

## ONLINE GRAMMAR CHECKERS AND THEIR USE FOR EFL WRITING

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**Abstract:** The presence of online grammar checkers as the result of technology advancement is inevitable to be popular among academicians and researchers. With more complete features offered to help improving writing, many utilize these tools to accomplish their work. This paper, thus, aims to present an overview of online grammar checkers and their use for EFL writing. Specifically, this paper explicates online grammar checkers and reviews some research investigating the use of these applications for writing. In addition, brief reviews about a number of online grammar checker tools comprising Grammarly, ProWritingAid, Ginger, and GrammarCheck are provided. Last, some suggestions are also offered for teachers and future researchers regarding the use of online grammar checkers.

**Keywords:** *online grammar checkers, grammar, feedback, EFL writing*

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## INTRODUCTION

Writing in our own language can be difficult. It can become more difficult when we write in a new language (Blanchard & Root, 2003:1). In higher education, furthermore, EFL students need to be able to write academic writing which indeed needs specific skills. They have to write in the form of formal English and be familiar with various kinds of text organizations. However, many EFL students still found problems in writing (Hasanah, 2011; Masduqi, 2011; Cahyani, 2011), especially in grammar (Ghufroon & Rosyida, 2018; Karyuwatry et al., 2018; Yang, 2018). It may make students struggle to fulfil the demand of schools and universities because of the language barriers.

As a matter of fact, grammar is one of the language components that is very instrumental in EFL writing. In academic writing, EFL students' writing quality will show their intelligibility and comprehension which is always underscored in higher education (Yang, 2018). Of course, to be grammatically correct is a must because it is also one of the criteria determining the quality of writing as well as to enhance the comprehension of readers. Students must be aware of numerous grammatical rules from sentence structure and forms to even the use of articles besides developing their ideas to write. Due to this complexity, students can feel discouraged and demotivated to learn writing (Karyuwatry et al., 2018). In other words, this component becomes one major challenge for EFL students to master.

The job of teachers is to facilitate students to advance their writing. This can be done through revising stage of the writing process. In this stage, teachers can play an essential role as a feedback provider, especially in giving grammar corrective feedback. Research has revealed that corrective feedback can help improve students' writing (Daneshvar & Rahimi, 2013; Kisananto, 2016; Farjadnasab & Khodashenaz, 2017). Unfortunately, it also takes more

effort from teachers given that they may have lack of time to correct all of their students' writing (Cavaleri & Dianati, 2016). One teacher may have 20 to 40 students in a class, and that means he or she needs to give written feedback to all students' writing. Sometimes, one time of editing and revising is not sufficient. This is why feedback provision takes a lot of time and energy. Teachers may be abandoned by the abundant teaching loads and the time constraints that make them get obstacles to provide corrective feedback comprehensively.

The emergence of online grammar checkers nowadays is considered to be the answer to this issue. These online tools promote to be able to eliminate grammar errors, misspelling, incorrect punctuation, sentence structure problems and beyond, which sounds very promising. The presence of this technology starts to attract practitioners' and researchers' attention. Plenty of research has been done investigating the use of online grammar checkers for editing writing (Chen et al., 2009; Radi, 2015; Cavaleri & Dianati, 2016; Jayavalan, 2018; Ghufroon & Rosyida, 2018; Karyuatry et al., 2018; Yang, 2018; Gain et al., 2019; O'Neill & Russell, 2019). It is inevitable that utilizing technology such as these tools for the sake of improving writing tends to be a necessity today.

This paper, therefore, aims to discuss the existence of online grammar checkers and their use for EFL writing. In specific, the paper firstly delineates online grammar checkers and reviews some research investigating the use of these tools for writing. Further, this paper also provides brief reviews of several online grammar checker tools. Lastly, the conclusions are drawn, and some suggestions are offered for teachers, and future researchers.

## **ONLINE GRAMMAR CHECKERS**

In writing, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling serve as the vital elements. They are essential to enhance the comprehension of readers. Writing with the correct grammar can help writers deliver a precise message to their readers which, in turn, creates a clear communication between the writers and the readers. Grammar is related to the structure and forms of words as well as sentence arrangement; thus it is crucial in writing (Gain et al., 2019). Therefore, grammar checking and editing become important parts in the writing process.

Online grammar checkers are online tools that provide grammar checking for writing. Not only grammar, most of them are completed with spelling and punctuation. Some even can go beyond basic correction by checking contextual mistakes, word choices, and plagiarism. These tools enable writers to correct mistakes with a high degree of accuracy and speed. These various online grammar checkers available commercially. While a number of tools still need payment for the subscription in order to give full access for all their services, some give free access to use, others provide both free and paid options with different services obtained.

The tools offer a quick access for checking and correction. By only typing the key words for online grammar checkers through the search engine, people will be recommended with a plethora of the tools. After visiting the web, what people need to do is only to type their texts, copy and paste, or upload the document on an available box. Then, with one click the tool will immediately process and highlight the mistakes in the forms of symbols and comments. Suggested corrections are also available so as people can easily edit their writing. With all the

convenience and easiness offered, no wonder these tools get the popularity among academicians and researchers (Chen et al., 2009; Gain et al., 2019).

## RESEARCH ON ONLINE GRAMMAR CHECKERS FOR EFL WRITING

The popularity of writing assistant tools such as online grammar checkers has been growing nowadays, especially for EFL writing. Academicians and students start to utilize these tools for assisting them for improving their writing because the key features offered by the tools meet their needs. Researchers also has attracted to study the use of these tools for EFL writing. Many investigations have been made, and their focuses are varying. In this part, this paper attempts to review some of this research.

Researchers confirm that feedback is an essential part in EFL writing (Ghufron & Rosyida, 2018; O'Neill & Russell, 2019). Therefore, feedback provision becomes important in the process of writing. The presence of writing assistant tools, thus, are considered helpful for assisting the feedback provision. Yet, Yang (2018) argues that such tools actually was not conceived positively in writing classes in the early 1990s. That was because grammar checkers at that time were restricted to detect spelling and grammar errors without giving constructive comments on content and organization. Today, with the advancement of technology the tool providers may argue that online grammar checkers they offer are available with more various and complete features. This is why a number of researchers have attempted to investigate the quality or performance of these online grammar checkers for providing informative feedback.

Chen et al. (2009) conducted an investigation toward the strengths and weaknesses of feedback provided by the two automated evaluation system, namely Vantage My Access and ETS Criterion. The systems were tested to 269 students' essays. The findings showed that these systems could provide 30 different types of feedback messages. When comparing the two systems, Criterion performed better event though both systems still failed to detect some mistakes. Therefore, the researchers suggested that teachers and students who want to use these tools should be aware of the weaknesses. Different result showed by Yang (2018) who examined the efficiency an online grammar checker, SpellCheckPlus, in English writing performance using a mixed-method design. Among the three writing assignments administered to the students, the research reported that there was no significant decrease in errors between the first and second assignments while the significant decrease was found between the second and the third assignments. This research confirmed that this online grammar checker is useful for low-proficient L2 learners' writing.

Two experiments were implemented by Ghufron & Rosyida (2018) and Jayavalan (2018) to test the effect of online grammar checker, Grammarly, on students' writing. Conducted in Indonesia, Ghufron & Rosyida (2018) investigated the effect of Grammarly in reducing students' errors in EFL writing compared to teacher corrective feedback. 20 university students in the experimental group were facilitated with Grammarly while the other 20 university students in the control group got teacher feedback. The results showed that there was a significant reduction in errors from the experimental group compared to the control group, meaning that Grammarly was effective in helping the students identify their errors. However, this research also found that the tool was still less effective to refine the content and organization of the writing. Thus, as suggested by the researchers, an alternative feedback is still necessary to complement the feedback. Different context of ELT is presented by Jayavalan

(2018) who conducted his research in Malaysia. He argued that Malaysian students still struggled in writing. Because of that, he focused his research on how the effect of Grammarly on students' ability in constructing correct sentences in writing essays. He found that this tool could aid the students to write sentences which were grammatically accurate. In a nutshell, both experimental researchers confirm that online grammar checker gives significant effect on students' writing accuracy.

Meanwhile, Karyuwatry et al. (2018) were interested to use online grammar checker for improving students' writing quality through a Classroom Action Research (CAR). In the preliminary research, they found that the students were discouraged to learn EFL writing because they felt that writing was difficult. Thus, the researchers believed that using online grammar checker could motivate the students to write besides improve their writing. After implementing two cycles of teaching, the results showed that there was an increase in the students' writing scores and the students gave positive attitude toward the use of online grammar checker.

Pertaining to students' perceptions toward online grammar checkers, some researchers have revealed their findings. Cavaleri and Dianati (2016) and O'Neill and Russell (2019) explored the university students' perceptions related to the use of Grammarly. Both research also showed similar findings. Cavaleri and Dianati (2016) found that the students perceived that Grammarly as a useful and practical tool to use. They also felt that this tool was able to improve their writing and understanding of grammar rules. O'Neill and Russell's (2019) research showed that students receiving feedback from Grammarly gave more positive responses and were significantly more satisfied with Grammarly than those who did not use the tool. In other words, the research found that students' perceptions on the use of online grammar checkers were positive.

Based on the aforementioned results of research, there are some points to highlight. First, many research show that online grammar checkers are helpful for improving writing even though there are also some which unveil the failure of the tools in detecting some errors. Second, the researchers agree that online grammar checkers can help correcting grammar mistakes, but still they may not yet be optimum in improving the content and organization of writing. Lastly, students perceive online grammar checkers as the helpful tools for them improve their writing.

## **SEVERAL ONLINE GRAMMAR CHECKERS**

There are a great deal number of online grammar checkers available in the Internet with various services offered. All offer their own key features to help editing any texts instantly and effectively. This article attempts to give brief reviews of several online grammar checkers. It is hoped that the reviews are sufficiently informative for teachers, students, and researchers who want to use the following grammar checkers on the basis of their need.

### **Grammarly**

Grammarly is an online platform that offers grammar and spelling checking developed by Grammarly, Inc., It is considerable to be the most popular and the leading grammar checking

tool for researchers (Gain et al., 2019). Therefore, there are a lot of studies have investigated the usage of this tool (Ghufron & Rosyida, 2018; Jayavalan, 2018; Gain et al., 2019; O'Neill & Russell, 2019) for academic purposes.

Grammarly has succeeded to gain its popularity because it offers more complete services which are essential to improve writing. The tool checks more than 250 common and advanced grammatical rules in addition to spelling, punctuation, word choice, and style mistakes. Furthermore, by installing Grammarly's free browser extension for Chrome, Safari, Firefox, and Edge, it can help users write correctly on nearly every site on the web. It also offers Grammarly Premium as a paid upgrade that offers more than 400 types of checks and features for grammatical errors and provides vocabulary enhancement and citation suggestions, and plagiarism detection. Not to mention that Grammar gives evaluation on writing's correctness, clarity, engagement and delivery and provides the overall score of writing. Below is the display of feedback given by Grammarly Free Writing Assistant.

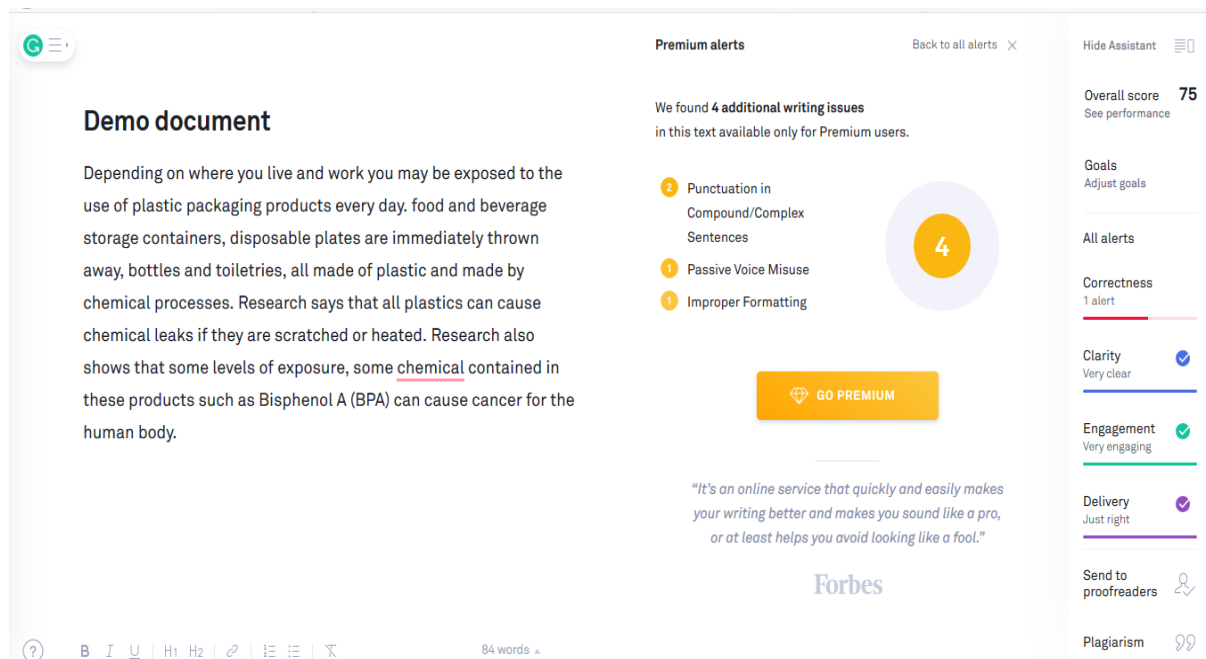


Figure 1. The Display of Feedback by Grammarly Free Writing Assistant

However, people also find that this tool has some shortcomings. As retrieved from TopTenReview.com (<https://www.toptenreviews.com/best-online-grammar-checker>, retrieved in October 28, 2019), although Grammarly give comprehensive suggestions on mistakes, the suggestions will be most helpful to people well versed in grammar and punctuation terms. The explanation may be too advanced for novice writers or people who are just learning English. In addition, the price for the premium subscription is not cheap. This may make people would think twice to subscribe.

### ProWritingAid

ProWritingAid is an online editing tool which also emerges to be one of the best writing assistants. What makes this application distinctive from others is in the way of presenting the



reports of feedback. This application offers more in-depth reports than other grammar checker tools which helps analyze the text in 20 different reports in order to appeal different users with different strengths and weaknesses in writing. Of the 20 reports, these includes style, grammar, overused words, clichés, thesaurus, repeats, length, pronoun, alliteration, transition, diction, and plagiarism. Besides comprehensive reports, the tool also gives scores to each report as well as the overall score, making the writers easier to improve the text. Moreover, ProWritingAid also integrates with other applications like Ms. Word, Open Office, Google Docs, Scrivener, and Google Chrome for the ease of editing.

The example of scoring and reports given by this tool can be seen in Figure 2 below. Once the users login the web, there is a space to type the text or upload the document (see Figure 2) while at the top part are the options provided that the users can choose what reports they want to know. The intended reports will show just in one click.

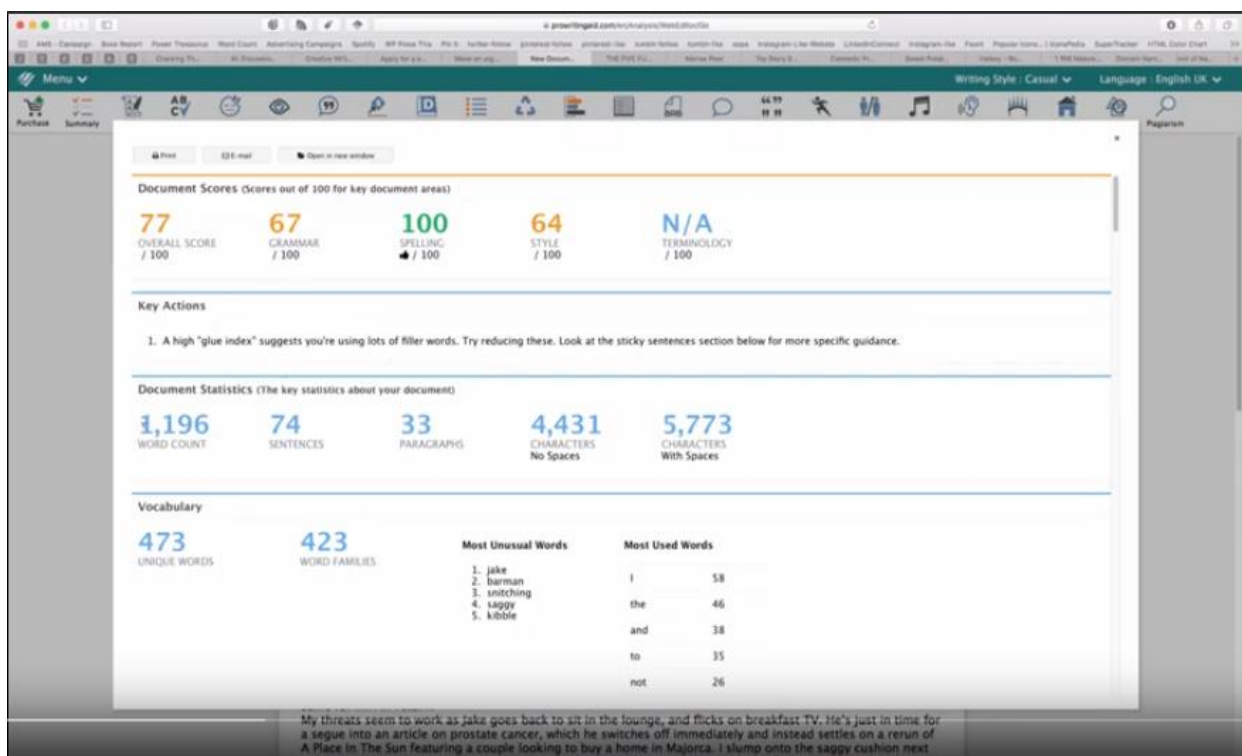


Figure 3. The Display of Scoring and Feedback by ProWritingAid  
 Source: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M\\_EzYMzQYAk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_EzYMzQYAk)

Besides the aforementioned strengths, this application also has some limitations. TopTenReviews.com mentions a number of limitations from ProWritingAid. Firstly, the tool does not provide online text box correction. People need to register first before using both free and premium services. Last, the complete reports of correction provided by this tool may sometimes make the feedback itself is not succinct. It may require users' comprehension to follow the correction.

## Ginger

Ginger is also a grammar application that offers a quick proofreading various services for its users. Using patent-pending technology, the tool guarantee can correct various grammar mistakes including in the areas of subject-verb agreement, singular vs. plural nouns, consecutive nouns, misused words, and contextual spelling correction. It helps identifies the correction that best fits the meaning of the original sentence and provides suggestions for alternative structures. Similar to Grammarly and ProWritingAid, this tool also can integrate with other applications, such as Twitter, LikedIn, Facebook, and Gmail, which enables the users to use its keyboard in those applications. More interestingly, Ginger also has a translate tool. According to TopTenRevicews.com, the translate feature from Ginger has a slightly better performance than Google translate (<https://www.toptenreviews.com/best-online-grammar-checker>, retrieved on October 28, 2019). Here is the display of Ginger as shown in Figure 2.

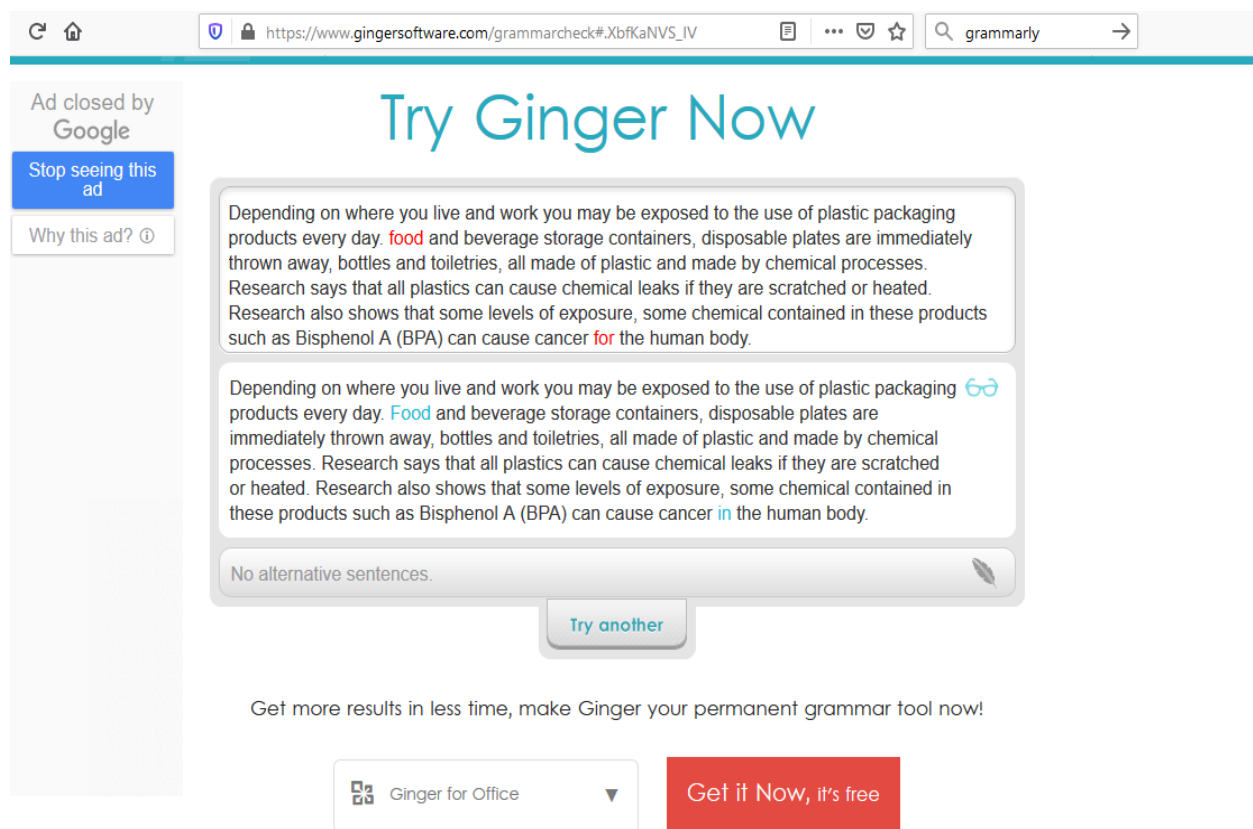


Figure 3. The Display of Feedback by Ginger Free Check

Like many other online applications, this tool also proffers subscription. There are two types of subscriptions, namely basic and regular subscriptions. However, as quoted from TopTenReviews.com, the users are unable to get access to the key features when using basic subscription. Thus, the regular subscription is recommended by this tool in order for the users to utilize all the key features. Unfortunately, the users need to pay for the regular subscription to get its best services. If only using the free check as shown in Figure 2, the feedback is given in the form of alternative texts with text-coloring to identify the mistakes and the correction.

## GrammarCheck

GrammarCheck is an online tool that focuses on checking grammar and spelling. Compared to the other three grammar checkers above, it is considered to be the simplest and the handiest tool to use. This is a free access tool that does not need any software installation and user registration. It provides two options of checking, namely Free Check and Deep Check. Users can use Free Check by clicking the option button after typing the text on the available box, and the system immediately shows underlined prompts that point out spelling errors, grammar suggestions, or style suggestions even though sometimes it tends to miss more small punctuation errors (see Figure 4). Meanwhile, the way Deep Check works is similar to Free Check, but the difference is that Deep Check is able to detect more difficult-to-spot mistakes. For those who need a quick and simple correction for their writing without more advanced feedback, this tool can be the choice.

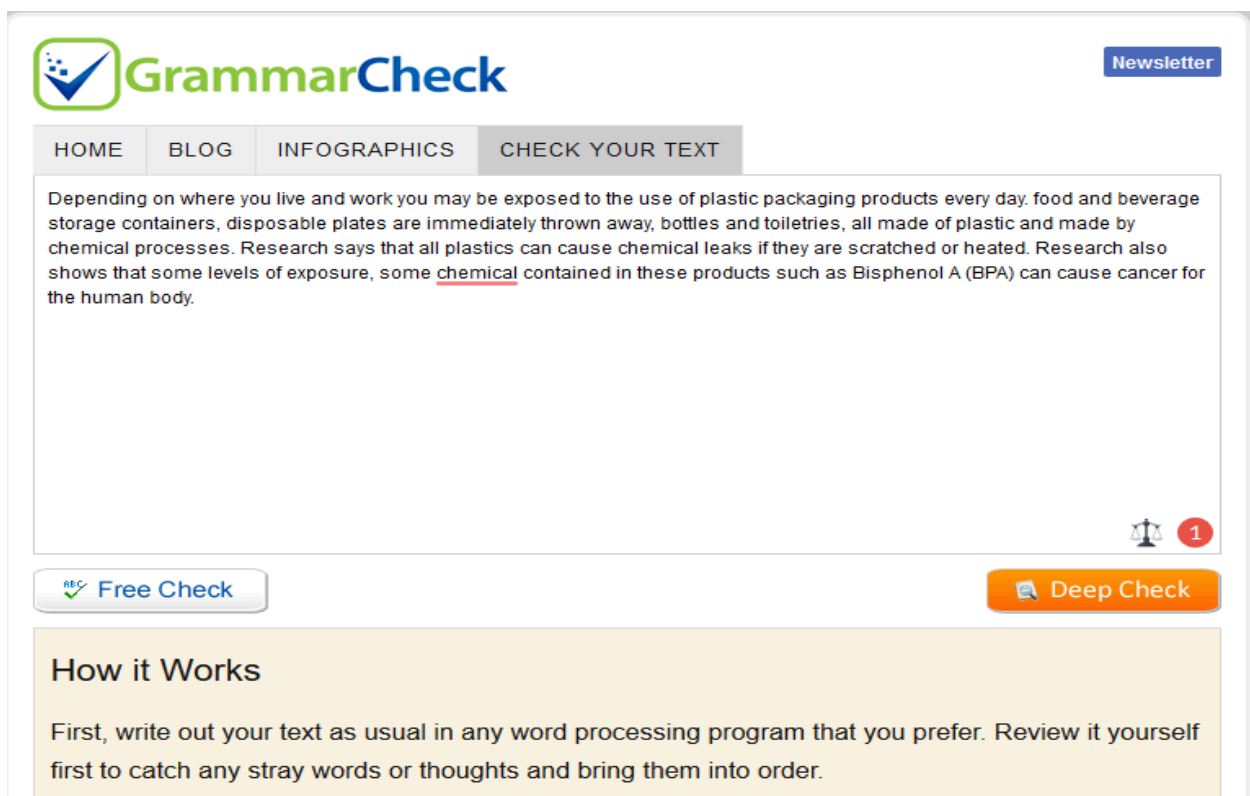


Figure 4. The Display of Feedback by GrammarCheck Free Check

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

### Conclusion

The presence of online grammar checkers are considered to be the solution for improving EFL writing today. Producing EFL writing is basically an on-going process that takes time; therefore, such tools are helpful to assist both teachers and students, especially in editing and revising stages, to improve writing more effectively and efficiently. There are various features



offered by the tools, and teachers and students can utilize them based on their needs. Nevertheless, these tools also have some limitations related to their capability of detecting all mistakes and improving all elements of writing. Therefore, teachers and students should be aware of the limitations when using these tools.

## Suggestions

Here are some suggestions offered:

1. For teachers: alternative feedback should still be offered to students because not all elements of writing (for example content and organization) can be provided by online grammar checkers.
2. For future writers: future writers may further investigate how online grammar checkers help students improve the content and organization of writing as well as examine EFL teachers' perceptions toward these tools.

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