

## COMMON MISTAKES

### But

“The two sisters are completely different. Elinor has a lot of sense, but Margaret is governed by her sensibility.”

Comment: *but* is often used where *while*, *whereas* or *and* would be more appropriate.

Correct version: “Elinor has a lot of sense, while Margaret is governed by her sensibility.”

### Characterisation

“In this paper, I will give a characterisation of Malvolio.”

Comment: Authors characterize the persons in their work; you analyse the characters or the characterization.

Correct version: “In this paper, I will give a character analysis of Malvolio.”

### Comma splice

“The novel is written from a character point of view, it focuses on the thoughts of the protagonist.”

Comment: Main clauses must not be separated by a comma. In most cases, you will use a semi-colon instead.

Correct version: “The novel is written from a character point of view; it focuses on the thoughts of the protagonist.”

### “Example for” / “typical for”

The phrases “example for” and “typical for” are examples of German interference (*Beispiel für*, *typisch für*). The correct preposition is *of*.

### False comparison

“The simple style of *Daisy Miller*, an early work by Henry James, is very different from a late work like *The Wings of the Dove*.”

Comment: This sentence compares style and a work; compare expressions that are logically and grammatically equivalent.

Correct version: “Henry James’s style is more complex in a late work like *The Wings of the Dove* than it is in an early work like *Daisy Miller*.”

### Hiding quotes in brackets

“Lord Henry makes many witty remarks about people (“she is a peacock in everything but beauty” 60) and art.”

Comment: Quotes should not be hidden but highlighted.

Correct version: “Lord Henry makes many witty remarks about art and about people: ‘she is a peacock in everything but beauty’ (60).”

### **“Hint to”**

The correct preposition is *at*: “These expressions hint at her working-class background.”

### **Hyphen instead of dash**

“The play is a brilliant combination of parody and paradoxical wit-it is Wilde’s supreme literary achievement.”

Comment: Distinguish between hyphen (*Bindestrich*) and dash (*Gedankenstrich*). The latter is longer and preceded as well as followed by a space.

Correct version: “The play is a brilliant combination of parody and paradoxical wit – it is Wilde’s supreme achievement.”

### **Motive / motif**

“Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is an example of the motive of the double.”

Comment: Distinguish between *motive* (plural: *motives*) and *motif* (plural: *motifs*). The former is the reason why you do something (‘the motive for the murder’); the latter is an element of the content of a literary work, usually more concrete than a theme.

Correct version: “Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is an example of the motif of the double.”

### **One-sentence paragraphs**

These indicate a lack of sense units and structure; as a rule, paragraphs in literary papers should contain about 200 words.

### **“Protagonists” / “Main protagonist”**

The protagonist is the principal character. As a rule, there is only one. “Main protagonist” is a tautology, “protagonists” a contradiction in terms.

### **Quoting from second-hand sources**

Whenever possible, use the original. Citing writers like Shakespeare, Dickens or Freud with a “qtd. in ...” betrays unpardonable sloth.

### **Slipping into the past tense while paraphrasing content**

“Lord Henry and Dorian meet in Basil’s studio. While Dorian is being painted, he listens to Lord Henry and absorbs his ideas. After the encounter, Lord Henry went to see a relative to make inquiries about Dorian.”

Comment: Stick to the present tense in paraphrasing content.

Correct version: “Lord Henry and Dorian ... Lord Henry goes to see a relative to make inquiries about Dorian.”

### **Unindented paragraphs**

Comment: Indent every single paragraph; this means that the first word of a new paragraph does not begin at the left margin but three to five spaces to the right of it (as the word "Comment" in this paragraph).

### **What instead of which (as sentence relative)**

"In *Twelfth Night*, Viola is shipwrecked and stranded on a foreign shore, what is a romance motif."

Comment: In this sentence, "what" functions as a relative pronoun that refers back to the entire preceding clause, not just to a specific noun. This kind of relative pronoun is *was* in German and *which* in English; it is always preceded by a comma.

Correct version: "In *Twelfth Night*, Viola is shipwrecked and stranded on a foreign shore, which is a romance motif."