**The 20 Most Common Errors in Student Writing**

According to the document I adapted for this handout, “Andrea A. Lunsford and Karen Lunsford collected writing samples **from first-year composition students** from across the country to update *The St. Martin's Handbook's* 1986 research into the most common errors in student writing.” This research informs “The Top Twenty: A Quick Guide to Troubleshooting Your Writing,” the first chapter in Lunsford’s textbook: *The Everyday Writer*, which you have access to through Canvas. For convenience, though, here is that list, with a few brief samples. We will use it for our grammar workshops, and you should all train yourselves to proofread for them in your own and others’ work. We all make these errors now and then, but they shouldn’t be left in your final drafts.

**Top 20 Student Errors – 2004/2005**

1. Wrong Word (e.g. “defiantly” instead of “definitely”)
2. Missing comma after an introductory element
3. Incomplete or missing documentation
4. Vague pronoun reference
5. Spelling (including homonyms) (e.g. their/they’re/there)
6. Mechanical error with a quotation
7. Unnecessary comma
8. Unnecessary and missing capitalization (e.g. “I’ve always been good at English.”)
9. Missing word
10. Faulty sentence structure
11. Missing comma with a nonrestrictive element
12. Unnecessary shift in verb tense
13. Missing comma in a compound sentence
14. Unnecessary or missing apostrophe (including *its/it’s*)
15. Fused (run-on) sentence (e.g. “I don’t want to walk home it’s raining now.”)
16. Comma splice
17. Lack of pronoun-antecedent agreement
18. Poorly integrated quotation
19. Unnecessary or missing hyphen
20. Sentence fragment

Note: I often lump some of these together as “sentence-boundary issues”--#13, #15, #16, & #20.

I use the term “tangled sentence” for any error that doesn’t have one of these formal label, though I think “faulty sentence structure” (#10) would usually cover it.