Some Very Common Problems

(Please pay close attention to this list!)

Wrong Word—Look-alikes

- were, where and we’re: Where were you going? We’re (we are) already there.
- Women is the plural form of woman. ex. Some women are going to help that woman.
- advice and advise: Advice is the noun and advise is the verb. ex. I gave my friend some advice. I advised her to leave her boyfriend. There is no such word as “advised”. “Advices” refers only to diplomatic reports, not advice from your friend or counselor.
- sweet v. sweat: candy tastes sweet, or a person is sweet when he or she is very kind. Sweat happens when people exercise.
- no, know and now: no is the opposite of yes; you can know a person or a subject; now means at this moment.
- fell v. feel: fell is the past tense of fall, while feel is the verb meaning to perceive through the sense of touch or to be aware of.
- choose v. chose: choose is the present tense while chose is the past tense.
- lose v. loose: lose is a verb meaning to be unable to find while loose means not tight.

Wrong Word—Sound-alikes

- could have, should have, would have (not could of, etc.)
- there, they’re and their: Send them over there to their car because they’re (they are) ready to go home.
- to, too and two: I need to take two aspirins because I ate too much chocolate. My friend did too.
- your, you’re: I hope you’re going to wash your face because it is dirty.
- its: belonging to it; it’s: it is
- a lot is two words, not one.
- whether v. weather: whether, as in whether or not; weather, as in rain, thunder, sunny, cool, warm, etc. There is no such word as wheather.
- went v. when: went is the past tense of the verb “to go” while when is an adverb or a conjunction referring to time.
- taught, thought, tough, through, though: taught is the past tense of teach; thought is the past tense of think, or an idea; tough means not easy or smooth; through is the preposition meaning by way of; though means “in spite of” or “and yet”. ex. I thought the meat was too tough to cut. My mom taught me to think through a problem, even though that might take some time.
Wrong Word

- ask v. tell: ask someone a question; tell them the answer. Or asked a question, told the answer.

- Part of speech: words take on different forms depending what part of speech they are. For example, the words “death” and “dead” are not interchangeable. Death is the noun and dead is the adjective. A person can fear death or be dead. A person cannot be death.

- I and a: I is the pronoun for the first person. A is an article meaning one. Also, “I am” can be abbreviated “I’m,” NOT “I’am.”

- Pronouns can have gender. For example, he, his and him are always male, while she, hers and her are always female.

- made-up words: The noun is conversation and the verb is converse. There is no such word as conversate.

Punctuation Problems

- Please do not use apostrophes with plurals or with third person singular verbs.
- Avoid contractions. This will solve many of your problems.
- Put quotation marks around words you have quoted from someone or somewhere else.
- Put quotation marks around the essay titles.

Verb Problems

- You are supposed to add a "d" to the end of "supposed."
- “ed” endings on verbs: do not confuse this with “it.” For example, decide it does not mean the same thing as decided.
- Make sure your verb tenses make sense, and are logical, not random.

Usage Problems

- Do not use double negatives in Standard English. Ex. I didn’t have no where to go.
- Be careful with nouns that are not countable. For example, there is no such word as “homeworks” or “furnitures.” See your handbook for a partial list.
- Avoid slang words, and avoid oral phrases, such as “and then I’m like” or “gonna.” That is never acceptable.