Editing for Language Errors

This resource explains several strategies for finding and fixing English language errors in your writing. Editing your writing for language errors takes practice; as you include these strategies in your writing process, your will get faster and better at noticing and fixing language issues in your writing.

1. Most importantly, don't worry about language, grammar, or punctuation errors while you write the first drafts of a paper. Because writing requires so many levels of detail, it's best to first focus your mental energy on explaining the ideas, organizing the paper, and providing evidence and support for your ideas. Wait until your paper is almost finished before paying attention to language errors.

2. To do a good job of editing, <u>look for only one kind of error at a time</u> (it's difficult to notice many kinds of errors at the same time). A good place to start is to ask yourself, "What mistakes do I make most often?" At the top of your paper, make a list of these common types of errors.

3. Read through your paper looking specifically for each of your most frequent types of errors, one at a time.

   a) Circle suspected errors of each type.
   b) Fix the errors you notice, and circle or highlight spots where you have questions.
   c) If you have not already looked for noun errors, <u>underline all the nouns</u> and then check the nouns for the following:
      a. Singular/Plural/Uncountable – for each noun, do you mean "one" or "more than one"? Make sure plural nouns end with "s".
      b. Check the verbs that follow these nouns for agreement to make sure each verb has the correct form to match the noun.

4. An effective editing step to help you notice other types of errors is "backwards editing." To use this strategy, start with the last sentence of the paper, read it carefully to make sure it works by itself as a complete sentence. Then, go to the next-to-last sentence and keep moving sentence by sentence working your way through the paper from the last sentence to the first sentence. This strategy helps you notice each sentence, one at a time, to make sure it works properly as a complete sentence on its own. Students who use this strategy often notice small errors they didn't see when they were editing the paper from the front to the back.

5. AFTER you have followed these steps, take your questions to your instructor, a classmate, or a tutor.

6. A final editing step is to read the paper out loud to someone, or have another person read the paper out loud to you – when you have an audience to listen to the paper, you will notice places in the writing that need clarifying or improvement.