Grammar Mistake Finder

A multi-pass self-editing checklist for creative authors

Your editor shouldn't spend their time fixing commas, taming ellipses, or wondering if your tense shifts were intentional. This printable checklist helps you run clean, focused passes on your draft, <u>before</u> you share it. Each pass targets a specific sentence-level risk. Use one section per read-through, or batch them by chapter. You don't need to catch everything; just catch the patterns.

Pass 1: Dialogue Tags vs. Action Beats

- ☐ Are dialogue tags punctuated correctly (e.g., "I'm fine," she said)?
- ☐ Are action beats written as standalone sentences (e.g., "I'm fine." She crossed her arms.)?
- ☐ Are you avoiding actions as tags (e.g., not using 'he smiled' as a tag)?

Pass 2: Tense Consistency

- ☐ Is the tense (past or present) consistent throughout each scene?
- ☐ Are there any subtle slides from past into present (e.g., 'She walked in and sees...')?
- ☐ Any flashbacks or time shifts clearly marked?

Pass 3: Point of View Integrity

- ☐ Does the narration stay inside one character's viewpoint per scene?
- ☐ Are internal thoughts clearly tied to one character, not omniscient?
- ☐ Have you avoided unintentional head-hopping?

Pass 4: Ellipses and Dashes

- ☐ Are ellipses (...) used only for trailing thoughts or soft fadeouts?
- ☐ Are dashes (—) used only for sharp interruptions or sudden breaks?
- ☐ Have you trimmed stacked punctuation that clutters the page?

Pass 5: Pronouns and Homophones

☐ Can every 'he/she/they' be traced clearly to a name?

☐ Have you caught homophone errors (their/they're/there, your/you're)?

☐ Is 'its' vs. 'it's' correct throughout?

Pass 6: Sentence-Level Clarity

☐ Are comma splices and run-ons broken into readable sentences?

☐ Are fragments used for effect—not confusion?

☐ Is each paragraph readable out loud without stumbling?

Pass 7: Wordiness and Repetition

☐ Are common phrases (just, really, suddenly, very) trimmed when they weaken impact?

☐ Are repeated sentence structures or rhythms varied?

☐ Have you trimmed redundant modifiers (e.g., 'quiet whisper')?

Optional: Style Snapshot for Your Editor

Write up a list to record intentional choices, especially if you want your editor to preserve voice, quirks, or special formatting. Include choices you've made, such as

• Do you use italics or narration for interior thoughts?

• Do you allow sentence fragments in character voice?

• Any recurring grammar choices (e.g., oxford comma, preferred dash type)?

• How do you format scene breaks or flashbacks?

• List any unusual spellings, terms, or invented names.