

BỘ GIÁO DỤC VÀ ĐÀO TẠO
TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC DÂN LẬP HẢI PHÒNG



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NGÀNH NGOẠI NGỮ

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**HAI PHONG PRIVATE UNIVERSITY
FOREIGN LANGUAGES DEPARTMENT**

GRADUATION PAPER

**A STUDY ON PUNCTUATION ERRORS IN
WRITING OF FIRST YEAR ENGLISH MAJORS AT
HPU**

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HAI PHONG - JUNE 20

BỘ GIÁO DỤC VÀ ĐÀO TẠO
TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC DÂN LẬP HẢI PHÒNG

NHIỆM VỤ ĐỀ TÀI TỐT NGHIỆP

Sinh viên :Mã số:

Lớp :Ngành :

Tên đề tài :

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NHIỆM VỤ ĐỀ TÀI

1. Nội dung các yêu cầu cần giải quyết trong nhiệm vụ đề tài tốt nghiệp
(về lý luận, thực tiễn, các số liệu cần tính toán và các bản vẽ).

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2. Các số liệu cần thiết để thiết kế, tính toán.

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3. Địa điểm thực tập.

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CÁN BỘ HƯỚNG DẪN ĐỀ TÀI TỐT NGHIỆP

Người hướng dẫn thứ nhất

Họ và tên :
Học hàm, học vị :
Cơ quan công tác :
Nội dung hướng dẫn:

Người hướng dẫn thứ hai:.....

Họ và tên :
Học hàm, học vị :
Cơ quan công tác :
Nội dung hướng dẫn:

Đề tài tốt nghiệp được giao ngàytháng..... năm 2010
Yêu cầu phải hoàn thành trước ngày.....tháng.....năm 2010

Đã nhận nhiệm vụ Đ.T.T.N
SINH VIÊN

Đã giao nhiệm vụ Đ.T.T.N
CÁN BỘ HƯỚNG DẪN

Hải Phòng, ngày.....tháng.....năm 2010
HIỆU TRƯỞNG

GS.TS.NSUT. Trần Hữu Nghị

PHẦN NHẬN XÉT TÓM TẮT CỦA CÁN BỘ HƯỚNG DẪN

1. Tinh thần, thái độ của sinh viên trong quá trình làm đề tài tốt nghiệp:

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2. Đánh giá chất lượng Đ.T.T.N (So với nội dung yêu cầu đã đề ra trong nhiệm vụ Đ.T.T.N trên các mặt lý luận, thực tiễn, tính toán giá trị sử dụng, chất lượng các bản vẽ).

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3. Cho điểm của cán bộ hướng dẫn :

(Điểm ghi bằng số và chữ)

Hải Phòng, ngày.....tháng.....năm 2010

Cán bộ hướng dẫn chính

(Họ tên và chữ kí)

**NHẬN XÉT ĐÁNH GIÁ CỦA CÁN BỘ CHẤM
PHẢN BIỆN ĐỀ TÀI TỐT NGHIỆP**

1. Đánh giá chất lượng đề tài tốt nghiệp về các mặt thu thập và phân tích số liệu ban đầu, cơ sở lý luận chọn phương án tối ưu, cách tính toán chất lượng thuyết minh và bản vẽ, giá trị lý luận và thực tiễn đề tài.

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2. Cho điểm của cán bộ phản biện:
(Điểm ghi bằng số và chữ)

Ngàytháng.....năm 2010
Người chấm phản biện

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Part A. INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale

Nowadays, a majority of countries in the world speak English which is one of the most important languages for international communication. It becomes a second language in all universities, in all grades. However, it is not easy to learn a foreign language well. English majors at HaiPhong Private University are taught four skills of listening, writing, reading and speaking from the first term. Of the four skills, many students consider writing the most difficult because it requires the knowledge and professional use of grammar and vocabulary to write a paragraph as well as a complete essay. Writing is different from spoken language. In spoken language, we use many unfinished sentences, ungrammatical structures. However, written language requires formal vocabulary, correct spelling and grammar structure as well as well organized sentences and ideas. Moreover, writing uses letters and punctuation under rules of grammar.

Writing is used as a basic working skill and requires a hard working process and continuous practice. A first year English major at HPU gets used to many writing tasks such as topic- based writing paragraphs, a letter, etc. Learners have to think clearly about what and how to write in order to have a good writing. Punctuation marks also contribute to a complete and good writing. Therefore, it is time to pay more attention to appropriate punctuation marks using because good punctuations show that a student or a writer has a good competence of using English. Besides, that helps us to express the ideas more clearly. A student in the first year should take serious consideration into punctuation using in writing. However, many first year English majors actually make punctuation mistakes, which urges me to choose a study on punctuation errors of first year English majors at HaiPhong Private University as my graduation paper.

2. Aims of the study.

The purpose of the study focus on helping the first year English majors at HaiPhong Private University to have more specific and clear understanding of English writing, and especially punctuations, help to find out their punctuation errors and suggest solutions to these mistakes. That includes:

- Studying on the basic theories of academic writing and punctuations.
- Finding out the mistakes of punctuation markings of first year English major.
- Finding out the effective solutions for frequently-made punctuation errors.

3. Scope of the study.

Punctuation is a large aspect; however, because of limited time and knowledge, the study only focuses on finding out the punctuation errors of first year English majors, supplying them with the misusing of punctuation markings, and helping them find out the effective solutions.

4. Method of study.

With the purpose of the study are to help first year English majors find out their mistake in using punctuation marks as well as the causes for these errors, my methods are:

- Material collection through reference book study related to English writing, grammar, and punctuations.
- Quantitive and qualitive method through a survey among first year English majors at HPU to explore their mistakes.
- Data analysis

5. Design of study.

My study includes three parts as following:

Part A, **Introduction** is the introduction of my study including rationale, aims of the study, scope of the study method of study and design of the study.

Part B, **The study on punctuation errors of the first year English majors**, the main part of my study contains three chapters.

- Chapter 1: **Theoretical background** supplies the readers with the theoretical background including the theory of academic writing, paragraph, and punctuation.
- Chapter 2: **Punctuation errors of first year English majors at HPU** deals with the punctuation errors of first year English majors. All the most common errors in using punctuation marks of first year English majors are specifically mentioned.
- The last chapter: **Causes of errors and suggested solutions** mentions the causes found and the suggested solutions to avoid the mentioned errors.

Part C, **Conclusion** is the conclusion and suggestions for further study.

**Part B: THE STUDY ON THE
PUNCTUATION ERRORS OF FISRT
YEAR ENGLISH MAJORS**

CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND.

1. Academic writing.

1.1. Definition.

“Academic writing, as the name implies, is kind of writing that you are inquired to do in college or university.

(Oshima, 2004: 02)

1.2. Characteristic features.

Academic writing differs from other kinds of writing (personal, literary, journalistic, business, etc) in several ways. Its differences can be explained by its special audience, tone and purpose.

1.2.1. Audience.

Whenever you write, consider your audience, who are the people who will read what you have written. Knowing your audience will help you reach your goal of communication clearly and effectively. For example, one may write letters to friends to tell them what a great time you had in school while neglecting your studies. One may have to write an essay for a history, political science, psychology, or English exam. Learner may have to write a letter to a prospective employer. Each of these letters has a specific audience, and what the writer say and how the writer say about it will affect audience’s understanding of the message. In academic writing, your audience is primarily your professors.

(Oshima, 2004: 02)

In order to have an interesting and valuable writing product, the writer must decide:

- Who the audience is: a classmate?, a the teacher?, a parents?, an employer? or an admission office?
- Who the writer is: a student?, a son or a daughter?, an employee or an expert about the topic?

Specifying the audience is an essential step because the writer has to make decision about topics, evidences, methods of presenting materials, and even grammar (vocabulary, sentence structure and verb tense) according to who will read the complete product. For most academic writing, the audience will be the instructor who assigns the writing. Sometimes, the students write for other audiences of the writing piece. Writers must consider the following:

- What are the needs, the interests and the expectations of the audience?
- What does the audience know about the topic? What does the reader not about the topic?
- What might the readers want to know? What will engage their interest?

1.2.2. Tone

Not only should you be concerned with your audience, but should the tone of writing which depends on subject matter and audience. Tone is writer's style or manner of expression. It reveals writer's attitude towards the subject by choice of word, grammatical structures and even by the length of the sentences. For example, a letter to a friend would have a friendly personal tone; it would probably contain some "slang" expressions and many active verb forms. A technical or scientific paper, by contrast, would contain more passive verb forms and technical vocabulary; it would have a highly formal, impersonal tone.

(Oshima, 2004: 02)

The tone of piece of writing is determined more by its intended audience than by its matter subject. For example, the latest medical research in the United State is reported in *American journal of Medicine*. These scientific articles are written for very special audience of scientists and doctors who understand medical and technical vocabulary. However, if the same article were written for newspapers or popular

magazines, they would be written in general English with technical words explained in everyday vocabulary because the intended audience, the public, might not understand highly technical terminology. Academic writing is always formal in tone.

(Oshima, 2004: 03)

1.2.3. Purpose

No matter what kind of writing you do, you should have a special and clear purpose. In literary writing, the purpose is often to entertain, whereas journalistic writing usually seeks to inform or persuade. In academic writing, your purpose will most be often to explain. It may also be to persuade or to convince your audience of the correctness of your point of view on a particular issue.

The purpose of a piece of writing will determine the rhetorical form chosen for it. For example, an article that tries to persuade readers that nuclear power plants are unsafe has a different purpose from an article that explains how a nuclear plant operates. The persuasive article will be organized in one way, and the expository article in another way.

(Oshima, 2004: 03)

There are three general purposes for writing and they can all occur in a single essay, although usually one of the purposes is dominant:

- To explain (educate, inform)
- To entertain (amuse, give pleasure)
- To persuade (convince, change the reader's mind)

2. Paragraph.

2.1. Definition

“A paragraph is a basic unit of organization in writing in which a group of related sentences develop one main idea. A paragraph can be as short as a sentence or as long as ten sentences. The number of sentences is important, however, the paragraph should be long enough to develop the main idea clearly.”

(Oshima, chapter 1, 16)

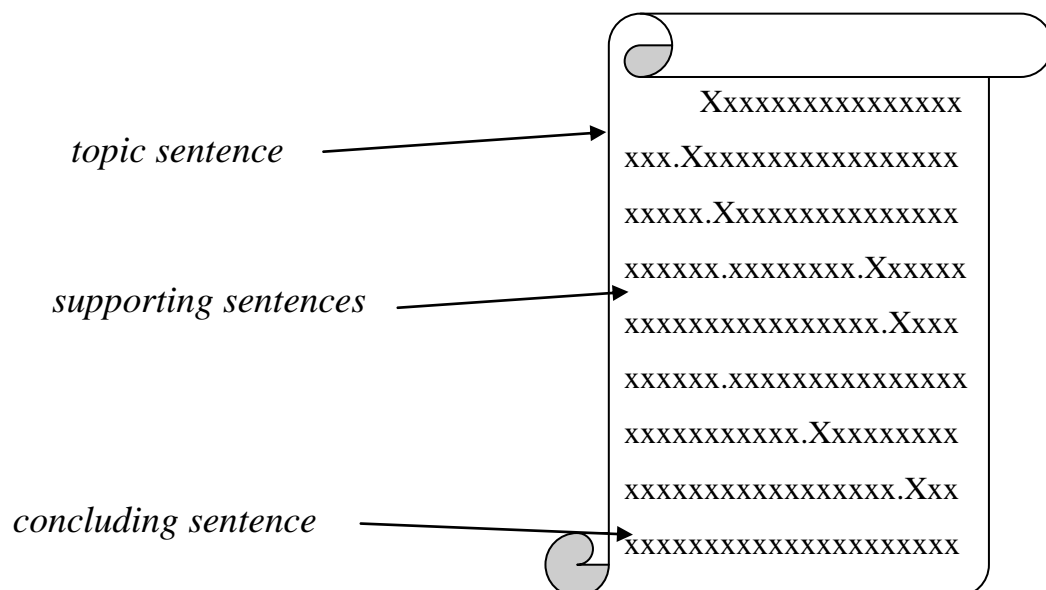
A paragraph may stand by itself or may also be one part of a longer piece of writing such as a chapter of a book or essay.

According to Dorothy E. Zemach and Lisa A. Rumiser a paragraph is a group of sentences about a single topic. Together, the sentences of the paragraph explained the writer’s main idea (most important idea) about the topic. In academic writing, a paragraph is often between five and ten sentences long, but it can be longer or shorter, depending on the topic.

(Drothy E. Zechmach and Lisa E.Rumisek, 2003: 11)

2.2. The structure of paragraph

A paragraph has three major structural parts: a topic sentence, supporting sentences and a concluding sentence.



2.2.1. Topic sentence.

The topic sentence states the main idea of the paragraph. It not only names the topic of the paragraph but also limits the topic to one or two areas what can be discussed completely in the space of a single paragraph.

(Oshima, 2004: 17)

A topic sentence usually comes at the beginning of the paragraph (sometimes this is not true). The topic sentence introduces an overall idea that you want to discuss later in the paragraph.

Example:

“Gold, a precious metal, is prized for two important characteristics. First of all, it has a lustrous beauty that is resistant to corrosion. Therefore, it is suitable for jewelry, coins, and ornamental purpose. It never needs to be polished and will remain beautiful forever. For example, a Macedonian coin remains as untarnished today as the day it was minted twenty- three centuries ago. Another of its important characteristic is its usefulness to industry and science. For many years, it has been used in hundreds of industrial applications. Its most recent use is astronaut’s suits. Astronauts wear heat shields made from it for protection outside the spaceship. In conclusion, it is treasured not only for its beauty but also for its utility.”

(Oshima , 2004:26)

In the above paragraph, the topic sentence comes at the beginning of the paragraph. The reader can easily recognize that the topic is gold and the controlling idea is “two important characteristics”. The topic sentence also limits the topic to two areas.

2.2.2. Supporting sentences.

The supporting sentences develop the topic sentence. That is, they explain the topic sentence by giving reasons, examples, facts, statistics and quotations.”

2.2.3. Concluding sentence

The concluding sentence may be found as the last sentence of the paragraph. It can finish a paragraph by repeating the main idea or just giving a final comment about the topic.

(Dorothy E. Zemach and Lisa A. Rumiser, 2003: 12)

The concluding sentence sums up the main point or restates the main idea in the different way. A sentence that sums up the paragraph reminds the reader of what the writer's main idea and supporting points were. A sentence that restates the main idea should give the same information in a slightly different way, perhaps by using different words or by using different word order. A concluding sentence should not introduce a new point.

(College writing, Dorothy E. Zemach and Lisa A. Rumiser, 2003:19)

According to Alice Oshima, the concluding sentence signals the end of the paragraph and leaves the readers with important points to remember. Writer can think of the concluding sentence as a sort of topic sentence in reverse. The last sentence of the example paragraph signals the reader the end by the transitional signal such as "In conclusion". It summarizes the preciousness of gold and the reader can remember the two main characteristics.

2.2.4 Unity and coherence

In addition to the three structural parts of paragraph, a good paragraph also has the elements of unity and coherence.

"**Unity** means that you discuss only one main idea in a paragraph. The main idea is stated in the topic sentence, and then each and every supporting sentence develops that idea. If, for example, you announce in your topic sentence that you are going to discuss two important characteristics of gold, discuss only those. Do not discuss anything else such as the price of gold, the history of gold or gold mining."

“**Coherence** means that your paragraph is easy to read and understand because your supporting sentences are some kinds of logical order and your ideas are connected by the use of appropriate transition signals. Furthermore, the relationship between the ideas is clearly shown by using appropriate transition words and phrases such as “first of all”, “the second important characteristic”, “for example”, and “in conclusion”.

(Oshima, 2004: 16)

3. Punctuation.

3.1. Definition

Punctuation is the system of symbols (. , ! - : etc) that we use to separate sentences and parts of sentences, and to make their meaning clear. Each symbol is called a “punctuation mark”.

(<http://www.englishclub.com/writing/punctuation.htm>)

According to Betty Schramper Azaz, in *Understanding and using English Grammar, 1999*, punctuation is the standard system of symbol that is added words and sentences to clarify their meaning.

Punctuation marks are symbols which indicate the structure and organization of written language, as well as intonations and pauses to be observed when reading aloud.

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Punctuation>)

The punctuation marks separate, group, and qualify words and elements in sentences; they help to suggest the pauses, intonations, and gestures that would be used in speech.

“Punctuation marks are the traffic signals of language: they tell us to slow down, notice this, take a detour, and stop”

(<http://www.slideshare.net/michaeljm007/punctuation>)

3.2 Role of punctuation marks in writing.

Can readers understand the meaning of the writing and the message of the writer without punctuation? How can they read it aloud if they do not know where they can pause, raise or down the voice? Of course, a writing without punctuation cannot be considered as a complete writing, there is no reliable way of communicating meaning. Therefore, the punctuation helps you to complete your writing and communicate the meaning.

In addition, not only using punctuation marks in writing is necessary but also the appropriate punctuations should be carefully considered. The correct punctuation helps you to present your ideas clearly, make the meaning of your paragraph more understandable and express your respect to the readers as well as your good knowledge of grammatical structure. If you use punctuation marks incorrectly, you will make the readers confused to understand what you mean especially in the writings which require the exactness.

For example:

If you want to talk about the importance of woman, you can write:

Woman! Without her, man is nothing.

(<http://www.slideshare.net/michaeljm007/punctuation>)

The meaning of the sentence as well as your idea will change if you use punctuation marks differently:

Woman, without her man, is nothing.

In another situation:

Who? Are we writing to John?

Who are we writing to, John?

(<http://www.slideshare.net/michaeljm007/punctuation>)

Readers can understand the meaning and purposes of these two sentences are not the same. In the first sentence, writer wants to know who will receive the letter and suppose that the receiver is John; while in

the second, writer wants to ask John who will receive the letter of John and the writer.






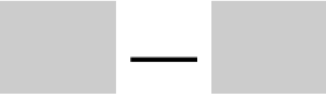



For one more example: “*Do not stop!*” means carry on, the listeners are not required to stop. Rewriting the same words as “*Don’t! Stop*” means stop whatever is being done with immediate effect. Definitely, both the sentences would be spoken in a different manner.






In academic writing, merely expressing your ideas is not enough. The writers also need to take care of how you express these ideas. One basic, if easily neglected, aspect of formulating your ideas convincingly relates to the proper use of grammar and punctuation. An abundance of grammatical mistakes and wrong punctuation not only leave a bad impression on the reader, they also make the process of reading more difficult and, very often, create unintended ambiguities. As a result, your argument becomes less convincing than you may think it is.

When writing, students usually punctuate almost by their habit, sometimes this is acceptable, but if their habits are not formed consciously according to accepted practices, they will have many serious mistakes in using punctuation marks.

3.3. Summary of punctuation marks

Each punctuation symbol is called punctuation mark. Each of them has their own using mechanics in English writing. The following is the system of the punctuation marks commonly used in English writing:

Punctuation Mark	Name	Example
	full stop or period	I like English.
	comma	I speak English, French and Thai.
	semi-colon	I do not often go swimming; I prefer to play tennis.
	colon	You have two choices: finish the work today or lose the contract.
	hyphen	This is a rather out-of-date book.
	dash	In each town—London, Paris and Rome—we stayed in youth hostels.
	question mark	Where is Shangri-La?
	exclamation mark	"Help!" she cried. "I'm drowning!"
	double quotation marks	"I love you," she said.

	apostrophe	This is John's car.
	underline	Have you read <u>War and Peace</u> ?
	underscore	bin_lad@cia.gov
	round brackets	I went to Bangkok (my favorite city) and stayed there for two weeks.
	ellipsis	One happy customer wrote: "This is the best program...that I have ever seen."

CHAPTER 2: PUNCTUATION ERRORS OF FIRST YEAR ENGLISH MAJORS AT HPU

1. Types of writing taught to the first year English majors.

1.1. Freewriting.

During the first term, students will learn how to collect and choose idea for their writing. Free writing is one step to do that.

Freewriting is a good way to begin writing about the topic. When you freewriting, you write down all your idea about the topic. You can write words, phrases, or sentences. Write quickly. Do not worry about spelling or grammar.

(Rebecca L.Oford and Meredrith Pike- Baky, 2000: 6)

With these characteristics, grammar is not paid attention, so the use of punctuation is not important in freewriting.

For example:

When student freewrite about the topic “World population growth”, students can write anything related to the topic:

<i>growing</i>	<i>statistic</i>
<i>increasing rate</i>	<i>citizen</i>
<i>estimate</i>	<i>double</i>
<i>people</i>	<i>increase</i>
<i>reach</i>	

After freewriting, students can choose or add more ideas to make an outline for the topic basing on what they have written down.

1.2. Paragraph writing

Paragraph writing is one of important writing skills that the students have to learn. Students will be given a topic to write about. From the ideas, sentences and phrases in freewriting, what will be written in a complete paragraph will be decided. Grammar, spelling and vocabulary must be paid much attention.

Example:

The following is the paragraph from above ideas and phrases:

“The world’s population is growing at an ever-increasing rate. According to estimates and statistics compiled by the World Health Organization, it took 1,600 years for the Earth to acquire its first one-half billion people. It took only 200 years, or until 1800, for its population to double to one billion. It gained another billion people by 1930, a time span of only 130 years. The third billion was gained by 1964 after only 34 years, and the fourth billion after only ten years in 1975. Population growth has slowed somewhat, so it took 13 years for the Earth to acquire its five billion citizen. WHO estimates that the world’s population will reach the six billion mark before the end of century.”

(Oshima, 2004: 70)

Different from freewriting, in writing a complete paragraph, the writer has to consider the punctuation because punctuation plays an important role in any complete writing as well as in a complete paragraph.

2. The punctuation errors.

The survey I conducted shows that the punctuation marks commonly misused by the first year majors are comma, full stop (period), colon, ellipsis dots (ellipsis mark) and exclamation marks. This part will deal with punctuation marks errors of first year English majors and the usage of these punctuation marks to help them recognize how they make mistakes and how to use them properly.

2.1. Comma errors

2.1.1. Comma functions

In English academic writing comma is the most common punctuation mark. Comma is the most commonly misused. The followings are the functions of comma in writing.

➤ **Comma in a series.**

Items in series of three or more are separated by a comma.

Example:

He was tall, handsome, and hardworking man.

The computer store was filled with video games, computer hardware and other electronic paraphernalia.

(Jame A.W.Hefferman and John E. Lincoln, 2006:423)

The fruit basket contained apples, bananas, and oranges.

(Appendix 2, 1)

❖ Note:

-No comma are in use between describing words of the word order in the sentence cannot reversed or is you cannot put “and” between them.

He ate four small chocolate candies.

(Appendix 2, 2)

-The comma must be used if “and” or “or” is omitted.

We hunted for the letter in the album, in all the old trunks, in the drawer, even under the rug.

(Jame A.W.Hefferman and John E. Lincoln, 2006: 419)

➤ **Comma in Direct speech.**

Commas are used to set a direct quotation off projecting clauses such as *he said, she said, they complained, she insisted, etc.*

Example:

“I have finished all my homework,” Marry said.

“The weather is fine,” the pilot said.

“He arrived lately,” she insisted.

(Appendix 2, 3)

Note:

-When the direct speech is interrupted, only the first word in the initial part of the quotation is capitalized.

“But they need rest,” she said, even if they are not tired.”

(Appendix 2, 4)

-The comma is not punctuated after a quotation used with a question mark or exclamation mark.

“Get out!” she yelled.

(William Cobbett, 1998: 186)

➤ Comma in sentence with introductory.

- Subordinate clause or phrase

A comma is used after a long introductory subordinate clause or phrase.

Example:

To transport the merchandise package, the company has to use container.

Living for along time, the tree reaches the height of three hundred feet.

(Appendix 2, 5)

- Words: yes, not, oh, well, why, now used in conversion, adverbs or coordinating conjunctions.

Well, I would like to go to beach for the holiday.

My sister is hard-working. In contrast, I am lazy.

Frankly, I do not like him.

(Appendix 2, 6)

-Phrase: to- V, V-ing, V-ed phrase or adjective phrases.

To verify or correct his hypothesis, the scientist performs an experiment.

-Subordinating clauses:

When we meet, I shall explain everything.

Before she had a breakfast, she drunk a glass of water.

(Appendix 2, 7)

Note:

A comma after a short introductory element is optional.

Today students protest individually rather than in concert.

(Jame A.W.Hefferman and John E. Lincoln, 2006: 245)

➤ Comma in sentences with interrupting element.

- Adverbial elements (words, phrases, or clause)

His friends, fortunately, got home safely.

His friends, as a matter of fact, got home safely.

His friends, as I've been told, got home safely.

(Appendix 2, 8)

- Nonrestrictive structures.

At the microphone stood the master of ceremonies, wearing a green suit.

Dothory Straight of Washington, D.C., who published her first book at the age of six, was a remarkable child.

(Jame A.W.Hefferman and John E. Lincoln, 2006:423)

➤ Comma in two complete thoughts.

Comma is used to help separate two complete thoughts when a coordinator (and, or, but, for, so) is expressed. For example:

The sky was clear and the weather was fine at Philadelphia, and the pilot requested permission to land there.

(William Cobbett, 1998:186)

The beams have rotted, so they can no longer support the roof.

(Jame A.W.Hefferman and John E. Lincoln, 2006: 420)

Note:

The comma can be omitted if both sentences are short.

We ate and they drink. (Appendix 2,9)

Adverbials like *therefore, however, otherwise, moreover* can connect two thoughts. These adverbials may take other positions in the second part of the sentence which begins with a semicolon.

The boy was sick; therefore (,) he did not go to school.

The boy was sick; he therefore did not go to school.

(Appendix 2, 10)

No connective (coordinator or adverbials) joins the sentences. Sometimes two sentences are written as one because the writer feels there is a relationship between them. In this case they are joined by a semicolon, never by a comma.

The boy was sick; he did not go to school. (Yes)

The boy was sick, he did not go to school. (No)

(Appendix 2, 11)

➤ Comma in a tag question.

Use comma to separate a question tag from the rest of the sentence.

It is a fine day, isn't it?

You have learnt it, haven't you?

➤ Commas in grouping number, elements in date, and after a salutation of personal letter.

- Use comma to grouping number into units of three in separating thousand, million, etc.

1,000. / 1, 000, 000. /1,000,000,000.

Vietnam population is over 74,000,000.

(A grammar of the English language, 1998: 187)

- Use comma to separate the elements in dates.

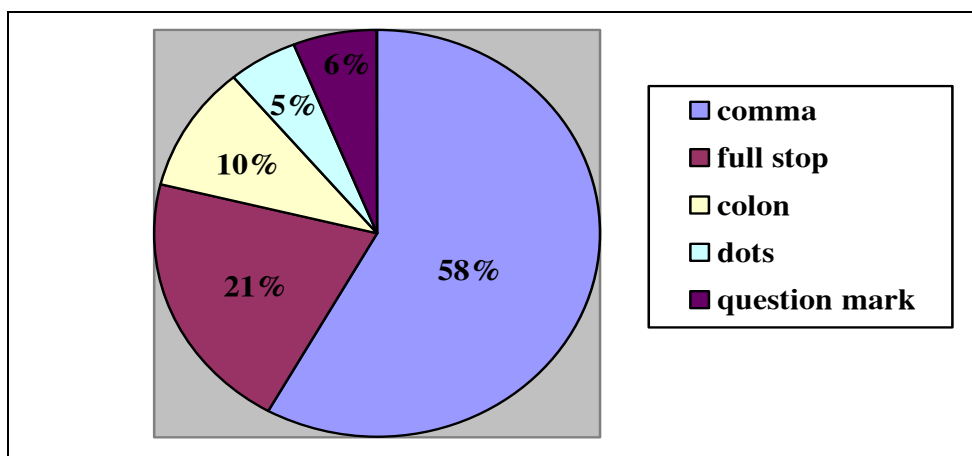
Sunday, May 31st, is her birthday. (Appendix 2, 13)

- In personal letter.

Dear Sir, I write this letter to (Appendix 2, 14)

2.1.2. Comma errors.

With the diversified usages, comma is often confused and misused. A questionnaire was given to the first year English majors and over 100 writing pieces were collected. The survey shows that the mostly errors are comma errors. The bellow chart which includes the statistics from data analysis presents that the comma errors occupy the largest percentage.



➤ Misusing comma in writing date and number.

Date and number are not only written in paragraph but also in daily life. Students often write date or number by habit. Therefore, sometimes comma errors in writing date and number are passed.

a. Comma errors in writing date.

There is over 50% of the first year English majors who have incorrect way of using comma when they use comma to separate name of month and day, month and year.

Example:

<i>October, 22 (incorrect)</i>	<i>15, May (incorrect)</i>
<i>→October 22 (correct)</i>	<i>→15 May (correct)</i>
<i>January, 2010 (incorrect)</i>	<i>22 April ,2010 (incorrect)</i>
<i>→January 2010 (correct)</i>	<i>→22 April 2010 (correct)</i>

(Appendix 2, 15)

b. Comma errors in writing number.

Many students replace commas by periods to group number into units of three in separating thousand, million, etc.

Example:

Population in Hai Phong city is over 654.000. (incorrect)
→Population in Hai Phong city is over 654,000. (correct)

Volcano formed over 1.000.000 years ago. (incorrect)
→Volcano formed over 1,000,000 years ago. (correct)

(Appendix 2, 16)

➤ Misusing in writing letter.

Sometimes first year English majors might write the paragraph under the form of a letter. One of their habits when writing letter is putting an exclamation mark after the salutation.

In a letter to Mia, a student wrote:

Dear Mia!

I am writing to...

(Appendix 2, 17)

In this situation, you use a comma. The colon can be accepted because Americans usually put a colon after the opening salutation in a business letter. In contrast, an exclamation mark is not.

➤ Misusing comma in a series.

Another punctuation error of first year English majors is marking comma before a coordinator when the series has only two items.

Example:

She has many English music discs, and books. (incorrect)

→*She has many English music discs and books. (correct)*

(Appendix 2, 18)

One more mistake in using comma with a series is using comma to separate the adjectives that do not modify for one word.


Example:

My brother has deep, blue eyes.

(Jame A.W. Hefferman and John E. Lincoln, 2006:426)

The comma in this sentence is punctuated wrongly because “deep” modifies for “blue” which modifies for “eyes”. It must be written:

My brother has deep blue eyes



➤ Comma splices.

Comma splice means that writer connects two independent clauses or two complete thoughts only by a comma. This mistake was found in 60 out of 100 writing pieces of first year English majors.

Example:

When my mother was young, she was very poor, she had to work all day to earn her money.

She was intelligent and learned hard, she used to be in the top of my class.

(Appendix 2, 19)

Comma splices make the writing boring. If writer wants to connect two complete thoughts, do one of these four ways:

- Add a coordinator after the comma:

When my mother was young, she was very poor, so she had to work all day to learn her money.

(Appendix 2, 20)

- Replace the comma by a semicolon:

She was intelligent and learned hard; she used to be in the top of my class.

(Appendix 2, 21)

- Replace the comma by a semicolon and a coordinator:

She was intelligent and learned hard; as the result, she used to be in the top of my class.

(Appendix 2, 22)

- Use a period instead of comma.

When my mother was young, she was very poor. She had to work all day to earn her money.

(Appendix 2, 23)

➤ Misusing comma with a long introductory subordinate clause or phrase.

This mistake is not popular. Just some students have the error of comma when the sentence contains a long introductory subordinate clause or phrase. These students usually forget to punctuate the comma after the long introductory element.

Example:

1. *When I asked my grandmother why I have name “Nga” she said that my name was name of movie star. (incorrect)*

→ *When I asked my grandmother why I have name “Nga”, she said that my name was name of a movie star. (correct)*

2. *When asking us to answer questions our teachers have to read full name to identify us. (incorrect)*

→ *When asking us to answer questions, our teachers have to read full name to identify us. (correct).*

3. *Whenever teachers give new constructions or new words we usually write them down notebooks. (incorrect)*

→ *Whenever teachers give new constructions or new words, we usually write them down notebooks. (correct)*

(Appendix 2, 24)

➤ Misusing comma with relative “that” clause as postmodifier in Noun phrase

A relative clause beginning with “that” can occur as a postmodifier in Noun phrase. There is no comma can be used to separate a “that” clause with its Noun phrase which is modified by it. Many students mark a comma between the head noun and postmodifier which is a “that” clause.

For example:

1. *My name, that was given by my grandfather, is very special. (incorrect)*

→ *My name that was given by my grandfather is very beautiful. (correct)*

2. *The teachers usually ask us many questions, that are very difficult to answer. (incorrect)*

→ *The teachers usually ask us many questions that are very difficult to answer. (incorrect)*

3. *If I had a chance to choose a new name, I would choose the name, that I have now. (incorrect)*

→ *If I had a chance to choose a new name, I would choose the name that I have now. (correct)*

2.2. Colon errors.

2.2.1. Colon functions.

- Use a colon before quotations, statements and series which are introduced formally.

Example:

Three countries were represented: England, France and Italia.

He began his speech: “Ladies and gentlements...”

Proceed as follows: switch on the computer, insert a disk and press any key.

(William Cobbett, 1998: 188)

- Use a colon between two independent clauses when the second explains or amplifies the first.

Example:

The garden had been neglected for a long time: it was overgrown and full of weeds.

Music is more than something mechanical: it is an expression of deep feeling and ethical values.

(William Cobbett, 1998:188)

(In this situation, a semicolon or a full stop, but not a comma, may be used instead of a colon)

- Use a colon between hours and minutes to indicate time, in bibliographical entries, etc.

Example:

The plane took off at 15:45.

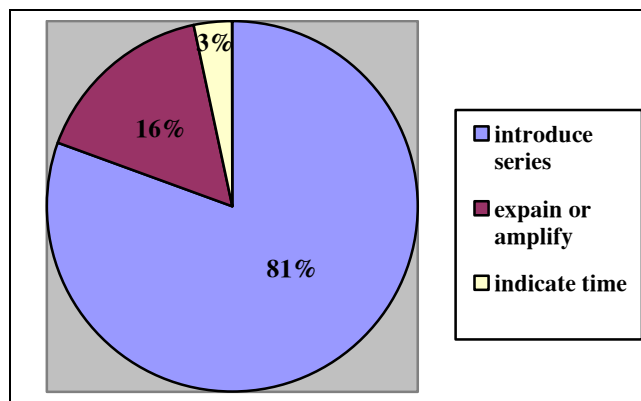
Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

(William Cobbett, 1998:188)

2.2.2. Colon errors.

Almost all students have colon errors when they want to introduce a list of items. A few errors are found in other usage of colon. The survey of using colon was conducted on 31 students. There are 25 out of 31 students making

mistake in using colon before a series introduced formally. These students think that the colon must be placed after the words *such as*, *including*, *contain* or *containing* and between a verb or preposition and its complements. This kind of error is going to be presented more detail in the next part. The rest errors are rarely found; only six students have this mistake when they forget to punctuate the colon while writing. The rate of colon errors is expressed in the following chart:



- Misusing colon in introduce a series.
- Misusing colon with “*such as*”, “*including*”, “*contain*” or “*containing*”.

Using “*such as*” and “*including*” is another way to introduce a series, but they do not need a colon following them.

Example:

1. *We have to learn many English skills, including: speaking, listening, writing and reading. (incorrect)*

→ *We have to learn many English skills, including speaking, listening, writing and reading. (correct)*

2. *I always have a habit to take note important things on my paper such as: new words, sentence structures, idioms. (incorrect)*

→ *I always have a habit to take note important things on my paper such as new words, sentence structures, idioms. (correct)*

3. *My friends give me a box of presents containing: toys, candy and some books. (incorrect)*

→*My friends give me a box of presents containing toys, candy and some books.*(correct)

(Appendix 2, 26)

- Misusing colon with preposition phrase.

Many students place a colon between preposition and its complement elements. They make this mistake when the complement elements look like a series. In English writing, the main preposition, which plays role of head in a phrase, and its complement elements are never separated by a punctuation mark. Students misunderstand these complements with a series introduced because their similarities of part of speech and function; consequently, they have misusing of colon.

Example:

1. *I had to found in: my pen box, my bag and my pocket.* (incorrect)

→*I had to found in my pen box, my bag and my pocket.* (correct)

2. *After lesson, my friends and I stopped at: supermarket, souvenirs shop, and bus top.* (incorrect)

→*After lesson, my friends and I stopped at supermarket, souvenirs shop, and bus top.* (correct)

3. *My cat likes to lie on: the table, television even my bed.* (incorrect)

→*My cat likes to lay on the table, television even my bed.* (correct)

(Appendix 2, 27)

- Misusing colon with verb and its subject.

This mistake is similar to mistake of using colon with preposition phrase. Especially, this error occurs with word “want”, “like”, “need”.

Example:

1.*I like: coffee, bananas, and candies.* (incorrect)

→*I like coffee, bananas, and candies.* (correct)

2.*We need: read many books, practice writing daily, and speaking English whenever we can to improve our English.* (incorrect)

→ *We need read many books, practice writing daily, and speaking English whenever we can to improve our English. (correct)*

3.I want: a cup of coffee, a loaf of bread and a newspaper. (incorrect)

→ *I want a cup of coffee, a loaf of bread and a newspaper. (correct)*

(Appendix 2, 28)

➤ Others colon errors.

Besides the errors indicated above, some students have mistake of forgetting to punctuate colon when they indicate time.

Example:

Everyday I get up at 700 and have breakfast at 730. (No)

Everyday I get up at 7:00 and have breakfast at 7:30. (Yes)

(Appendix 2, 29)

This mistake will make the idea of the sentence foolish. However, just a few students have mistake with this because of their carelessness. After writing, they usually do not revise their writing and the mistake regarded as unimportant error like this is not detected.

2.3. Full stop errors.

2.3.1. Full stop functions

➤ Use full stop or period to mark the end of a narrative sentence, indirect question, or a mild imperative sentence.

Example:

1. *The days are growing shorter, and the nights are becoming cool.*

2. *On some mornings, a hint of frost chills the air.*

3. *Note her ways closely.*

4. *Leave it at the door.*

5. *I wonder what she will do next.*

6. *I always wonder how to learn best.*

7. *I ask her if she could help me study speaking well.*

(Appendix 2, 30)

This usage of period is used considerably in any writing. In practicing English writing skills in the first year, English majors are sometimes given the topic such as writing about someone you like, describing a place or a person, sometimes they write about their opinion about something. Therefore, period mark is used considerably. Like comma, period is one of the most popular marks in writing. Except special sentences, whenever writer wants to sign readers the end of a sentence except special ones, they use period. Certainly, it is used more than exclamation mark, question mark, dots, round brackets, apostrophe and double quotation marks.

Note: Do not use comma after another full stop or other end marks like exclamation mark and question mark.

Example:

We do not want customers saying, “Why don’t you have what I want?”.(incorrect)

→*We do not want customers saying, “Why don’t you have what I want?” (correct)*

(Appendix 2,31)

➤ Use a stop after most abbreviations and contractions.

Example: *Mr., Dr., Ave., B.C., P.M., M.A., Ph.d., etc.*

(William Cobbett, 1998:189)

Dr. Boyle

Kate Fansler, Ph.D.

Mrs.N.A. Stephens

(Jame A.W.Heffernan and John E. Lincoln, 2006: 436)

➤ Place a stop after the number used in vertical.

Example:

Woven into the history of the human race is the history of its four great religions:

Buddhism

Judaism

Christianity

Islam

(Jame A.W.Heffernan and John E. Lincoln, 2006: 436)

Note: If you put this information in a sentence, put the number in round brackets without full stop.

Example:

Woven into the history of the human race is the history of its four great religions: (1) Buddhism, (2) Judaism, (3) Christianity, (4) Islam.

(Jame A.W.Heffernan and John E. Lincoln, 2006: 436)

2.3.2. Full stop errors.

➤ Full stop and sentence fragments.

This is one of common errors of first year English majors. In the first terms, their writing skill is not as good as in the next terms. They write by their habit and what they leant in high school. Therefore, they have many sentence problems, including sentence fragments.

Sentence fragments are the incomplete sentences which are punctuated as though they were completed sentences. This following is one example paragraph containing many sentence fragments:

“My full name is Hoàng Thị Thanh Vân. It means “a fresh golden cloud” in Vietnamese. My last name “Vân”. Which is given by my mother. Was named after her village. My parents call me “chây” .because when I was small. I scared of thunders. When sleeping I heard the sound of thunder. I hug my mother tightly. Like a “chây” does...”

(Hoàng Thị Thanh Vân, Na1301)

This mistake occurs when students separate the parts of sentences by a period.

Example:

Before she went to Ho Chi Minh City to study. I had cried a lot.

I always revise. After I wrote a paragraph.

When I read the paragraph. There are many new words.

If you want to have a good studying. You should study seriously.

I like my name very much. Which has particular meaning.

If a paragraph presents many sentences fragments, it will be less smooth and coherent and the reader cannot understand what you want to say.

(Appendix2,32)

- Use period after another punctuation mark.

This misusing of full stop is usually presented in quotation. Students often place a period after the quoted sentence including exclamation or question mark in the quotation marks.

Example:

1. *When I ask my grandmother, she said, “Honey, your name is beautiful and lovely like yourself!”.*

→ *When I ask my grandmother, she said, “Honey, your name is beautiful and lovely like yourself!”*

2. *“I know! It’s you!”. He stood up and shouted at me.*

→ *“I know! It’s you!” he stood up and shouted at me.*

3. *I used to ask my mother this question: “Mom, why did you name me Thiyy?”.*

→ *I used to ask my mother this question: “Mom, why you did name me Thiyy?”*

4. *She asked me, “Why don’t you note the news words on your handle book?”.*

→ *She asked me, “Why don’t you note the news words on your handle book?”*

(Appendix2,33)

2.4. Ellipsis dots errors.

2.4.1. Ellipsis functions.

Three dots are used to mark words left out of quotations.

Example:

“And so the writer ... suffers, especially in the creative years of youth, every from of distraction and discouragement.”

- Virginia Woolf

When the left out parts which are a part of the sentences or include one or more sentences, we use ellipsis dots with a period.

“Some time ago, my family built a large deck and pool. The pool was set in a private area and had views of the lake and mountains beyond It was not apparent to us until much later that our neighbors felt that their peace and harmony- indeed, their entire quality of life-had been compromised.”

- Ellie Porte

(Chicken Soup for the Soul- Stories for a better World)

Note: Use a line of dots to indicate the left out poetry line(s).

*Under the cooling shadow of a stately elm
Close sat by d goodly river’s side,
Where gliding streams the rocks did overwhelm;*

.....

*I once that loved the shady woods so well,
Now thought the rivers did the trees excel.
And if the sun would ever shine, there would I dwell.*

Anne Bradstreet,

“Contemplation,”no.21

2.4.2. Ellipsis dots errors.

In Vietnamese writing, like English writing, people use dots to replace left out words of quotations. However, many Vietnamese have the habit that use dots after a series to indicate the equal other items in list.

Example:

“Và ngày nay, các nhà khoa học nông nghiệp như Bùi Huy Đáp, Vũ Tuyên Hồng... đã lai tạo giống lúa mới, góp phần tăng trưởng sản lượng nông nghiệp, làm cho nước ta không chỉ có đủ lương thực mà còn trở thành một trong những nước đứng đầu về xuất khẩu gạo trên thế giới.”

(Hương Tâm, Ngữ Văn 9, tập 2, trang 35)

When writing English paragraph, students apply this habit when they want to indicate that there are many other items after the written items in the series. For instances:

At home, I spend four hours to learn English: doing homework, listening English, chatting with my friend in English, ...

In history, there are many heroes such as Lê Lợi, Lê Hoàn, ...

Sometimes, I want to change my name to others such as Hương, Nga, Mai, ...

(Appendix 2, 34)

To correct this error, writers can use the words *etc.*, *and so on*, *and so ford*, *so on and so ford* to replace the dots.

Some students used dots arbitrarily; consequently, readers understand that your idea or the meaning of the sentence is not completely verbalized and the writing becomes obscured. For example:

When I meet a beggar on the street, I can give them a little money...

Now I am studying my favorite major, so I can concentrate easily and spend time improving my English or doing things I love...

(Appendix 2, 35)

2.5. Question mark errors.

2.5.1. Question mark functions.

Use question mark after a direct question:

Who have broken my glasses?

Must the problems of farmers be ignored?

What do you want?

(Appendix 2, 36)

Note: If a direct question is quoted, the question mark is punctuated at the end of the question and in the quotation marks.

Example:

I cannot forget her question, “Why you don’t forget it to concentrate on studying?”

“What is your name?” the teacher asked.

(Appendix 2, 37)

2.5.2. Question mark errors.

The error in using question mark mostly presents in indirect question or after interrogative form playing the role of indirect object or subject compliment in the sentence.

Example:

I wonder what I have to do to improve my English?

What I do not know is why he tells me that story?

I do not know how to do that?

She asked me how many English books I read?

She did not tell me when she would come back?

(Appendix 2, 38)

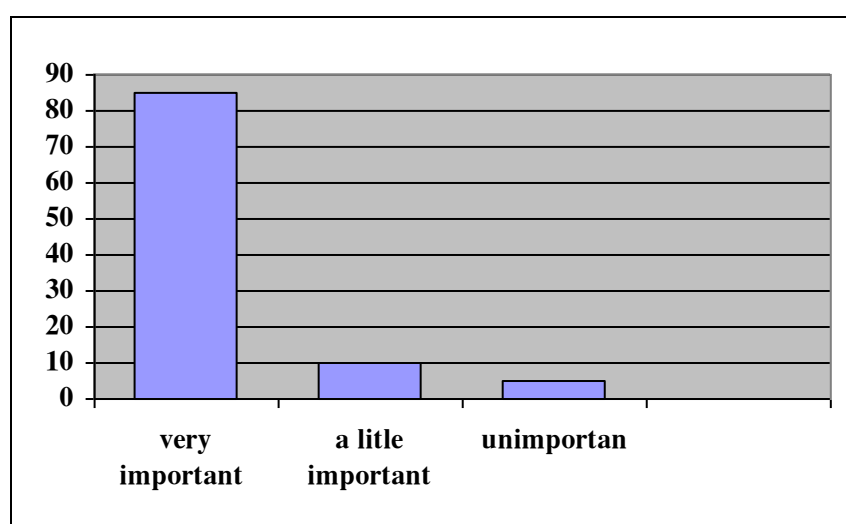
CHATER 3: CAUSES OF ERRORS AND SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

1. Causes of punctuation errors of first year English majors.

The chapter II shows common punctuation errors of the first year English majors. To find out solutions, firstly, researcher has to discover what leads to above punctuation errors. So what are the causes of the misusing punctuation marks? Through survey, some causes that will be presented concretely were found out.

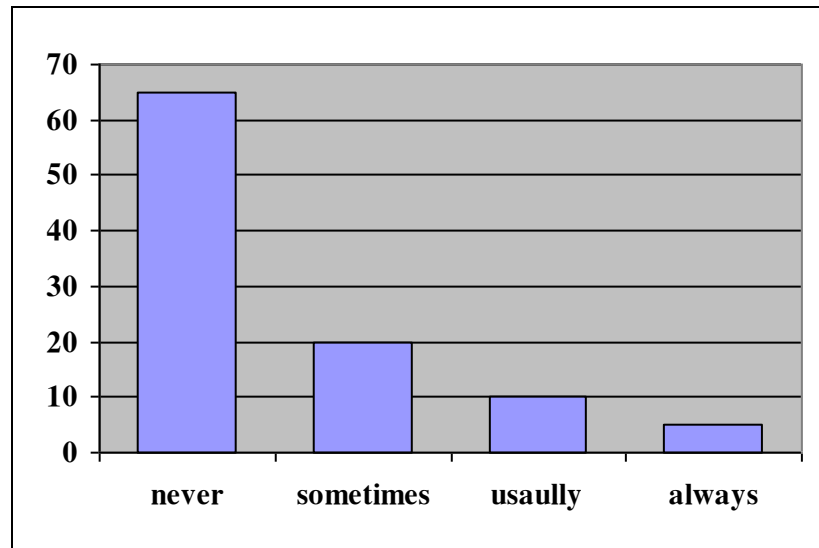
1.1. Carelessness.

Almost all students are aware of the importance of punctuation mark in writing. The result of the survey presents that there are 85% of first year English major asserts that punctuation marks are very important, 10% a little important and 5% unimportant.



Nevertheless, when the students were asked about the frequency of checking punctuation mark using after writing, the result is different. The majority of students never check punctuation after finishing writing. Just only 5% of students say that they always do that. 20% students sometimes and 10%

usually check their punctuation. These statistics are shown by the following chart:



Carelessness is one of the main reasons leading to the punctuation mark errors. While writing, students only think about what and how they will write about the topic, but the punctuation marks using is not paid attention. Because of carelessness, during writing process, they punctuate marks arbitrarily leading to unfortunate errors. That reduces the persuasiveness of their writing products. Moreover, after finishing, they usually check grammar structures, verb forms, spellings, and vocabulary but rarely punctuation marks. As the result, the errors which seem to be small and unimportant make their writing products less valuable even foolish and incomprehensive. Readers cannot understand what they mean when they unintentionally punctuate dots, a colon to indicate time, or a period improperly in the sentences.

1.2. Poor understanding of grammar.

A good writing is the combination of many factors: vocabulary, tone, grammar, unity and coherence, etc. As presented, punctuation is a part of grammar. To have good punctuation, writer must have enough understanding of grammar. The first year students are only taught sentence structures because their curriculum does not require specialized knowledge.. However, they used grammar due to their habit using at high school without concrete understanding

their structures and functions of the elements in a sentences. For example, if students have enough understanding about the functions of “wh” clause in a sentence, they will not have mistake of using comma or question mark. If a “wh” clause is an object, a question mark cannot be placed at the end of the sentence or a period cannot be punctuated between it and main clause as the sample sentences written in 2.5.2 and 2.3.2. If students understand the functions of adjective in a noun phrase, they will not place a comma between an adjective and the adjective modifying for its meaning. This error has been presented in 2.1.2 Therefore, to use punctuation marks effectively, understanding clearly grammar is necessary to any first year English majors.

1.3. Poor understanding of using punctuation marks.

Besides understanding grammar well, students must understand clearly the usage of each punctuation marks especially the indicated ones which is mostly use in writing paragraph. 60% of students said that they did not know adequately about the usage of punctuation marks until they study in university. In high school, teachers rarely even never remind student about the punctuations or sometimes they do when the errors is too serious like ending sentence without period, so students hardly know much about the usages of punctuation marks. They use as they imitate the ways of teachers. As the result, they do not know if their punctuations are correct or not. In university, they understand more about that by teacher’s instructions and friends’ experiments. Hence, they punctuate marks by their experiences or sense, without following any mechanics resulting in the errors.

1.4. Habit of using punctuations marks.

Many errors are mistaken by the habit of the students who are still affected by Vietnamese writing. Mostly, it occurs with dots in quotation and the item in series and period, which have shown concretely in 2.4.2 and 2.5.2. It takes a long time to change this habit because in they used to have writing task at high school. When writing English, they use the Vietnamese usage of these punctuation marks. For example:

In Vietnamese writing, three or more complete thoughts can be included in a sentence, but in English, they are not. In English sentence, the complete thoughts can be separate by a colon, semicolon. If they are separated by a comma, a coordinator or subordinator must be present depending on the ways of writing. Lets look at two examples:

In Vietnamese: “... Sau Cách mạng tháng Tám, Kim Lân tiếp tục làm báo viết văn, ông vẫn chuyên về truyện ngắn và vẫn viết về làng quê Việt Nam....”

(Văn học 12, Nhà xuất bản giáo dục: 2000, 103)

In English: “Getting married is easy, but staying married is a different matter.”

In this sentence, writer uses a comma and a subordinator to separate two complete thoughts.

2. Suggested solutions.

After discovering the reasons leading to the punctuation errors, readers can find out solutions for their errors. This part will give readers some suggested solutions to avoid the mistakes.

2.1. Improve knowledge of grammar.

As indicated former, understanding grammar well helps you using punctuation marks more effectively and properly. When you know clearly which grammar structure or which sentence structures you use to verbalize the idea, you will easy to define where to punctuate comma, dots, or period, question or exclamation marks, colon or semicolon.

2.2. Remembering the punctuation marks regulations.

Besides knowledge of grammar, remembering the punctuation regulations is also necessary for student to avoid the mistakes. When writing, if you always remind the punctuation regulations of each marks, you will use it properly and correct timely incase of errors. Especially, you should pay attention to the exceptions or notices of each mark. This will help you to avoid the confusing. You had better limit using by habit as much as

you can. Moreover, the more you understand about mechanics of using punctuation, the more convenient for you to avoid Vietnamese usage habit in English writing.

2.3. Proofreading after writing.

It does not take you a lot time to do this. After writing, you should check it. Your writing may be good at structure and idea, but incorrect punctuation will make it less meaningful if the errors are not detected. Sometimes you pass the errors which seems to be inconsiderable; in a fact, they are regrettable errors. Firstly, revise the sentence structures, vocabulary and spelling. After checking spelling and structures, proofread if your punctuation is match with what the writers want to mean or not. Because, sometimes incorrectly punctuated marks will change the meaning of the message. In conclusion, checking punctuation will be a finishing step to complete your paragraph.

Another way to revise punctuation is reading loudly the writing. This ways will help writers to detect the errors especially the comma, period, question or exclamation marks by the tone and intonations. It will be more effective if writers exchange students' writing pieces with classmates. They will check for each other. By this way, students not only correct their mistake but also learn the good ways of using punctuation marks from friends.

2.4. Using flexibly many kinds of sentences.

This is an effective way to avoid punctuation errors. If students still confuse when punctuating a sentence, write it by the other ways with the same meaning. The above parts have presented some useful ways to correct the mistakes of comma, period or colon. In using question mark, try to define which form of sentence used, direct or indirect to punctuate correctly. Before using dots, consider that the elements is series introduce or the complement in a phrase.

2.5. Frequent practice

Like many other skills, writing requires hard working process. The more you practice the more skillful you are. To practice, you can do the exercise related to the punctuation such as place punctuation marks in the properly positions or correct the punctuation errors in a paragraph. You can easily to find exercises of punctuation practice in English Grammar in use book or in grammar exercise book or ask teachers and friends for help.

Part C. CONCLUSION

1. Conclusion

There are many important factors creating a good paragraph. Punctuation is considered one of the most important factors. Throughout my study, I found out the most common errors in using punctuation marks of first year English majors in Hai Phong Private University, the reasons and solutions for these errors. The common errors are found in using comma, period, semicolon, question mark and ellipsis dots.

In my study, the rationale, aims, methods, scope and design of the study are mentioned in the part A in hope that the reader will have an overview on my study.

Part B includes three chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the theoretical background including an overview on academic writing, paragraph, definition and the kinds of punctuation marks. Chapter 2 shows clearly punctuation errors of first year English majors at HPU. Chapter 3 gives reader causes leading to the presented errors and suggested solutions.

Part C contains the conclusion and suggestions for further study.

I am fully aware that shortcomings and mistakes are unavoidable. I wish to receive any comments and contributing ideas from others. I also hope that my graduation paper will be useful for first year English majors in Hai phong Private University as well as other English learners.

2. Suggestions for further study.

Due to limited time and knowledge, this graduation paper has not yet covered the other aspects of punctuation. Beside the punctuation errors of first year English majors at HPU, there involves a lot of other aspects such as using punctuation marks effectively in paragraph writing and essay writing, punctuation errors of other grades of English majors, etc. These issues are suggested for further study. Researcher hopes that there a survey of solutions for punctuation errors will be conducted in a further study. Once again, all sincere thanks are sent to everyone who gives the writer supports and encouragements as well as precious help during the study.

Suggested exercises

Exercise 1.

The following short passages contain fragments. Correct the fragments by adding them to an independent clauses and crossing out the period and capital letter. Use correct punctuation where necessary:

1. The Chinese always kept better records about earthquakes than any other country. So it only makes sense that they created the first seismograph. It was invented by an astronomer and geographer name Chang Heng. In the second century A.D. It had eight carefully balanced bronze balls. Which were arranged in a circle around a compass. Whenever the instrument picked up movement from an earthquake. Once of the balls would roll off.

2. Because it is very expensive to put a criminal in prison. Electronic tagging has become a popular way to restrict a criminal's freedom while awaiting trial. A belt, fitted around the criminal's ankle. Carries an electronic device that sends out a coded radio signal to the criminal's home telephone. If the criminal tries to leave home. The signal is broken. And the telephone immediately contacts the police.

Exercise 2.

Remove all misused commas, add any that are needed, and leave any that are correctly used in the following passage.

Many early American homes were decorated with blockprinted wallpapers. Import from England, and France, the papers made the arrival of ships from abroad an exciting event for Colonial homemakers. Merchants, looking for sales, advertised that pepering was cheaper than whitewashing, and, they urged would be customers to examine the endless variety of brightly colored patterns. Indeed by today's standards the colors in many Colonial papers seem vibrant, intense, and , even gaudy. One wonders whether the

citizens of Boston Massachusetts and Providence Rhode Island, yearned for bright reds, green, and, blues because of the grey, New England winters.

(A college handbbook, Nhà xuất bản trẻ,2006:429)

Exercise 3.

Can you identify all 15 errors in the following passages?

My wife works part time registering, and placing children in the Minneapolis school system. Often her work brings her into contact not only with children but also with parents who have difficulty reading and writing.

Once she was helping a mother fill out a form; when she noticed something unusual. Under 'marital status' the woman had written, "Two times a week".

Although, the woman had misunderstood the question, by some standard's I guess that's not so bad. But the mothers inability to read and understand a common term such as "marital status," reflects a serious problem in American society.

"Adult Literacy in America," a government study released in 1993 stated there are some 40 to 44 million Americans like her, adults who possess only the most rudimentary reading and writing skills. In it's introduction, the study revealed that nearly half of all adult Americans read and write so poorly they have difficulty holding a decent job.

Who gets the blame for this shocking level of functional illiteracy in America?

You do. We do. The schools, the parents, and the students - we all do.

You may not agree, however, I believe we all bear some responsibility for the problem. High schools are awarding diplomas to students who cannot read or write. Parents are spending too little time interacting with their

children. And students are devoting too little effort to their number one responsibility in life – getting educated.

Who pays the price for functional illiteracy in America?

We all do, and “we” includes: the business community which for years has complained about poor writing skills among the following groups; job applicants and new hires.

(<http://www.wilbers.com/punct12.htm>)

Suggested keys

Exercise 1.

The following short passages contain fragments. Correct the fragments by adding them to an independent clauses and crossing out the period and capital letter. Use correct punctuation where necessary:

1. The Chinese always kept better records about earthquakes than any other country. Therefore, it only makes sense that they created the first seismograph. It was invented by an astronomer and geographer name Chang Heng. In the second century A.D, it had eight carefully balanced bronze balls which were arranged in a circle around a compass. Whenever the instrument picked up movement from an earthquake, once of the balls would roll off.

2. Because it is very expensive to put a criminal in prison, electronic tagging bas become a popular way to restrict a criminal's freedom while awaiting trial. A belt fitted around the criminal's ankle carries an electronic device that sends out a coded radio signal to the criminal's home telephone. If the criminal tries to leave home, the signal is broken and the telephone immediately contacts the police.

Exercise 2.

Many early American homes were decorated with blockprinted wallpapers. Import from England and France, the papers made the arrival of ships from abroad an exciting event for Colonial homemakers. Merchants, looking for sales, advertised that pepering was cheaper than whitewashing and they urged would be customers to examine the endless variety of brightly colored patterns. Indeed by today's standards, the colors in many Colonial papers seem vibrant, intense, and even gaudy. One wonders whether the citizens of Boston Massachusetts and Providence Rhode Island yearned for bright reds, green, and, blues because of the grey New England winters.

Exercise 3.

My wife works part time registering, [**Unnecessary comma between compound elements that are not independent clauses**] and placing children in the Minneapolis school system. Often her work brings her into contact not only with children [**Note: A comma is optional here; for a faster pace and less emphatic style, omit it.**] but also with parents who have difficulty reading and writing.

Once she was helping a mother fill out a form; [**Semicolon between a subordinate clause and an independent clause**] when she noticed something unusual. Under ‘marital status’ [**Single quotation marks for double quotation marks**] the woman had written, “Two times a week”. [**Period outside rather than inside closing quotation marks**]

Although, [**Unnecessary comma after *although*; in addition, commas are often used erroneously after *and*, *but*, and *such as***] the woman had misunderstood the question, by some standard’s [**Unnecessary apostrophe in a plural word**] I guess that’s not so bad. But the mothers [**Missing apostrophe in a possessive**] inability to read and understand a common term such as “marital status, [**Unnecessary comma between subject and verb**]” reflects a serious problem in American society.

“Adult Literacy in America,” a government study released in 1993 [**Missing comma after a set-off phrase**] stated there are some 40 to 44 million Americans like her, adults who possess only the most rudimentary reading and writing skills. In it’s [***It’s for its***] introduction, the study revealed that nearly half of all adult Americans read and write so poorly they have difficulty holding a decent job.

Who gets the blame for this shocking level of functional illiteracy in America?

You do. We do. The schools, the parents, **[Note: The serial comma the comma before the conjunction in a series of three or more items may be used or omitted.]** and the students - **[Hyphen for a dash]** we all do.

You may not agree, **[Comma splice – a comma between two independent clauses]** however, I believe we all bear some responsibility for the problem. High schools are awarding diplomas to students who can't read or write. Parents are spending too little time interacting with their children. And **[Note: In all but the most formal writing, it is now permissible to begin a sentence with *and* or *but*.]** students are devoting too little effort to their number one responsibility in life – getting educated.

Who pays the price for functional illiteracy in America?

We all do, and “we” includes: **[Unnecessary colon between a verb and its complement]** the business community **[Missing nonrestrictive comma – a comma setting off a nonessential element]** which for years has complained about poor writing skills among the following groups; **[Semicolon for a colon]** job applicants and new hires.

6. Which sentence has appropriate commas?

- a. He ate four small chocolate candies
- b. He ate four small, chocolate candies
- c. He ate four, small, chocolate candies.
- d. He ate four small chocolate, candies.

7. Choose the best answer for date writing:

- a. 10 May 2010
- b. 10 May 2010
- c. 10 May, 2010
- d. other:

8. Which punctuation mark do you use after the salutation in a letter?

- a. period
- b. dash
- c. question mark
- d. comma

9. Which punctuation can be use after the word “such as”, “including”, “contain”, “include” or “contain”?

- a. question mark
- b. zero
- c. colon
- d. comma

10. How do you write if you want to mean that there are many equal other after a list of item?

For example: She brought many things: cakes, flowers, present

- a. ellipsis dots (...)
- b. period (.)
- c. use words such as “etc”, “and so on”
- d. your opinion:

II. Small exercises

This exercise is to examine your punctuation using. Mark the punctuation in places that you think necessary.

Punctuate the following sentences:

1. His friends fortunately got home safely
2. I’m not tired he said
3. Proceed as follows switch on the computer insert a disk and press any key
4. I do not know how they got there
5. What is your problem John asked
6. Get out she yelled
7. He arrived lately she insisted

8. When asking us to answer questions our teachers have to read full name to identify us
9. When I ask my grandmother, she said Honey your name is beautiful and lovely like yourself
10. We have to learn many English skills including speaking listening writing and reading
11. My name that was given by my grandfather is very beautiful

Thank your very much for your cooperation.

Appendix 2

A list of examples used in the study

1. The fruit basket contained apples, bananas, and oranges.
2. He ate four small chocolate candies.
3. "I have finished all my homework," Marry said.
"The weather is fine," the pilot said.
"He arrived lately," she insisted.
4. "But they need rest," she said, even if they are not tired."
5. To transport the merchandise package, the company has to use container.
Living for a long time, the tree reaches the height of three hundred feet.
6. Well, I would like to go to beach for the holiday.
My sister is hard-working. In contrast, I am lazy.
Frankly, I do not like him.
7. When we meet, I shall explain everything.
Before she had a breakfast, she drunk a glass of water.
8. His friends, fortunately, got home safely.
His friends, as a matter of fact, got home safely.
His friends, as I've been told, got home safely.
9. We ate and they drink
10. The boy was sick; therefore (,) he did not go to school.
The boy was sick; he therefore did not go to school.
11. The boy was sick; he did not go to school. (Yes)
The boy was sick, he did not go to school. (No)
12. It is a fine day, isn't it?
You have learnt it, haven't you?
13. Sunday, May 31st, is her birthday.
14. Dear Sir, I write this letter to....
15. October, 22 (incorrect) 15, May (incorrect)
→October 22 (correct) →15 May (correct)

January, 2010 (incorrect) 22 April ,2010 (incorrect)
→January 2010 (correct) →22 April 2010 (correct)

16. Population in Hai Phong city is over 654.000. (incorrect)

→Population in Hai Phong city is over 654,000. (correct)

Volcano formed over 1.000.000 years ago. (incorrect)

→Volcano formed over 1,000,000 years ago. (correct)

17. Dear Mia!

I am writing to...

18.She has many English music discs, and books. (incorrect)

→She has many English music discs and books. (correct)

When my mother was young, she was very poor, she had to work all day to earn her money.

19.She was intelligent and learned hard, she used to be in the top of my class.

21.She was intelligent and learned hard; she used to be in the top of my class.

20.When my mother was young, she was very poor, **so** she had to work all day to learn her money.

22.She was intelligent and learned hard; **as the result**, she used to be in the top of my class.

23.When my mother was young, she was very poor. She had to work all day to earn her money.

24. When I asked my grandmother why I have name “Nga” she said that my name was name of movie star. (incorrect)

→When I asked my grandmother why I have name “Nga”, she said that my name was name of a movie star. (correct)

When asking us to answer questions our teachers have to read full name to identify us. (incorrect)

→When asking us to answer questions, our teachers have to read full name to identify us. (correct).

Whenever teachers give new constructions or new words we usually write them down notebooks.(incorrect)

→Whenever teachers give new constructions or new words, we usually write them down notebooks.(correct)

25. My name, that was given by my grandfather, is very special. (incorrect)

→My name that was given by my grandfather is very beautiful. (correct)

The teachers usually ask us many questions, that are very difficult to answer. (incorrect)

→The teachers usually ask us many questions that are very difficult to answer. (incorrect)

If I had a chance to choose a new name, I would choose the name, that I have now. (incorrect)

→If I had a chance to choose a new name, I would choose the name that I have now. (correct)

26. We have to learn many English skills, including: speaking, listening, writing and reading. (incorrect)

→ We have to learn many English skills, including speaking, listening, writing and reading. (correct)

I always have a habit to take note important things on my paper such as: new words, sentence structures, idioms. (incorrect)

→I always have a habit to take note important things on my paper such as new words, sentence structures, idioms. (correct)

My friends give me a box of presents containing: toys, candy and some books. (incorrect)

→My friends give me a box of presents containing toys, candy and some books.(correct)

27. I had to found in: my pen box, my bag and my pocket. (incorrect)

I had to found in my pen box, my bag and my pocket. (correct)

After lesson, my friends and I stopped at: supermarket, souvenirs shop, and bus top. (incorrect)

After lesson, my friends and I stopped at supermarket, souvenirs shop, and bus top. (correct)

My cat likes to lie on: the table, television even my bed. (incorrect)

My cat likes to lay on the table, television even my bed. (correct)

28. I like: coffee, bananas, and candies. (incorrect)

→I like coffee, bananas, and candies. (correct)

We need: read many books, practice writing daily, and speaking English whenever we can to improve our English. (incorrect)

→We need read many books, practice writing daily, and speaking English whenever we can to improve our English. (correct)

I want: a cup of coffee, a loaf of bread and a newspaper. (incorrect)

→I want a cup of coffee, a loaf of bread and a newspaper. (correct)

29. Everyday I get up at **700** and have breakfast at **730**. (No)

Everyday I get up at **7:00** and have breakfast at **7:30**. (Yes)

30. The days are growing shorter, and the nights are becoming cool.

On some mornings, a hint of frost chills the air.

Note her ways closely.

Leave it at the door.

I wonder what she will do next.

I always wonder how to learn best.

I ask her if she could help me study speaking well.

31. We do not want customers saying, “Why don’t you have what I want?” (incorrect)

→We do not want customers saying, “Why don’t you have what I want?” (correct)

32. Before she went to Ho Chi Minh City to study. I had cried a lot.

I always revise. After I wrote a paragraph.

When I read the paragraph. There are many new words.

If you want to have a good studying. You should study seriously.

I like my name very much. Which has particular meaning.

33. When I ask my grandmother, she said, “Honey, your name is beautiful and lovely like yourself!”

→When I ask my grandmother, she said, “Honey, your name is beautiful and lovely like yourself!”

“I know! It’s you!”. He stood up and shouted at me.

→“I know! It’s you!” he stood up and shouted at me.

I used to ask my mother this question: “Mom, why did you name me Thủy?”.

→I used to ask my mother this question: “Mom, why did you name me Thủy?”

She asked me, “Why don’t you note the news words on your handle book?”.

→She asked me, “Why don’t you note the news words on your handle book?”

34. At home, I spend four hours to learn English: doing homework, listening English, chatting with my friend in English,...

In history, there are many heroes such as Lê Lợi, Lê Hoàn,...

Sometimes, I want to change my name to others such as Hương, Nga, Mai,...

35. When I meet a beggar on the street, I can give them a little money...

Now I am studying my favorite major, so I can concentrate easily and spend time improving my English or doing things I love...

36. Who have broken my glasses?

Must the problems of farmers be ignored?

What do you want?

37. I cannot forget her question, “Why you don’t forget it to concentrate on studying?”

“What is your name?” the teacher asked.

38. I wonder what I have to do to improve my English?

What I do not know is why he tells me that story?

I do not know how to do that?

She asked me how many English books I read?

She did not tell me when she would come back?

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