



Error Analysis (For Tutors)

Error analysis is the process of identifying and correcting local or lower order concerns. Once you have addressed an essay's higher order or global concerns (such as structure, support, thesis, coherence, etc.), you can turn to the more local issues of grammar and usage. Together, you and your tutee can use error analysis to help her/him become a better writer. Below are the steps you and your tutee can follow to do a thorough error analysis on her or his writing.

Step 1: Before tallying or noting errors, familiarize yourself and your tutee with common abbreviations, some of which are exemplified on the tally sheet. For example:

vt = verb tense

ss = sentence structure

sv = subject-verb agreement

ro = run-on sentence

Step 2: If you are working with an essay that has already been heavily marked by an instructor, you and your tutee can tally up the grammatical error marks and note them on the tally sheet. If you are working with a clean essay, you, the tutor, will need to read through the essay yourself, perhaps focusing on just one page, to see which grammatical issues you can spot. Keep track of them in your head, or perhaps note them on a separate piece of paper, but don't mark them on the tutee's essay. (Don't worry – you are not expected to be able to find every minor issue in the essay. Just note the errors that cause you problems as you read. You're looking for patterns, not for every single mistake.)

Step 3: Tally up the errors, looking for patterns. Which errors seem to be occurring the most?

Step 4: Prioritize the errors by distinguishing between those that take away from the paper's overall comprehensibility (such as verb tense or sentence structure – sometimes called "global" grammar errors) vs those that are distracting but don't take away from meaning (such as incorrect or missing articles – sometimes called "local" grammar errors).

Step 5: Once you've selected which errors to work on, have your tutee read the problem sections of the essay along with you. If your tutee is unable to catch errors that you've noticed (or that the teacher has indicated), ask her/him to look at the particular sentence or line to try to spot the error. If she/he still cannot, you may need to explain the error, and practice with some sample exercises to reinforce the lesson. As your tutee gets better at spotting her/his own errors, you may simply be able to indicate that there is *some* kind of error in a sentence or line, but you won't have to note which particular kind.

Helpful Error Analysis Hints:

- Student should read paper aloud.
- Try reading the paper backwards, beginning with the last sentence and moving back to the first sentence. This is especially useful for fragments.
- Make sure the larger, global concerns of the paper are finished before performing error analysis.
- Let the student make all the markings and corrections on the paper.

Grammar Tally Sheet

Global Grammar Errors – more serious errors (errors that impede understanding)

Symbols	Explanation	Tally
vt	Incorrect verb tense	
cs	Comma splice- two independent clauses joined by a comma	
ro	Run-on – two independent clauses joined with no punctuation	
RTS	Run-together sentence – refers to both comma splices and run-ons	
ss	Incorrect sentence structure	
wo	Incorrect or awkward word order	
conn	Incorrect or missing connector	

pass	Incorrect formation or use of passive voice	
unclear	Unclear message	
coh	Coherence – one idea does not lead to the next	
frag	Fragment – incomplete sentence	
dm	Dangling modifier – phrase or clause with no word(s) to modify in the sentence	
pro ref	Pronoun reference – pronoun reference is unclear	
vf/wf	Verb/word incorrectly formed	
sv	Incorrect subject verb agreement	
modal	Incorrect use of formation of a modal	
cond	Incorrect use or formation of a conditional sentence	

Local Grammar Errors – less serious errors (errors that are distracting, but most often do not impede understanding.)

Symbols	Explanation	Tally
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art	Incorrect or missing article	
num	Problem with the singular or plural noun	
wc	Wrong word choice, including prepositions	
nonidiom	Non-idiomatic (not expressed this way in English)	
cap	Capitalization – capital letter needed	
lc	Lower case – word(s) incorrectly capitalized	
p	Punctuation – punctuation incorrect or missing	
pro agree	Pronoun agreement – pronoun agreement incorrect	
sp	Spelling error	
hom	Homonym – words that sound alike but are spelled differently (to/too/two)	