UNNECESSARY SHIFTS

Shifts refer to changes in writing that cause inconsistencies. A shift is unnecessary when logic does not require the shift. Therefore, avoid unnecessary shifts.

SHIFTS IN PERSON: Examples:

**Original:** If a student wants to write well, you must practice.
**Corrected:** If a student wants to write well, he or she must practice.

**Original:** Billy Wayne earned all As. You must be smart to do that.
**Corrected:** Billy Wayne earned all As. He must be smart to do that.

Explanation: *I, we, me, us, my, mine, our, ours* are first-person pronouns. *You, your, yours* are second person. All other pronouns and all words to which they can refer are third person. Thus, in the examples above, the two originals contain shifts in person: from third person (student) to second person (you) and from third person (Billy Wayne) to second person (you). Logic does not require these shifts. In fact, logic requires that the writer keep the same person, as shown in the corrections. The third person (not second person you) is appropriate in formal writing.

SHIFTS IN NUMBER: Examples:

**Original:** A student enjoys writing; they find pleasure in expressing their thoughts.

**Corrected:** A student enjoys writing; he finds pleasure in expressing his thoughts.
**Corrected:** Students enjoy writing; they find pleasure in expressing their thoughts.

Explanation: In the original there is a shift in number from singular to plural (from student to they). In the corrections there is no shift in number: student, he and his are all singular; students, they and their are all plural.

SHIFTS IN TENSE: Examples:

**Original:** Johnny Mac went to the movie and sits in the front row.

**Corrected:** Johnny Mac went to the movie and sat in the front row.
**Corrected:** Johnny Mac goes to the movie and sits in the front row.

Explanation: In the original there is a shift in the tense of verbs from past tense (went) to present tense (sits). In the corrections there is no shift in number: went and sat are both in the past tense; goes and sits are both in the present tense.