COMMON ERRORS

Through a comprehensive study of 3,000 graded college essays collected from teachers across the United States, Robert J. Connors and Andrea Lunsford (1988) ranked the most frequently occurring "formal and mechanical" (stylistic) errors. This list is below.

It is important to keep in mind here that instructors' sensitivities to these various stylistic errors can differ drastically from one instructor to another. Indeed, some instructors see certain stylistic errors as very serious and react quite strongly to some types of errors (such as the use of has went for has gone, or double negatives). In other words, the most frequent errors may not necessarily be the most serious errors. Misspellings, for instance, are one of the most frequently marked writing errors, but for many teachers, not the most serious error. Some readers see certain stylistic errors as serious while others do not -- what is or is not a stylistic error often seems to lie in the eyes of the beholder.

1) No comma after introductory element
2) Vague pronoun reference
3) No comma in compound sentence
4) Wrong word
5) No comma in nonrestrictive element
6) Wrong/missing inflected endings (verb, noun)
7) Wrong or missing preposition
8) Comma splice (sentence or independent clause)
9) Possessive apostrophe error
10) Tense shift (main verb, auxiliary verb)
11) Unnecessary shift in person (possibly subject or pronoun)
12) Sentence fragment
13) Wrong tense or verb form (main verb, auxiliary verb)
14) Subject-verb agreement (subject, main verb, auxiliary verb)
15) Lack of comma in series
16) Pronoun agreement error (pronoun, subject, main verb, auxiliary verb)
17) Unnecessary comma with restrictive element
18) Run-on or fused sentence
19) Dangling or misplaced modifier
20) Its/it's error