5.2: Other Grammar and Style Tips

You probably learned a lot about grammar and style rules before entering post-secondary school. Clauses, contractions, modifiers, comma splice – is this sounding familiar?

This section reviews some common errors that instructors see in papers written by nursing students. Check out Table 5.5 for some of the common errors made in writing.

Table 5.5: Common grammar errors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common errors</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Correction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contraction use:</strong> Two words that are combined with an apostrophe – should be avoided in scholarly writing</td>
<td>It’s best to evaluate the physical environment of the home prior to hospital discharge for clients with complex care needs and limitations in physical mobility.</td>
<td>It is best to evaluate the physical environment of the home prior to hospital discharge for clients with complex care needs and limitations in physical mobility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Excessive modifiers/descriptors:</strong> These are adjectives and adverbs that describe nouns and verbs – excessive use of these words to describe something that is already descriptive is distracting to the reader.</td>
<td>These nursing interventions were extremely effective. The client was quite upset after receiving the diagnosis. <strong>Avoid use of words such as very, quite, and extremely.</strong></td>
<td>These nursing interventions were effective. The client was upset after receiving the diagnosis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Semi-colon use:** A semi-colon is used to connect two closely related independent clauses (group of words that can stand alone as a complete sentence). Semi-colons are also used to separate items in a long list.

RN prescribing has a potential to increase access to care; as well as increase healthcare system efficiencies.

Examples of determinants of health include; income; education, gender, culture.

**Note:** the words after the semi-colon do not form a complete clause.

**Omission of listing comma:** This comma is used to separate the items in a list of two or more. (The comma that comes before the final item is called the Oxford comma, and it is typically used in academic writing.)

Common areas of study in year one nursing include writing, therapeutic communication and biology.

**Common areas of study in year one nursing include writing, therapeutic communication, and biology.**

**Comma splice:** Two independent clauses (i.e., complete sentences) joined with a comma.

It is important for clients to receive sufficient sleep, researchers have found that lack of sleep has been shown to slow healing.

It is important for clients to receive sufficient sleep. Researchers have found that lack of sleep has been shown to slow healing.

**Run-on sentence:** Two independent clauses joined with no intervening punctuation (i.e., run together).

Clients who are at risk for premature death due to risky health behaviours such as unprotected sex and illegal drug use may benefit from attending nurse and peer facilitated health promotion programs because these programs can provide opportunities for clients to receive support from nurses and for clients to speak with other clients who have had similar experiences.

Clients who engage in risky health behaviours such as unprotected sex and illegal drug use are at risk of premature death. These clients may benefit from attending nurse and peer facilitated health promotion programs. These types of programs provide opportunities for clients to receive support from nurses and for clients to speak with other clients who have had similar experiences.

**Verb form or verb tense error:** A verb that is in the incorrect form or in the incorrect tense.

The nurse speaked with the client’s family.

The nurse spoke with the client’s family.
Wrong preposition: The preposition chosen is incorrect.

The nurse gave instructions for the client.
The nurse gave instructions to the client.

Apostrophe error: Using an apostrophe when one isn’t needed, or leaving out the apostrophe when it is needed, or putting the apostrophe in the incorrect place.

Nurse’s are integral to the healthcare system.
Nurses are integral to the healthcare system.

Nurse’s philosophy of care is central to how they practice.
Nurses’ philosophy of care is central to how they practice.

Attribution statement

Descriptions of the last six common errors were adapted from (with editorial changes):

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