

Findings from Lunsford and Lunsford (2008)

Source: <http://www.csudh.edu/ccauthen/575S12/Lunsford.pdf>

Table 1: Most Common Formal Errors (Top 10)

Error or Error Pattern 1986	Error or Error Pattern 2006
1. No comma after introductory element	Wrong word
2. Vague pronoun reference	Missing comma after an introductory element
3. No comma in compound sentence	Incomplete or missing documentation
4. Wrong word	Vague pronoun reference
5. No comma in non-restrictive element	Spelling error (including homonyms)
6. Wrong/missing inflected endings	Mechanical error with a quotation
7. Wrong or missing preposition	Unnecessary comma
8. Comma splice	Unnecessary or missing capitalization
9. Possessive apostrophe error	Missing word
10. Tense shift	Faulty sentence structure

Table 2: Comparison of Average Length of Student Essays, 1917–2006

Year	Average Paper Length
1917	162 words
1930	231 words
1986	422 words
2006	1038 words

Table 3: Comparison of Error Rates per 100 Words

Study	Year	Errors per 100 Words
Johnson	1917	2.11
Witty and Green	1930	2.24
Connors and Lunsford	1986	2.26
Lunsford and Lunsford	2006	2.45/2.299

Sources

Connors, Robert, and Andrea A. Lunsford. "Frequency of Formal Error in Current College Writing, or Ma and Pa Kettle Do Research." *College Composition and Communication* 39.4 (1988): 395–409.

Johnson, Roy Ivan. "The Persistency of Error in English Composition." *School Review* 25 (October 1917): 555–80.

Lunsford, A. and Lunsford, K. "Mistakes Are a Fact of Life: A National Comparative Study." *College Composition and Communication* 59.4 (June 2008): 781-806.

Witty, Paul A., and Roberta La Brant Green. "Composition Errors of College Students." *English Journal* 19 (May 1930): 388–93.