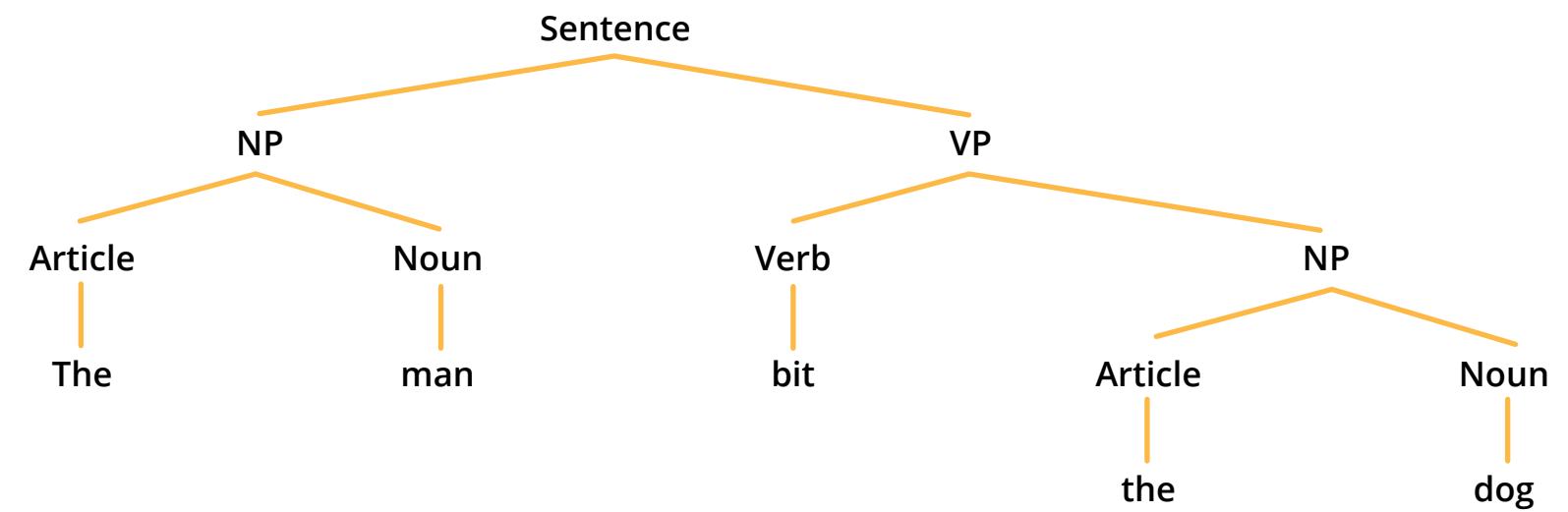English grammar is a challenge for us all. If English is not your first language, there are additional challenges you need to manage.

The following are error-types that are frequent in the writing of many students. If you are aware of the ones YOU make, you can look for them and correct them when checking your assignment drafts.

Note: The examples used come from an essay written on the subject of social networking.

1. Incomplete sentences

Problem	Solution
Sentences may be missing some of the essential elements that make them grammatical. **Examples:**	To be grammatical, an English sentence must have at least a SUBJECT and a VERB. You can see in the **incorrect** example below, the use of the full stop has made the second sentence ungrammatical – in this case it doesn't have a VERB. This issue is resolved below through the use of a semi colon.
✗ Online communities can provide support for people with particular needs. For example, those with certain medical conditions.	✔ Online communities can provide support for people with particular needs; for example, those with certain medical conditions.
	There are certain words that require sentences to be made up of **two** parts (or clauses). These are CONNECTIVE WORDS such as *although, while, when, whereas, if*. In these cases, you use a comma to divide them.
✗ Although young people have led the adoption of social networking technologies. Older generations are beginning to catch up.	✔ Although young people have led the adoption of social networking technologies, older generations are beginning to catch up.
	To ensure your sentences are grammatical, the best approach is to read them aloud – and to trust your ear.

A diagram shows a sentence parse tree:

- Sentence
  - NP
    - Article → The
    - Noun → man
  - VP
    - Verb → bit
    - NP
      - Article → the
      - Noun → dog

2. Run-on sentences

Problem	Solution
Your sentences may 'run on' without being properly separated from each other. This is in fact the reverse of the previous problem – incomplete sentences. **Example:**	Run-on sentences occur when you put two **complete** sentences together without a joining word, or a full stop. The most common mistake is to separate them with a comma. In your writing, always try be aware of when one sentence ends, and another begins.
✗ Social networking has been a major development of the 21st century, its emergence has had a dramatic effect on how people relate to each other.	✔ Social networking has been a major development of the 21st century. Its emergence has had a dramatic effect on how people relate to each other.
	It is not always necessary to divide information like this into separate sentences. Note: There are other ways the information could be combined.
	✔ Social networking has been a major development of the 21st century, its emergence having had a dramatic effect on how people relate to each other.

3. Countable/uncountable nouns

Problem	Solution
Some of your nouns may be made plural when they can only be singular (i.e. they are uncountable). **Example:**	UNCOUNTABLE NOUNS are generally objects/ things that cannot be separated, and thus counted e.g. *water, rice*. These nouns cannot take 's' and cannot take the indefinite article (*a/ an*), or plural determiners (e.g. *many, these, a lot of*).
X <u>Many research**es**</u> have been done to gather <u>information**s**</u> about the effects of social networking.	**✔** <u>Much</u> research has been done to gather information about the effects of social networking.
	Other common uncountable nouns you are likely to encounter in your studies include: *literature, knowledge, advice, permission, progress, equipment*. It is not always clear why some of these terms are uncountable. It is best just to learn them - and to always avoid using 's' with them.

4. Articles (e.g. a/an, the)

Problem	Solution
Articles may be omitted or used incorrectly **Example:**	The rules for article usage can be complex; however, there is one rule that always applies: A **singular countable noun** ALWAYS needs an **article** (**or determiner** e.g. *this, that*).
X Social networking has had major influence on society in 21st Century.	**✔** Social networking has had **a** major influence on society in **the** 21st Century.
	Sometimes the best way to deal with this issue is to read your work aloud and to trust your ear.

5. Subject-verb agreement (adding 's' to 3rd person singular verbs)

Problem	Solution
Forgetting to add 's' to the end of certain verbs, or adding 's' when you don't need to **Examples:**	Remember the following rule: When the SUBJECT of a sentence is third person singular, and the VERB is in present tense, you must add 's' (e.g. *I like, you like, we like, they like* but......*he/she/it likes*).
X This website support people who are socially isolated.	**✔** This website <u>support**s**</u> people who are socially isolated.
	Sometimes you have to look carefully to determine exactly which is the SUBJECT element of the sentence, and whether it is singular or plural. The key SUBJECT element in the following example is *attraction* not *websites*.
X The attraction of these <u>websites</u> <u>relate</u> to their ability to support people who are socially isolated.	**✔** The <u>attraction</u> of these websites <u>relate**s**</u> to their ability to support people who are socially isolated.

6. Verb tenses

Problem	Solution
Not using verbs in the right tense	Rules for tense usage in academic writing are complex. Many of the mistakes made by students however, relate to the following two rules: 1. When an action has been performed and completed at some **definite** time in the past (e.g. *last year, on Thursday, in the 20th Century*), use SIMPLE PAST.
Examples:	
✗ Smith (2013) **has conducted** a study several years ago into the effects of social media on people's relationships.	✔ Smith (2013) **conducted** a study several years ago into the effects of social media on people's relationships.
	2. When an action (or series of actions) has been performed at some **indefinite time** in the past, and which we think is likely to continue into the present (i.e. the exact time is not important), use PRESENT PERFECT.
✗ Researchers **conducted** many studies into the effects of social media on people's relationships.	✔ Researchers **have conducted** many studies into the effects of social media on people's relationships.

ACTIVITY: Editing task

The following paragraph - taken from the social networking essay - contains a number of the error-types described above. All of these are underlined. See if you can correct the errors.

Some writers are critical of the way that social networking seem to draw users into having such a strong focus on their personal identities (Rosen, 2007). The concern is that social media sites just offer _ vehicle for self-promotion and vanity. In _ interesting study, Buffardi and Campbell (2010) have found that people with 'narcissistic' personality traits tended to be _ greatest users of social media, it is not clear from a study whether social media actually promotes 'narcissism' or whether it is just a tool embraced by those who are already this way inclined. Nevertheless, the literatures express increasing concern about this aspect of the media.

See next page for answers

Useful links:

Learning and Academic Skills (LAS) offers grammar workshops that can help you improve your skills in this area. Get details at **http://www.swin.edu.au/las**

The following is an excellent website from Griffith University in Queensland. It covers the error-types described above in more detail, along with other aspects of English grammar that you may find challenging e.g. passive voice, prepositions, conjunctions.

https://www.griffith.edu.au/international/englishhelp/help-yourself-resources/articles

ACTIVITY: Answers

The following paragraph - taken from the social networking essay - contains a number of the error-types described above. All of these are underlined. See if you can correct the errors.

Some writers are critical of the way that social networking seem**s** to draw users into having such a strong focus on their personal identities (Rosen, 2007). The concern is that social media sites just offer **a** vehicle for self-promotion and vanity. In **an** interesting study, Buffardi and Campbell (2010) **found** that people with 'narcissistic' personality traits tended to be **the** greatest users of social media. **It** is not clear from **the** study whether social media actually promotes 'narcissism' or whether it is just a tool embraced by those who are already this way inclined. Nevertheless, the **literature expresses** increasing concern about this aspect of the media.