible. Development should come from having more to say, more examples, deeper thinking. Never try to fulfill a page or word number requirement by taking the longest way around to say something. That's B.S.ing, and your instructors will catch it quickly.

ww = wrong word. You've used a word incorrectly, or you chose the wrong word for this context and what you wanted to say.

r = repetition of words or phrases. Usually avoid this, unless you are clearly doing it for emphasis

GHL = Grammar Hit List Available for download from the web site. These are mistakes that should never appear in college or professional writing.

(The Grammar Hit List is basically a small usage directory, based on the mistakes

I find most often in student papers. A much more extensive usage glossary is given at the end of *Hacker*. You would do well to browse through it and remember usages you were unaware of before.)

ts = tense shift You started in the present tense and shifted to past, or visa-versa.

agr = agreement mistake between subject and verb or pronoun and antecedent

unc pro ref = can't tell what your pronoun is supposed to refer to

id = incorrect idiom, or non-idiomatic usage

pov = point of view. Usually means you've used "you," which should be avoided in formal papers. Often means you've shifted from third person to second person (from "he," "she," etc. or "I" to "you") or been otherwise inconsistent

mis = you misstated your idea—I can tell what you wanted to say, but it didn't come out the way you intended—possibly because you used an incorrect word, the sentence got turned around backwards, or you got a clause, phrase, or word in the wrong place

unc = unclear; can be like **mis**, above. The idea didn't get stated clearly, even if I can tell what you might have wanted to say. (Telling a professor, "You know what I meant" will never work—it means that you didn't communicate it on the page, which is where it's supposed to be. Also, as soon as you start explaining, "this is what I meant," that's a red flag: what you meant should be clear from the way you wrote it.)

thesis = your essay lacks a clear statement of its overall idea and direction (cf. the *Survival Guide* download on the website)

Various punctuation marks: I often insert those where they should be, or strike them out when they shouldn't be there. You're docked for them. The rules are not difficult.

¶ = the paragraph sign which means you should have started a new paragraph.

○ = the circle. I usually circle misspelled words; I may also circle incorrect or missing punctuation, sometimes incorrect usage.

Dev. = your paragraph lacks sufficient development—usually, you’ve made vague and general statements that lack illustrative examples or support. Cf. the *Survival Guide* materials for discussion on paragraph structure and development. Especially useful is the concept of “the skeptical friend.”

Example:

I expected PCC to be a lot like high school, but it’s much different.

(Now, explain how it’s different.)

The teachers are nicer than I thought they would be, but parking sucks.

(Explain what you thought the teachers would be like, then how they’re different, then what’s wrong with parking, which everyone agrees about.)

I had heard that college teachers were strict and mean. They never gave a student any breaks at all. Even if a family member died, the student had to attend class and submit work on schedule. Forget going to the funeral. But in the two classes I’ve had, the teachers seemed pretty easy-going. One told the class that if emergencies arose, she would be glad to work out rescheduling assignments. She also said that if we were having trouble with the assignment, we could e-mail her or set up an appointment to talk to her. The teachers here really want students to succeed.

The teachers make up for the bad parking. [That was a transitional statement—establishes a connection with the preceding paragraph.] It’s a good thing I got here early the first day. I cruised the parking structure for two hours before I found a place, and even then I was late to class. The new structure has classical music playing. I suppose it’s to calm the savage beasts who have had to wind up and down, through thick and thin, playing dodge-em cars to find a place. People were honking, the smell was terrible, student security officers were waving their flags confusingly, and it seemed like general chaos. One guy nearly caused an accident when he stopped suddenly and tried to squeeze his SUV into a compact space. He scraped the car next to him, then pulled out and drove away quickly, nearly hitting another car. He was also on his cell phone.

Key to good paragraph development: detail, specifics, something meaty. This applies whether you’re writing about the first day at school or about the argument of *Cows, Pigs, Wars, and Witches*.