

## AT A GLANCE: FOUR KINDS OF WRITING “ERRORS”

**Recommended citation:** Merkle, B.G., and S.B. Heard. 2026. At a glance: Four kinds of writing “errors.” Handout to accompany Merkle, B.G., and S.B. Heard. 2026. “Four kinds of writing ‘errors’ and how you can effectively respond when you spot them.” *School of Good Trouble* (blog), March 10, 2026. <https://schoolofgoodtrouble.substack.com/p/four-kinds-of-writing-errors>

**Table 1. Error types, nature of error, and examples of these errors in scientific writing**

“ERROR” TYPE	NATURE OF “ERROR”	EXAMPLES OF RELEVANT ISSUES IN <i>SCIENTIFIC</i> WRITING
1	Inconsistent with generally accepted ‘good’ writing	Spelling and grammatical errors; paragraph lacking topic sentence
2	Violates reader expectations for scientific writing (even if ok in other genres)	Depart from IMRaD structure; multiple direct quotes from source material
3	Repeats a bad habit in scientific writing	Excessive use of acronyms; written exclusively in passive voice
4	Something you don’t like about scientific writing (although ok and common in scientific writing)	Crucial vs. critical; summary of major results at end of Intro vs. only sharing results later in paper

*NOTE TO READERS: See page 2 for table with effective responses for each error type.*

**Table 2. Effective mentor/editor/reviewer responses to each error type**

<b>“ERROR” TYPE</b>	<b>NATURE OF “ERROR”</b>	<b>EXAMPLES OF RELEVANT ISSUES IN <i>SCIENTIFIC</i> WRITING</b>	<b>EFFECTIVE RESPONSE</b>
1	Inconsistent with generally accepted ‘good’ writing	Spelling and grammatical errors; paragraph lacking topic sentence	Equip the student to fix the error by referring them to a reliable guide to English composition and/or your preferred style guide (or the guide of the journal where you intend to submit).
2	Violates reader expectations for scientific writing (even if ok in other genres)	Depart from IMRaD structure; multiple direct quotes from source material	Equip student to fix the error by discussing norms of scientific writing and referring them to a specialized guide to scientific writing.
3	Repeats a bad habit in scientific writing	Excessive use of acronyms; written exclusively in passive voice	Discuss with student why these “errors” shouldn’t be perpetuated, even though they are accepted.
4	Something you don’t like about scientific writing (although ok and common in scientific writing)	Crucial vs. critical; summary of major results at end of Intro vs. only sharing results later in paper	Recognize that your stylistic preferences are not “rules” and people not following them does not mean they’ve made an “error.” These situations are your best opportunity to help students see they have choices they can make as they develop their own writing style. This is how you help them learn towards independence.

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