

- ✓ **Its vs. It's**— Here's one which is often overlooked. *Its* is a possessive. *It's* is a contraction of *it is*. The apostrophe takes the place of the *i*.
- ✓ **“That” check**— For those with a tendency to be wordy, this is essential. Look through the paper and find all the *thats*. Use these four tips to determine if it is necessary to the sentence:
 - First try taking it out; many sentences make sense without the extra word.
 - If it refers to a person and has a preposition before it (*to, for, in, by, etc.*), then change it to *whom*.
 - Any other time *that* refers to a person, change it to *who*.
 - If there is a comma before the *that*, it should probably be *which*.
- ✓ **Verb Tenses**— Stick to one! This is especially important for research papers. You must make a choice between “The author says/states/writes...” and “The author said/stated/wrote...” Normally both are grammatically correct, but they become wrong when you mix them in one paper.
 - Note: Anything that happens in a novel or story must be in present tense. For example: “In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Lucy discovers a mysterious wardrobe and goes into it.”
- ✓ **Look for Better Words**— Since we students write so many papers, we often get stuck in a rut of meaningless phrases. The more concrete and descriptive you can be, the better the paper will turn out.
 - The Banned Words list includes: *kind of, sort of, a bit, a little, very, just, interesting, nice, like, meaningful, arguably, pretty much, in a sense, one of the most... and the fact is...*
- ✓ **Plural vs. Singular**— In speaking, we have blurred the lines here, but in writing the rules still stand: *everybody, each one, everyone, anybody, any one, somebody, and someone* are all singular nouns. This means that when you refer back to them later in the sentence, you must use a singular pronoun.

For example:

 - CORRECT: Everyone has his or her own unique style of writing.
 - INCORRECT: Everyone has their own unique style of writing.

If the phrase “he or she” sounds awkward in the sentence, and you would like to use ‘they,’ you must also change the noun to be plural: *people, some, or many* are correct nouns to use with *they*.