1. Subject verb agreement – if the subject is plural, the verb must agree. An example of incorrect usage: Student funding policies is wrong. Correct: Student funding policies are wrong.

2. Think and feel: Please think your thoughts and feel your feelings. Feeling words such as sad, mad, glad, bad and scared stand alone. For example, I might say “I am sad” to express my feelings. If I want to tell you what I think, believe, observe and so forth I might say, “I think that students deserve better student loan funding and lower tuition fees.” I would not say, “I feel [mad, bad, . . .?] that students deserve better student loan funding.” I might say “I feel sad for those women and men who are not able to attend university because of tuition fees.” Note the word ‘that’ – a thinking word – does not appear in a feeling sentence.

3. Use plain language writing. “I do believe that student loan funding and tuition fees are a major barrier for women and men who hope to attend university in this economic climate.” I would not rework that sentence to say, “It is my observation that parliamentary policies and academic administrations are culprits in pursuing policies that stifle avenues to higher learning.” The latter sentence might look more ‘impressive’ but it actually obscures the meaning and the reader might have to read it twice to get the meaning – always a killer for busy profs with many papers to mark.

4. Please avoid repetitious writing. If you write something on page 3, do not repeat the same idea on page 7 just to ‘pad’ your paper. Professors see the repetition and wonder if you believe that they might have missed the earlier point.

5. Remember to always put quotations in quotation marks, followed by the reference to where you found the quote. If your quote is long, please indent 5 spaces and type the quotation without quotation marks into your paper and include the reference at the end in the style you are using (APA, MLA, etc.).

6. Please avoid passive verbs—by their very ‘passive’ nature they detract from your work, which you want to present in a strong manner—and one good way to do that is to use strong, active verbs.

7. Sentences that confuse, sentences that lack a subject or a verb, sentences that ramble along for a paragraph and other sentences that cause the reader to backtrack are problematic. Rewrite the sentence in a more engaging and straightforward manner . . .

8. Edit your work. And no, this does not mean reading it over quickly on the computer before printing it off and handing it in. If this is an important assignment, print your draft, and then—with pencil in hand – read it out loud! This is a foolproof method for editing your work and

Used with permission: Jane Birkbeck.
often results in an improved mark. Another suggestion is to let the draft sit for 24 hours. Looking at it with fresh eyes a day or so later usually catches mistakes.

9. Confusion with affect/effect: This is a common error, easily remedied. The verbs: 
   Affect is to ACT ON - Eg: ‘The cold weather affected his hearing.’ Effect is to bring about: "cold weather effects hearing problems." The nouns: Affect relates to the emotions; Effect is the result of something, ‘The effect of the cold weather was to create many hearing problems.’

10. Please check for spelling errors, for example "definitely" – a word often spelled incorrectly. There is really no excuse for this as all computer packages have a spelling function. The only problem is that you must watch that the word is not confused with another word, as the spellchecker won’t find these.

11. Finally, to end as we began with verbs [a good conclusion always refers to the beginning of the paper], please reread your work to be certain it is all in the same tense. If your paper starts in present, it is worth your time to read through your essay and look for places you might have jumped into past tense.