






The following are the most common corrections and comments that I make on student essays, with explanations:


 A wavy underline shows that there is a problem with the passage, similar to “**awkward**,” below.


 A straight underline marks a particularly important passage in the essay, or one that requires comment at the end of the essay or in the margin.


 Insert a word or letter. By itself, this indicates missing upper punctuation, such as an apostrophe or quotation mark.


 Insert a word or letter. By itself, this indicates missing lower punctuation, such as a comma or period.


 The word or phrase circled has something wrong with it: spelling, tense, case, number, and so on. Sometimes I will draw a line to another circle, in order to show you what the problem is.


 The letters or words or punctuation here should be in reverse order. See, for example, “**split infinitive**,” below.


 The punctuation circled must be paired with identical punctuation where the arrow points. That is, the punctuation (usually commas) should appear at both places, or neither.

 Omit the letter, or letters, or space indicated. For full words and longer passages, I may just draw a line through them, or circle them and write “omit.”

 Insert a space here.

 Omit the space here.

 A surprising statement, which has elicited either a positive or negative reaction on my part.

 This indicates that I am not sure what you mean. See “**meaning**,” below.

agreement: The subject and verb, or pronoun and antecedent, do not agree in number.

awkward: Poorly written, though why it is so may not be clear, or may be too complicated to explain in a short written comment.

dangling: An introductory participial or prepositional phrase “dangles” when its understood subject is not the subject of the sentence—for example, “Having worked hard on the greensheets, they were handed out in class.”

integration: Quotations must be integrated into your prose both logically and grammatically, so that they read as part of your essay. Incidentally, avoid long, indented quotations, especially in essays as short as ones you will be writing for this class.

fragment: The sentence lacks a subject or verb. See “!” above for an example.

meaning: The passage is not sufficiently clear (or not clear at all), either on its own or in context. Often accompanied by “?”

parallelism: Two or more phrases in a sentence which should be grammatically parallel are not—for example, “To sin is human, forgiving divine.”

run-on: A sentence that goes on too long, usually in a grammatical sense. This includes the infamous “comma splice,” two independent clauses insufficiently joined only by a comma.

subordination: A run-on sentence that could be made grammatical by subordinating the verb of one of the independent clauses.

syntax: Something, usually grammatical, is wrong with the words or their order in the sentence.

tense, tense shift: The verb tenses have shifted for no apparent reason.

wrong word: This indicates that there is something wrong with the choice of words, and the sentence does not make sense as a result. You may have meant a similar word, or you may just misunderstand the word you used.