

COMMON WRITING ERRORS

The causes of poor writing are not limited to grammatical errors. This brief guide addresses five common writing errors that frequently appear in manuscripts. If you come across these errors, instruct the authors to improve the quality of their writing.

Is the subject of each sentence clear?

If the subject is unclear, the central idea of the sentence will also be unclear.

Where to pay close attention: Introduction and Discussion.

Poor	Better
Evaluating them is essential, especially for their establishment in the Gulf of California.	The fishing polygons of small-scale fisheries must be evaluated to establish marine protected areas in the Gulf of California.

Are most sentences ~30 words in English and ~40 words in Spanish?

When sentences are longer than these word-count limits, they tend to contain grammatical errors, and the ideas are often unclear.

Where to pay close attention: Introduction and Discussion.

Poor	Better
The effects of climate change on marine ecosystems are multifaceted and can result in rising sea temperatures that lead to coral bleaching and disrupt species migration patterns, ocean acidification that impairs the development of calcium carbonate-dependent organisms and diminishes biodiversity, and increasingly severe weather events that physically damage habitats and degrade water quality, ultimately compromising ecosystems and the essential services provided by these systems.	The effects of climate change on marine ecosystems are multifaceted. These effects include rising sea temperatures, ocean acidification, and increasingly severe weather events. Rising sea temperatures can result in coral bleaching and disrupt species migration patterns. Ocean acidification impairs the development of calcium carbonate-dependent organisms, which can result in a loss of biodiversity. Lastly, increasingly severe weather events physically damage habitats and degrade water quality, which can negatively affect essential ecosystem services.

Does each sentence contain one central idea?

Sentences that contain multiple central ideas are often unclear and frequently contain grammatical errors.

Where to pay close attention: Introduction and Discussion.

Poor	Better
Stricter measures, such as protecting breeding areas, are needed to establish legal catch lengths for vulnerable species, evaluating fishing polygons in small-scale fisheries is essential for establishing marine protected areas in the Gulf of California.	Stricter measures are needed to protect vulnerable species such as establishing no-take zones within breeding areas. It is also necessary to evaluate fishing polygons, institute minimum catch sizes for small-scale fisheries, and establish marine protected areas in the Gulf of California.

Does each paragraph begin with general information before providing specific supporting details?

Paragraphs should generally follow this format to present information logically.

Where to pay close attention: Introduction and Discussion.

Poor	Better
Kelp forests are highly productive systems that provide habitat, food, and shelter for numerous species, including fish, invertebrates, and marine mammals. Kelp forests protect coastlines by buffering wave action and reducing coastal erosion. The biodiversity within these forests supports commercial fisheries and recreational activities. Upwelling plays a crucial role in sustaining kelp forests. Nutrient-rich water is brought to the surface layer of the ocean, promoting kelp growth, which in turn supports the complex food webs. Rising sea temperatures and ocean acidification can limit kelp growth.	Kelp forests are highly productive systems that are threatened by the effects of climate change. The high productivity of kelp forests is mainly due to upwelling. This process brings deep, nutrient-rich water toward the surface. These nutrient inputs allow kelp forests to grow to cover large areas. Extensive kelp forests provide habitat, food, and shelter for numerous species, including fish, invertebrates, and marine mammals. Indeed, the biodiversity within kelp forests supports numerous commercial fisheries and recreational activities. Unfortunately, rising sea temperatures and ocean acidification due to climate change can limit kelp growth, threatening the ecosystem services provided by kelp forests, such as protecting coastlines from wave action and reducing coastal erosion.

Are most paragraphs ~5 sentences in length? Are most paragraphs roughly the same length?

Paragraphs that are longer than this limit tend to contain multiple central ideas, which decreases clarity. Paragraphs that are shorter than this limit tend to contain poorly developed ideas. When most paragraphs in the manuscript are roughly the same length, the ideas in each paragraph are likely to be explained adequately.

Where to pay close attention: Introduction, Results, and Discussion

Poor	Better
<p>“Initial impressions are strong and lasting. Your first words have great leverage, making the beginning of a paper a ‘power position.’ You must use that power to accomplish three goals: identify the problem that drives the research, introduce the characters, and target an audience. If you’re clever, you can foreshadow the challenge and even the conclusions. By establishing the paper’s focus and tone, the opening identifies your intended audience—whom do you want to read your work and how do you want them to think about it? You must start well. Your first sentences get readers moving and set the direction; you establish their expectations and generate momentum. If you start in one direction and then abruptly switch, readers get mental whiplash as they try to follow. Potentially worse, if the opening is unclear and doesn’t go in any direction, they will sit twiddling their thumbs, waiting to figure out where to go.” (Schimel 2012).</p>	<p>“Initial impressions are strong and lasting. Your first words have great leverage, making the beginning of a paper a ‘power position.’ You must use that power to accomplish three goals: identify the problem that drives the research, introduce the characters, and target an audience. If you’re clever, you can foreshadow the challenge and even the conclusions. By establishing the paper’s focus and tone, the opening identifies your intended audience—whom do you want to read your work and how do you want them to think about it? You must start well. Your first sentences get readers moving and set the direction; you establish their expectations and generate momentum. If you start in one direction and then abruptly switch, readers get mental whiplash as they try to follow. Potentially worse, if the opening is unclear and doesn’t go in any direction, they will sit twiddling their thumbs, waiting to figure out where to go.” (Schimel 2012).</p>

References

Schimel, J. 2012. *Writing Science: How to write papers that get cited and proposals that get funded*. New York (USA): Oxford University Press, Inc. 236 p.