

The Limitations of Spell-Check by Liberty University Online Writing Center (OWC) Tutor Erica Heisler

Spell-check is definitely a valuable tool for writers to use when they wish to ensure accuracy. Many email, discussion board, and word-processing programs have spell-check enabled as an automatic feature. However, as with any safeguard, spell-check has its limitations and must be utilized with caution. The following examples, gleaned from actual student papers, are illustrative of spell-check's imperfections:

1. Rating an employee's satisfaction with his job seems straight forward.

What's wrong with this sentence? "Straightforward" should be one word, but Microsoft Word will not catch the error unless the grammar checking feature is enabled.

2. I will analyze the three activities of leaders and compare them to peer reviewed articles.

The term "peer-reviewed" requires a hyphen because it comes before the noun it modifies.

3. Therefore, educators of this age group should be facilitating instruction that challenges their students' appropriately.

While "students" is not spelled incorrectly, the inclusion of the apostrophe is erroneous. Apostrophes are never used to indicate plural nouns except in very special cases, such as, "Pete received all A's and B's." (<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/plurals.htm>)

4. The results of this project validate that I am and extravert.

Upon careful rereading, it is obvious that "an" should take the place of "and."

5. ENTJ represents the four dominate preferences in my personality.

Be careful: the adjective "dominant" can modify "preferences," but "dominate" is a verb.

6. The authors state in their internationally bestseller that the most important aspect of leading is simply knowing oneself.

This sentence is using the adverb "internationally" to modify the noun "bestseller;" it would, instead, be correct to write either "internationally bestselling book" (an adverb may modify an adjective such as "bestselling") or "international bestseller" (adjectives *do* modify nouns).

7. By listening and getting involved in blogs and online communities as well as being sensitive to consumers, business will see longevity and endue the storm.

The meaning of "endue" (to invest with a gift) is different from that of "endure," which is the word the student meant to write. (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/endue>)

If writers want to demonstrate that they have a thorough grasp of their subject matter, they will carefully review their papers for mistakes the spell-checker has missed.