

Field Geology Editing Codes and Writing Tips

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To help you identify aspects of your writing that you could improve, we may have written codes near sentences that could use some rewriting. The explanation of these codes, with an example of *incorrect usage* shown in italics in parentheses, is as follows:

- A Awkward sentence. Combining many phrases into a single sentence does not shorten your paper but instead makes it less clear, especially if you use lots of “that” and “which” to link the phrases. (*The granite that composed the ridge had intruded the sedimentary rocks that had been baked up to temperatures of 400°, based on the metamorphic minerals that were present, and they were faulted, being turned upside down so that the oldest rock, which was the basalt flow, was now on the top and the youngest rock, a fine-grained sandstone, was now on the bottom.*) The reader may be able to figure out this sentence after the second or third reading, but shouldn’t have to. Don’t try to put too much in any sentence.
- AGE Misuse of the term “age”. You do not need to say *Triassic aged rocks*, since Triassic rocks says the same thing. Also, radiometric age determinations are not *age dates*; they are either ages or age determinations.
- C Missing, misplaced, or unmatched comma (*This sentence, for example needs a comma after the word example.*). Use paired commas to set off phrases, such as this little phrase, within your sentences. In general, use a comma if you want the reader to pause (*On one street signs had fallen over.*). To test whether you need a comma, read your sentence out loud as if you had never read the sentence before, and see if you need to insert a little pause. Also, in spite of what you may have been taught, it is much clearer to include the comma before “and” in a list, like “red, green, black, and gold”.
- D Dangling participle (*The dog bit him, indicating he had bad dog karma.*) Indicating is “dangling” if it does not clearly refer to a noun or pronoun in the first part of the sentence [like the directly preceding noun or the subject]. In this sentence, neither the “dog” nor “him” indicates anything. An easy fix is to add a comma, a subject, and the word “and”. The dog bit him, and this incident indicates he has bad dog karma.
- DI Data and interpretation mixed together. It’s best to present data first, then interpretation, or to otherwise make it clear to the reader what is actually observed and what is interpreted.
- F The phrases “were found” or “were seen” can almost always be deleted. (*The rocks were found to contain garnets; instead, say “The rocks contain garnet.”*). Also, don’t the rocks still contain garnet even if they are not found or seen by us.
- FIG Figure would have helped here. Sometimes a picture does equal a thousand words!
- I Incomplete sentence (*Sentence no verb.*)
- J Technical jargon that I suspect you don’t understand. It’s better to use only those terms you fully understand, or to look up any terms about which you are uncertain.
- L Linkage of sentences not great. Let your sentences flow from one to another, each building clearly on the subject, object, or other aspect of the previous sentence. It can be confusing to start a follow-on sentence with a subject out of left field (i.e., one that wasn’t even mentioned in the previous sentence). A good approach is “The T-Rex was really angry. It trampled the bushes as it chased a lawyer and ate him.” A more confusing way would have been to start the second sentence with “The lawyer ...”, which will leave the reader with some momentary doubt about how the lawyer fits into the story.
- M Miscellaneous grammar or punctuation error. Generally use a “:” to start a list or after a phrase such as “the rock types include the following: quartzite, rhyolite, etc.” Use a “;” to separate two complete phrases that you want to be part of the same sentence, such as “The volcano erupted; they ran.”, or to separate items that themselves contain commas: “The rocks were very resistant; tan, gray, and black; and rough to the touch.
- NQ Not quite correct; usually refers to content, rather than grammar.
- OP Optional change. The sentence was grammatically correct as written, but could be improved.
- ORG Organization a little funky or unclear.
- P Sentence structure not parallel (*The rock is green, yellow, and is white.*). This sentence needs to have another “is” before yellow or to have the last “is” deleted.
- R Repetitive use of word. You have already used the same word very nearby.
- RED Redundant. You have said this elsewhere in the paper, maybe more than once.
- REF Reference missing or incomplete. Either a key reference should have been cited here, or the citation given is not complete or fully correct.
- RO Run-on sentence or sentence is too complex (*The rocks were deformed, their color was red, they were fine grained.*). To fix, either make each clause a separate sentence or separate related clauses with a semicolon.

- S Spelling error -- always use a spell checker! Misspelled words in a letter or paper leave a bad impression.
- TS No topic sentence. The first sentence in a paragraph should tell the reader what in general is coming or should otherwise set up the rest of the paragraph. It may ease the transition from the last paragraph to this one. Don't just plow right into some minute detail.
- TT Improper use of time term. You should not use a time term, such as often or occasionally, when you mean commonly, locally, generally, etc. (*The rocks are often black.* Does this mean they are black only on Mondays?) -- you didn't lose any points for this, but it's good to look at the literal meaning of your words. Problem-causing time terms include often, occasionally, and frequently. Some editors also don't like to use the word "occur" or "occurrence" for geographic location (*The rocks occur on the hill.*). They suggest using "are present" or "are exposed", but you could also just say "The rocks are on the hill" or "crop out on the hill". (Crop out is the verb form of outcrop, which is not a verb.)
- TW Usage of *that* versus *which* probably not correct. In general, *that* should be used for an essential clause, where no break in the flow of the sentence is intended. "There is the Velociraptor that ate Rush Limbaugh." The phrase after *that* is essential because there may be more than one Velociraptor. *Which* should be used for a nonessential clause, and is generally preceded by a comma to set off the phrase as being nonessential to the sentence. "There is the Velociraptor, which looks really hungry." In this case, there is only one raptor but I wanted you to know that, by-the-way, it looks hungry. "Which" can be used in some other ways that don't require a preceding comma, in which case you don't need one right in front of "which".
- V Vague reference to previous part of a sentence or to a previous sentence. (*The sandstone layer defined several large folds, and formed huge rounded hills. They were two miles across.*). Does *they* refer to the folds or hills, neither one of which was the subject of the previous sentence. Especially watch words like *it*, *they*, or *that*.
- VT Verb does not match number of subject (*There is many sea creatures, and that big one look mean.*)
- U Unit modifier or compound adjective lacks a hyphen. When two or more descriptive words appear before a single noun, hyphens may be required to clarify meaning. (*He is a tall timber inspector. It is a light colored granite.*). Does he inspect tall timber or is he tall in stature. The rock is not actually light, so a hyphen is needed to link the two adjectives. Thus, "it is a light-colored granite" needs a hyphen, but "it is light colored" does not. Comparatives (like "darker gray dog"), superlatives ("most cool" dude), and adverbs (words ending in "ly", like "gently dipping" layer) don't require hyphens.
- UC Unclear linkage. A word, such as "this" or "it", may be vague as to which part of this sentence or the previous sentence it refers. Such a word — notice I could have used "it" — may be vague if it does not refer to a directly preceding word, to the subject of the previous sentence, or to the entire previous sentence.
- W Excessively wordy and/or indirect (perhaps verging toward paragraph padding or B.S.)
- ¶ Paragraph break needed.
- ✂ Delete
- # Insert space.
- ≡ Word should have been capitalized. Capitalize place names (like Grand Canyon) and official names of formations (e.g. Kaibab Formation or Conway Granite), but not directions (like north, northwest) or ordinary, everyday mineral and rock names, like granite, sandstone, or quartz, unless those words are part of an official name, as in "Conway Granite". Capitalize ages, like Mesozoic and Cretaceous.
- / Letter should have been lower case (not capitalized). I may also put two lines beneath the offending letter.
- () Delete space or hyphen, or combine two words into one. Words like "northeast" are not hyphenated.
- 's Use of apostrophe is incorrect. (*There were two rock's. I found out one was Steves.*). Use an apostrophe to indicate possession, such as "Steve's rock" or "three students' books", not for plurals "two rocks". The exception is the term "it's"; use "it's" only when you mean "it is". Do not use "it's" if you mean it possesses something; instead say "its color was pale blue".
- ✓ What you say is right on! I usually use this to refer to content, and am congratulating you for getting it right

Category	Perfect	V.Good	Good	Fair	Poor
Content/Understanding/Effort	35	34-32	30-28	26-24	22-18-14
Figure Relevance/Presentation	6	5	4	2	0
Organization/Clarity/Grammar	6	5	4	2	0
Spelling/Incorrect Word Choice	3	2	1	0	0

Total