**TEACHING CLIENTS TO EDIT MODULE**

**What is the difference between a tutor and an editor?**

Tutors help guide clients through the editing process in a way that teaches strategies and techniques that foster independent editing skills. Editors, on the other hand, simply correct grammar and style errors. In this module, you will practice strategies and techniques that improve your ability to teach clients to edit.

To complete this tutorial, you will need to use Diana Hacker’s *A Pocket Style Manual*[[1]](#footnote-1). You can also refer to editing materials on the website or in the session resource binder. You should mark the pages you reference for future client appointments.

By the end of this module, you should know how to:

* Scan for error patterns effectively
* Prioritize clients’ errors
* Explain to a client why some errors infringe on his/her ability to express an intended meaning
* Teach clients to **recognize** their error patterns
* Provide clients with resources to help them edit independently
* Teach clients to **correct** their error patterns

**Part I: Teaching Clients How to Identify Their Most Frequent Errors**

In order for clients to self-edit their own papers, they need to know how to assess their editing errors.

1. Begin an editing session by looking through client papers for patterns of error.
2. Make a list of errors on a piece of scrap paper. Next, prioritize serious errors over basic errors. Serious errors include problems with clarity and grammar.
   1. Clarity errors include verb choice, misplaced modifiers, vague pronouns, wordiness/redundancy, and passive voice.
   2. Grammar errors include fragments, run-ons, parallel structure, improper verb tense, and incorrect subject/verb agreement.
   3. Basic errors, such as punctuation and capitalization, should only be addressed when clarity and grammar errors have been taken care of.
3. Share the prioritized list with clients and explain why some errors infringe on the writer’s ability to express his or her intended meaning.
   1. For example, commas missing after introductory word groups are not as serious as fragments.

**Exercise 1:** Review the paragraph below. List the patterns of error that you identify from highest to lowest priority.

The society was broken up into four classes: nobles, client, commoners, and slaves (Mckay, 6). The code of Hammurabi had severe penalties that the government created so anyone who broke the code. This was so the government officials would keep the civilization in order. Having the laws written down made them less likely to change but was a problem for the lower class since they could not read. Also if you were not a seignior, meaning you did not own property, the laws did not apply to you. Most laws began with “if a seignior..” and this was very unjustified to women, and lower class people. Men who didn’t own land didn’t have rights. To add one, women were oppress in every single way, and could not avoid penalties. If a Seignior we to accuse a woman of infidelity, even if it was not true she would have throw her-self in the river. The code of Hammurabi had extreme consequences. For example “If a son has struck his father, they shall cut off his hand” (Kishalansky, 36). Another extreme law was “If a seignior has destroyed the eye of a member of the aristocracy, they shall destroy his eye” (Kishalansky, 36). This is really unfair because if could off been an accident of hurting another seigniors eye, and therefore you could lose your eye, or hand.

Type List Here:

Review your list. Now, in your own words, explain why your first two errors on the list are highest priority.

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**Teach Clients to Recognize Their Patterns of Error**

Clients need to be able to find the errors that they need to correct; therefore, tutors must teach them ways to recognize each type of error. Tutors and clients can now add “ways to recognize” each high priority item on the list of common errors.

For example, if a client has a pattern of verb inconsistency, the tutor must first make sure that the client can identify a verb within an individual sentence. Once the client demonstrates that he/she can distinguish verbs from other sentence parts, the tutor can then suggest a strategy for the client to recognize and check the tense of each verb. This strategy could be as simple as looking for and underlining all verbs in a paragraph and then looking to see if the core verbs in each sentence match the tense used in that paragraph.

Help Clients Examine Sentences in Parts

Tutors should strive help clients “see” their sentences in terms of parts. That is, tutors should help clients understand sentences’ grammatical elements and the ways in which the grammatical elements help shape meaning.

Phrases and Clauses, Oh My!

**Exercise 2:** Explain to your client—using grammatical terms—why one is a phrase (or fragment) and one is a sentence (independent clause).

Daring him to walk across the street.

He walked across the street.

TYPE HERE:

**Exercise 3:** Mark the independent clause with brackets, or [ ], and mark the dependent clause with parenthesis, or ( ).

While Sarah loved listening to the rain hit the roof of her tent.

The rats invaded my sister’s basement last winter.

Now, in your own words, explain why one clause is dependent using grammatical terms.

TYPE HERE:

Connecting Phrases and Clauses

Commas, along with other punctuation marks, **“control” the phrases and clauses** so that they communicate exactly what the speaker/writer intends. Review *A Pocket Style Manual* to familiarize yourself with the various comma rules.

**Exercise 4:** In order to explain comma rules, you will often have to explain subordinating and coordinating conjunctions. Practice doing so below.

What are subordinating conjunctions? Give several examples.

What are coordinating conjunctions? List them all.

**Exercise 5:** In the sentences below, use grammatical language (identify clauses, phrases, and conjunctions)

to explain where commas are necessary.

While some penguins have evolved to tolerate arctic conditions others inhabit the warm waters of California.

Type Here:

The painting I wanted was astonishingly expensive but the vase that complemented it was cheap.

Type Here:

Near his favorite store on Michigan Avenue he saw a tourist being pick-pocketed.

Type Here:

The talk show reported that though awareness efforts about domestic abuse are increasing many women feel abandoned.

Type Here:

Alligators run rampant near my grandmother’s condo in Florida so I refuse to wear flip-flops.

Type Here:

Wherein her mother was distant her mother-in-law was obnoxiously nosey.

Type Here:

**Exercise 6:** A restrictive element is included in one sentence below, while a nonrestrictive element is included in the other—please underline the restrictive and nonrestrictive elements and add a comma where necessary.

I bought a purse that was red.

I bought a purse for my mother which was red.

Now, in your own words, explain why one element is restrictive while the other is nonrestrictive in these particular cases.

TYPE HERE:

**Exercise 7:** Below are two sentences that contain interrupters. Use commas to “set aside” the interrupters, preserving the intended meaning for each sentence. Again, use the appropriate annotation for clauses and phrases.

Geraldine a very well-intentioned and kind woman drove my grandmother nuts.

The bed and breakfast in Door County decorated with artifacts true to its history is my mother’s favorite getaway.

Now, in your own words, explain how to recognize interrupters.

TYPE HERE:

Sentence Combining and De-Combining

Clients need to take sentences apart to put them back together again logically and coherently. This is a great opportunity to teach about subordination in more complex sentence structures.

**Exercise 8:** For each set of sentences below, combine them into one clear, concise sentence. The first one has been done as an example.

1. Lowell Weicker was once Governor of Connecticut.   
   He was leader of that state's American Party.   
   Weicker has long been known as a maverick among politicians.   
   He now teaches at the University of Virginia.  
     
   Type Here: Now a teacher at the University of Virginia, Lowell Weicker, long known as a maverick among politicians, was once Governor of Connecticut and head of that state's American Party.
2. Ronald E. Pepin is a well known translator of medieval texts.  
   He has two honorary degrees from Fordham University.  
   He recently published his fourth book on ancient medical practices.  
   He was only forty-four years old at the time.  
     
   Type Here:
3. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is a novel written by Ken Kesey.  
   Its protagonist is Randall Patrick McMurphy.  
   He pretends to be insane to escape a work farm.  
   He discovers he is now trapped in an asylum.  
   He shows other characters the truth of their situation.  
     
   Type Here:

Sentence Mapping

Basic sentence mapping is an effective tool to use to identify potential grammar and clarity issues for not only you but also with your clients. Below are two mapped sentences. The sentence is coded as follows:

Sentence core, i.e. independent clauses = [ ]  
Dependent clauses = ( )  
Phrases = ( )

*Example:* [Terrance discussed the issue] (with his supervisor).

*Example:* [Alberta took the restaurant’s marketing slogan], (“Wino Wednesdays,”) (to a whole new level).

**Exercise 9:** Use the brackets and parentheses listed in the code above to map the following sentences.

Professor Jenkins instructed his students to brainstorm a research question.

Wild birds eat the crabapples off of the tree in my front yard.

Though the student used to procrastinate, he now begins his work as soon as he receives it.

Complex Sentence Mapping  
Mapping or parsing sentences in terms of clauses (independent and dependent) and phrases helps clients to see the superordinate or main parts of the sentence and subordinate or auxiliary information in a sentence. Once students start to “see” their sentences through this lens, making grammar suggestions becomes a matter of style choice, not just correctness.

**Exercise 10:** Map the following sentences. Mark independent clauses with brackets, or [ ], and mark the dependent clauses with parentheses, or ( ):

Although Satan seems to take responsibility for his disobedience towards God and resents his actions, he never admits his fault; his complaining, victimized tone suggests God – or extrinsic coercions – forced him into his lowly position. His diction implies external forces compel him to do evil. And his victimizing metaphors categorize his soliloquy as ironic.

In particular, I will examine how Radegund used asceticism, miracles, service, and her lifestyle to achieve this power, as Venantius and Baudonivia described it. Venantius believes that Radegund achieved power in her monastery primarily though extreme asceticism and Christ-like miracles, while Baudonivia believes Radegund achieved this power mainly through service and lifestyle that benefited the monastery as a whole, rather than individual people.

**Provide Clients with the Resources that Address Their Patterns of Error**

Once clients can recognize the error that they are making, they can learn to fix it. When discussing resources, use Hacker if possible as clients should own their own copy of this guide.

**Exercise 11:** Refer to the list of client patterns of error that you created in the last exercise. In the chart below, list the two highest priority errors on your list under the “ERROR” column. Then, list how the client can recognize each error under the column “WAYS TO RECOGNIZE ERROR.” Lastly, under the column “RESOURCE,” write a resource and, if applicable, its relevant page numbers that the client can refer to when correcting the error.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **ERROR** | **WAYS TO RECOGNIZE ERROR** | **RESOURCE** |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

**Teach Clients How to Use the Resources to Correct Their Patterns of Error**

Lastly, tutors should show clients how to use the resource(s) to correct their error. Tutors should give clients time to practice independently editing for prioritized errors. Per the example above, the client can practice underlining all core verbs in a paragraph and comparing them to one another to evaluate what tense is being used in the paragraph. The client can practice referring to the relevant pages in Hacker to remind himself/herself of what he/she has learned in the appointment so that he/she can complete this process when he/she is working independently. **Remember that the goal of working with clients on sentence-level issues is to get them to edit independently**, so checking their ability to correct an error without tutor help is critical to this independence.

**Exercise 12:** Read the report below.

Mike came to the Writing Center with a revision-in-progress of his thesis literature review. He showed me his new topic sentences to confirm that I could understand the main point of each paragraph he had revised. He also cut or edited more information independently that he identified as repetitive or unclear. To further guide Mike’s revision process, I clarified two sentence-level patterns I noticed in his writing: commas after introductory word groups and subject-verb agreement. These priorities seemed useful for helping him improve clarity since he could address his comma usage by gaining a better grasp of how to locate the primary subject-verb phrases in his sentences. We identified correct and incorrect examples of these patterns in his writing, and Mike looked closely at other examples in the Hacker Manual to reinforce his grasp of the logic behind these rules. We did not get to explore other grammatical patterns in depth because I wanted to ensure Mike understood how to execute two of the primary obstructions to clarity in his writing. Mike left with new notes for revision in his draft and new sentence-level examples to guide his independent editing. I will also email him additional resources to better reinforce these rules.

1. What sentence patterns does the tutor notice in her client’s writing?
2. How does the tutor prioritize certain patterns over others?
3. How does the tutor help the client edit independently?

Type Your Responses to the Questions Here:

**Part II: Teaching Clients How to Gain Independence in the Editing Process**

**Strategies to Explain Common Errors**

Knowing how to identify and correct errors is one thing; explaining to a client how to do so for him/herself is quite another. In the section below, you will practice ways to make explicit the steps to correcting common grammar and stylistic errors.

**How to Teach Clients to Avoid Comma Splices**

If a sentence has two independent clauses connected by a comma, it is an error called a comma splice.

*Example:* I evacuated the building, Donna stayed at her desk.

Clients have options as to how they want to correct comma splices, including:

1. Make each independent clause its own sentence.  
   *Example:* I evacuated the building. Donna stayed at her desk.
2. Add a comma and a coordinating conjunction between the two independent clauses. The coordinating conjunction should express the relation between the clauses.  
   *Example:* I evacuated the building, but Donna stayed at her desk.
3. If the relationship between the two independent clauses is clear, a semicolon can be used to connect them.  
   *Example:* The tension between them had increased; she decided that they should talk.

**How to Teach Subject-Verb Agreement**

Subject-verb agreement can be tricky to explain in a session. Do not rely solely on your own knowledge to teach the client. Use the Hacker guide for assistance. In instances like these, your familiarity with the Hacker guide is vital.

1. Refer to page 20 and explain the basics to the client. Emphasize that there are several tricky situations highlighted in Hacker on pages 21-23.
2. Using the client’s own sentences, have the client **underline the subject and verb of each sentence**.
3. Identify one or multiple errors in subject verb agreement.
4. Use Hacker’s error classifications to **diagnose** the issue. Hacker explores the following issues: words between subject and verb; subjects joined with *and;* subjects joined with *or* or *nor*; indefinite pronouns such as *someone*; collective nouns such as *jury;* subject after verb, *who, which,* and *that;* plural form, singular meaning; titles, company names, and words mentioned as words.
5. Based on the classification of the subject in Hacker, have the client adjust the sentence for subject-verb agreement and explain what he/she did and why that change made the subject-verb agreement correct.
6. Once the client gets the steps down, have him/her practice “diagnosing” the subject-verb relationship on his/her own while you watch and guide as necessary.

Example:

A client wants to know if the subject and verb agree in the following sentence:

*Physics are helpful when determining the events of a crime scene.*

To evaluate the subject-verb agreement of this sentence, you would apply steps two through five from above.

Step 2: Have the client underline the subject and verb of the sentence:   
*Physics are helpful when determining the events of a crime scene.*

Step 3: Identify what makes this sentence confusing. In this case, *physics* has a plural form (it ends in an –s) but a singular meaning.

Step 3: Direct the client to the Hacker pages that explain this particular subject-verb relationship. In this case, the subject seems plural but actually has a singular meaning. Page 23 (10h) details similar words and explains how to conjugate verbs with such subjects.

Because the subject has a plural form but a singular meaning, the subject and verb do not agree. The sentence should read *“Physics is helpful when determining the events of a crime scene.”*

**Exercise 13:** Keeping in mind that the following sentences have subject-verb agreement errors, underline the subjects and verbs as suggested in step two above. For each sentence, practice steps three through five by determining and noting after the sentence 1) if the verb is a form of ‘ to be,’ 2) if the subject is before or after the verb, 3) classifying the subject, and 4) listing the appropriate reference page in Hacker.

1. Three Sisters Boutique specialize in hand-crafted garments.  
     
   Type Here:
2. Each of the papers have been graded.  
     
   Type Here:
3. Large amounts of information fries my brain.  
     
   Type Here:

**Verb Tense Should Fit the Writer’s Situation**

Rules of Thumb:

* Use past tense to narrate past events.  
  *Example:* The empire collapsed when its people abandoned it.
* Use present or present progressive to write about things happening now.

*Examples:* The ideology represents the agenda of the political party.  
 The ideology is representing the party’s agenda.

* Use present tense to state general truths or habitual action  
  *Example:* A person cannot be in two places at once.

When Writing about Literature:

* Use “literary present” when writing about Literature.  
  *Example:* Alice breaks into tears when, in the cemetery, she thinks of her Alzheimer’s disease.
* Exception: a writer may need to use other tenses to help clarify complex chronological relationships.  
  *Example:* Even though Alice was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease, she maintains her job as a

Harvard professor.

Writing about History:

* Use past tense.  
  *Example:* The liberals supported Barack Obama’s speech on race in America.
* Exception: when writing about current historians’ opinions.  
  *Example:* Johnson contends that the liberals supported Barack Obama’s speech on race in America.

**Exercise 14:** The paragraph below is an excerpt from a literature paper about a character named Cleofilas. Considering the rules of verb tense in literature, review its verb tense.

Cleofilas’ naïve behavior was not solely the result of her over-romanticized vision of love. She was also unable to react because her reality did not fit into the mould of the happy married life she had always imagined while watching the telenovelas. The first time that Juan Pedro hit Cleofilas, the author writes as follows: “When it happened the first time, when they were barely man and wife, she had been so stunned, it left her speechless, motionless, numb. She had done nothing but reach up to the heat of her mouth and stare at the blood on her hand as if even then she didn’t understand” (249). This stunned reaction on the part of Cleofilas, accompanied by the incomprehension of the seriousness of what had just happened, demonstrated her failure to understand her reality. She could not leave her fantasy of marriage behind and thus could not accept her reality.

What advice would you give this client about the paragraph’s verb tense? In your own words, explain what the client will have to do to correct his/her verb tense and why. Use examples from the paragraph to support your explanation.

Type Here:

**SYNTAX: CLARITY**

**How to Teach Parallel Structure**

When two or more ideas are parallel, they should be expressed in parallel grammatical form. Hacker identifies two categories of parallelism: items in a series and paired ideas. When discussing parallel structure with a client:

1. Go to Hacker pages 5-6 and explain these two categories.
2. Use an example from his/her paper, if possible.
3. Map or diagram the sentence to show the sentence parts and their relationship to one another
4. Select the form that each idea in the series should be in, assuring that each idea is in that form.

**How to Illustrate Vague Reference of “This,” “That,” or “Which”**

Circle unclear uses of “that,” “this,” and “which,” ask client to define what word refers to, and write new noun after pronoun. Ex: “This shows my argument is right” becomes “This evidence shows my argument is right.” If necessary, reword for stronger phrasing: “The anthropologist’s evidence shows my argument is right.”

**How to Teach Pronoun/Antecedent Agreement**

The antecedent of a pronoun is the word the pronoun refers to. A pronoun and its antecedent agree when they are both singular or both plural. There are three exceptions: indefinite pronouns, generic nouns, and collective nouns. When discussing pronoun/antecedent agreement with a client, refer to Hacker pages 32-34.

**How to Teach Subordination**

Subordination allows a writer to demonstrate the relationship of one idea to another. When using subordination, place the key idea of the sentence in the independent clause and the less important idea in the subordinate clause. Subordination also helps eliminate short, choppy sentences.

Example: The novel is very powerful. It concerns the rights of women in the twentieth century.

Rewrite: The novel, which concerns the rights of women in the twentieth century, is very powerful.

Example: The write comes up with many ideas about his or her topic. He or she organizes these ideas into a paper.

Rewrite: After coming up with many ideas about the topic, the writer organizes them into a paper.

Example: The changes in education included a change in curriculum. The changes had a drastic effect on the thinking of the Turkish villagers

**Exercise 15:** YOUR TURN – REWRITE THE LAST EXAMPLE HERE:

**How to Teach Misplaced Modifiers**

Modifiers should be as close as possible to the element(s) they modify. The best method for establishing the phrase’s misplacement is by underlining the misplaced modifier and drawing an arrow to the idea that it currently modifies and another arrow to the idea that it should modify. The client should then recognize that his or her phrase modifies a different part of the sentence.

**Exercise 16:** For each sentence below: 1) Place brackets, or [], around independent clauses and parenthesis () around phrases and dependent clauses. 2) Use the highlight function in word to highlight the subject and verb of the sentence. 3) Underline the misplaced modifier. 4) Ask yourself which word or sentence part the modifier modifies and rewrite the sentence so that the modifier modifies that which it was intended to. The first one has been done as an example.

1. [I found a penny] (jogging around the park).  
   I found a penny as I jogged around the park. (or “As I jogged around the park, I found a penny.”)
2. The dancer tripped and fell on his shoelace.
3. Giving directions in a booming voice, the recruits listened to their new commander.
4. The teacher handed the tests back to the students with a frown.

**SYNTAX: WORDINESS AND CONCISION**

**How to Teach Clients to Avoid Wordiness**

“Wordiness” is a loaded term.If a client (or professor) identifies sentences as “wordy,” your job is to help the client identify *the grammatical or stylistic* issues within the supposed “wordiness.”

What is wordiness? Usually, wordiness is one or more of the following:

* Powerless “to be” verb forms
* Sentences that include “it is” / ”there are”
* Inflated phrases like “because of the fact that”
* Sentences with too many coordinating conjunctions
* Sentences with too many prepositional phrases
* Meaningless adverbs like “actually,” “basically,” “generally,” “very,” etc.
* Vague language
* Repetition of words, phrases, or ideas

Getting Clients to Recognize How and Why Their Sentences are Wordy:

1. Isolate the sentence from the paragraph and have the client read it aloud.
2. Have the client underline (in three different colors, if possible) where he/she thinks the sentence is being wordy, vague, or unclear (this process might require some guiding questions like “what does ‘x’ mean for this paper specifically?” “Repeat x in your own words”).
3. Help client identify **why** **the word or phrase is wordy or unclear**. Your job is to provide the client with a specific explanation.
4. Ask the client to think of ways to fix the problem. For example, if the client uses too many coordinating conjunctions, ask the client to break apart the sentence or use subordination to illustrate a clearer relationship.
5. Re-word the sentence to make it coherent, concise, and specific.
6. Read both sentences aloud and compare.

**How to Teach the Paramedic Method**

Concision: The Paramedic Method (From the Purdue OWL):

1. Circle the prepositions (of, to, in, about, for, onto, into)
2. Draw a box around the "is" verb forms
3. Ask, "Where's the action?"
4. Change the "action" into a simple verb
5. Move the doer into the subject (Who's kicking whom)
6. Eliminate any unnecessary slow wind-ups
7. Eliminate any redundancies.

**Exercise 17:** Use the paramedic method to revise the following sentences. Show the step-by-step process below.

It is expected that the Chicago Transportation Authority will announce a proposed solution to the bus shortage next Monday, April 2.

Type Here:

The majors considered most popular by students are the ones that have been proven to be useful for them after college.

Type Here:

Some politicians argue that abortion is immoral, while other politicians argue that access to safe abortion is a woman’s right; this is a divisive issue.

Type Here:

**How to Teach Clients to Make Passive Voice Active**

1. Use Hacker’s page 3 to explain passive voice. Review “to be” verbs (Hacker 5); explain that these verbs capture “a state of being or existing,” not a true action, which can confuse readers.
2. Ask client to scan their own writing for “to be” verbs.
3. Use one of these four different ways to solve passive voice:
   1. Switch the subject and object (ex: The ball was chased by the dog -> The dog chased the ball).
   2. Add a subject (ex: The boat was docked -> I docked the boat).
   3. Drop an unnecessary auxiliary verb (ex: He has said that before - > He said that before).
   4. Think of a new verb, but be sure to check the meaning of the new verb and check if it absolves the sentence of passivity—encourage your client to use a thesaurus!
4. Teach clients to ask themselves: “Who is doing what?” Explain that finding the “who,” the “doer,” will enable them to write direct, specific sentences that reveal the true actor buried under layers of generalizations.
5. Give them resources to find active verbs before or during drafting. Review A Writer’s Word Bank and Vocabulary.com’s “Word Families” section.
6. Check client understanding. Have your client go through the paragraph he/she labeled for passive voice. Ask him or her to fix each passive phrase with one of the four techniques discussed. After each successful fix, have the client write out the passive phrase and how he or she fixed it on a separate sheet of paper. After you and the client complete the paragraph, ask the client for an example of each solution.

Example:

Client’s original sentence: The sculpture is a symbol of the sun, moon, and stars and has meaning because it has a Greek origin.

List the existing verbs: “is,” “has,” “meaning,” and “has.” Point out that other words have verb forms: “symbol” and “origin.” Use these possible verbs to answer the question: What does what? Now the sentence can be:

Client’s revised sentence: The sculpture symbolizes the sun, moon, and stars and originated in Greece.

This sentence is stronger and more concise. The client could add a clause explaining the “meaning” its Greek origin adds or expand on this “meaning” in a subsequent sentence.

**Exercise 18:** Using each of the four ways to solve passive voice, correct the following paragraph. Write the revised paragraph below the existing one.

Cleofilas had grown up in a male-dominated family that consisted of her father and six brothers. Having lacked a positive female influence, she had escaped into the fantasies of telenovelas. These programs were not depicting young poverty-stricken couples that were struggling to pay bills and to feed their infant children, which were the troubles that were plaguing Cleofilas and Juan Pedro. Rather, the telenovelas were providing Cleofilas an escape from her abusive relationship and were allowing her to dissolve into the lives of fantasy characters.

Type Your Revised Paragraph Here:

1. All pages referenced in Diana Hacker’s A Pocket Style Manualwere taken from and apply to the book’s Fifth Edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)