

## Writing skills: common problems

Read the following passage of text. It contains four examples of common presentational problems. List these and note how you would correct these errors.

Criminal damage refers to crimes where any person without lawful excuse intentionally or recklessly destroys or damages property belonging to another. This is an offence contrary to Section 1(1) of the Criminal Damage Act. A great deal of Criminal Damage that is reported to the Police takes the form of Vandalism. Graffiti is a particular problem, particularly in urban areas. According to the British Crime Survey, criminal damage is perceived as an insignificant crime. But vandalism and graffiti are considered to be serious as they have strong associations with anti-social behaviour which is a major cause of public concern. This is thought to be because the appearance of a Neighborhood has a significant impact on the local community and a neglected physical environment is generally perceived to be unsafe.

**1. Unnecessary capitalisation.** Words such as criminal damage, police, crime and vandalism do not require capital letters. It is common for students to use a capital letter at the beginning of any word that they feel is important such as Crime, Court and Police but this is incorrect as capital letters should only be used for proper nouns or at the start of a sentence.

**2. Misspelling.** There is an additional 's' in recklessly, an 'f' is missing from graffiti and the American spelling of neighbourhood has been used.

**3. Duplicated words.** In the fourth sentence, it is stated that graffiti is a particular problem and that is particularly so in urban areas. The repetition of the same word in a single sentence is generally regarded as poor practice (unless it is done intentionally for emphasis) as it suggests that the writer is too lazy to find an alternative word. It is not difficult to rephrase the sentence to improve its phrasing: 'graffiti is a particular problem, especially in urban areas' is a much better alternative.

**4. Incorrect use of a conjunction.** The sixth sentence starts with the word 'but'. This word is a conjunction so should be used in the middle of a sentence to join two statements together (denoting that the later part of the sentence is an exception to the statement contained in the first part of the sentence). The solution to this is either to join two sentences together (According to the British Crime Survey, criminal damage is perceived as an insignificant crime but vandalism and graffiti are considered to be serious) or to replace the word 'but' with an alternative such as 'however'.

**Note:** although it is not an issue of presentation as such, there is also an absence of referencing in this sample paragraph. A year should be provided for the Criminal Damage Act and there should be some reference to indicate which of the British Crime Surveys is being used as the source of the information. It would also be reasonable to expect some reference for the attitudinal information concerning lack of safety being associated with poor physical surroundings.