Correct Sentences

Do not carelessly write parts of sentences or double sentences as if they were complete sentences. Incomplete sentences are called *fragments*—because they are only a fragment of a sentence. Double sentences are usually called *fused sentences* (or sometimes *run-on sentences* or *comma splices*) —because they are two sentences incorrectly stuck together.

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Incomplete sentences: fragments

A fragment is not a sentence. It is part of a sentence punctuated as if it were a sentence.

To avoid misusing fragments, first check to make sure your sentence has both a subject and a verb. Here are two examples:

Rows of chairs in front of the podium.
Seventeen new Brooks Brothers suits.

These examples are both fragments because they lack verbs. The action or state of being for the chairs and the suits is missing. On the other hand, take these two examples:

Returning to the office after lunch.
And to meet the new supervisor.

These examples are fragments because they lack a subject. The person who is returning or meeting is missing.

When you see these kinds of fragments standing alone, you can spot them easily. Sometimes, however, in the context of other sentences, they aren't so obvious. For example:

Consolidated Microchips is hiring engineers.
Engineers with backgrounds in computer science.

The second sentence here is a fragment: it lacks a verb. Engineers do what? As another example:

He was trying to follow the word-processing instructions. Which were hard to understand.

The second sentence is a fragment: it lacks a subject. What were hard to understand?

Spot the fragments in these sentences:

She brought a slide projector. The one from the Audiovisual Department.

"The one from the Audiovisual Department" is a fragment because it has no verb.

He was offered a job at Consolidated Microchips.
And was given a starting salary larger than his father's.

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"And was given a starting salary larger than his father's" is a fragment because it has no subject.

Checking for subject and verb, then, is the first step in detecting a fragment. But you have a second check as well. Say you had written this:

> After the new management had doubled the workers' production.

You check for subject (*management*) and verb (*had doubled*)—but this is still a fragment. Why? Perhaps you can hear intuitively that the sentence doesn't really end; as a reader, you are still waiting to hear the rest. The grammatical reason, however, is that the word *after* subordinates the subject and verb (as we discussed on pages 211–12). Subordinated subjects and verbs cannot stand alone as sentences. Two more examples:

> My boss believes that we should work sixty hours a week. And that we should never take vacations.

The second sentence here is a fragment, because of the subordinator *that*.

> We are surprised when the computer is working. And when the printer is working as well.

Again, the second sentence here is a fragment, because of the subordinator *when*.

In summary, to avoid carelessly writing fragments, check each sentence for a complete (unsubordinated) subject and verb.

You may, however, very occasionally use fragments for emphasis, parallelism, and conversational tone. For instance, the last two sentences in the following example use fragments consciously (not carelessly) for emphasis.

> **Use sparingly for emphasis:** Practice your speech thoroughly. Rehearse out loud. On your feet. With your visual aids.

Double sentences

A double sentence is two sentences stuck together incorrectly as if they were one sentence. Some people call double sentences *fused sentences* because they are fused together incorrectly. Some call them *run-on sentences* because they are run together incorrectly. Finally, some people call a certain type of double sentence a *comma splice* because it contains two sentences spliced together incorrectly with a comma. Regardless of what

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you call double sentences, they are incorrect and may confuse your reader.

Let's look at two correct sentences as an example:

Correct: The recruiter was impressed by her well-written résumé. He also noted that she appeared poised and articulate during her interview.

Now, let's look at how those two correct sentences might have been incorrectly written. First, they might have been incorrectly joined with a comma:

Incorrect: The recruiter was impressed by her well-written résumé, he also noted that she appeared poised and articulate during her interview.

Second, they might have been incorrectly joined with a dash:

Incorrect: The recruiter was impressed by her well-written résumé—he also noted that she appeared poised and articulate during her interview.

One of the most common double-sentence errors involves the use of transitional words or phrases. Transitions, as we discussed in chapter 8, are like bridges or glue between your ideas. They include such words as: *finally, however, therefore, for example,* and *and on the other hand.* (See page 199 for a complete list of transitions.) Students often write fused sentences like this one, with two complete sentences—"She color-coded. . . ." and "She used. . . .—joined incorrectly with a comma and the transition *for example:*

Incorrect: She color-coded her visual aid, for example, she used red to mark decreases in sales.

As another example, here are two complete sentences—"He delivered. . . ." and "He did not speak. . . ."—joined incorrectly with a comma and the transition *however:*

Incorrect: He delivered a well-organized presentation, however, he did not speak loudly enough.

Watch out especially for fused sentences involving a comma plus a transition.

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To de-fuse fused sentences into correct grammatical units, you have four choices. First, you can separate every main clause with a period, like this:

Correct: The recruiter was impressed by her well-written résumé. He also noted that she appeared poised and articulate during her interview.

Setting off every sentence with a period implies to your reader that every sentence is equally important.

Second, you can separate sentences with a semicolon, like this:

Correct: The recruiter was impressed by her well-written résumé; he also noted that she appeared poised and articulate during her interview.

In one sense, the semicolon is equal in strength to a period; they both separate sentences correctly. In another sense, however, the semicolon is different because it ties the two sentences together—more closely than they are tied to other sentences in the paragraph. For example, take a look back through this paragraph. The second sentence, starting "In one sense," consists of two sentences joined by a semicolon. Because they are joined by the semicolon, those two ideas tie together more closely than they do to the other sentences in the paragraph.

Third, you can add a coordinating conjunction, like this:

Correct: The recruiter was impressed by her well-written résumé and he also noted that she appeared poised and articulate during her interview.

Coordinating conjunctions are strong connectors, strong enough to connect sentences. They are relatively easy to remember because only seven exist: *and*, *but*, *or*, *for*, *nor*, *so*, and *yet*. Instead of definitely separating ideas, as you do with periods, you are relating ideas if you use coordinating conjunctions: *and* relates ideas of equal importance, *but* implies a contrast is coming up, and so forth.

As a fourth choice, you can use a subordinator. Subordinators make one part of your sentence subordinate—or less important—than the other part. Typical subordinators include *although*, *since*, and *while*. See page 212 for a complete list. Instead of separating ideas of equal importance, as you would with a period or semicolon, when you use a subordinator you are emphasizing one part of your sentence. For example, here the writer subordinates the résumé and emphasizes the interview:

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425 **Correct:** Because she had such a well-written résumé, the recruiter was not surprised that she was poised and articulate during her interview.

In the next example, the writer subordinates—or makes less important—the interview.

Correct: Although he was impressed with her interviewing skills, the interviewer commented on her well-written résumé.

Parallelism

The last thing to keep in mind to construct correct sentences is parallelism. *Parallelism* means expressing ideas of equal importance in grammatical structure of equal importance. For example, to describe three job duties, write: "*editing*, *proofreading*, and *designing* layout." Do NOT write: "*editing*, *proofreading*, and *the design* of layout." What's the difference? In the second example, the third item is not grammatically parallel to the other two items. In this case, all three items should be *-ing*-ending verbs. In other cases, items might be all nouns, all verbs, all infinitives, whatever—as long as all equally important ideas use the same form.

Why does parallelism matter? The reason, once again, is your reader: readers can understand and follow your thoughts much faster if you use effective parallelism. The following examples illustrate different kinds of parallelism, and—I hope—how parallel forms are easier to read than unparallel forms.

1. Parallel adjectives

Correct: He was *sensitive* and *helpful*.
Incorrect: He was *sensitive* and *a big help*.

Correct: Your *original*, *clever* idea will make your boss happy.
Incorrect: Your idea is *original*, *clever*, and *will make* your boss happy.

2. Parallel nouns

Correct: The new manager is *a genius*, *a leader*, and *a hard worker*.
Incorrect: The new manager is *a genius*, *a leader*, and *works hard*.

3. *Parallel verbs*

Correct: If the staff members are well motivated, they will *arrive*

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at work on time, *correct* their own mistakes, and *use* less sick leave.

Incorrect: If the staff members are well motivated, they will *arrive* at work on time, *correct* their own mistakes, and *fewer* sick days will be used.

4. Parallel clauses

Correct: Some business professors *teach by lecturing*; others *teach by using* the case method.

Incorrect: Some business professors *teach by lecturing*, unlike *the alternative use* of the case method.

5. Parallel bullet points

Correct: The president announced we plan to
- *trim* the overseas staff,
- *cut* the domestic-marketing budget, and
- *improve* quality control.

Incorrect: The president announced we plan to
- *trim* the overseas staff,
- *cut* the domestic-marketing budget, and
- *quality control* will be improved.

6. Parallel internal enumeration

Correct: To use the word processor, (1) *insert* the program disk in drive A, (2) *insert* the file disk in drive B, and (3) *turn* on the computer in all three places.

Incorrect: To use the word processor, (1) *insert* the program disk in drive A, (2) *the file disk* goes in drive B, and (3) *don't forget to* turn on the computer in all three places.

7. Parallel coordinating conjunctions (such as *and* or *but*) or correlative conjunctions (such as *either-or*). (See page 424 for more information on conjunctions.)

Correct: Neither *expanding* the sales staff nor *increasing* the number of advertisements can save this product.

Incorrect: Neither *expanding* the sales staff nor *more advertisements* can save this product.

8. Parallel comparisons (*more than, less than, equal to*)

Correct: On the phone, first *identifying* yourself is more effective than *starting* right off with your sales pitch.

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Incorrect: On the phone, first *identifying* yourself is more effective than the get-right-down-to-the-sales-pitch *approach.*

9. Parallel repeated words

Correct: He always hands in *his* payroll sheets, *his* data cards, and *his* time reports on the first of the month

or

Correct: He always hands in his *payroll sheets*, *data cards*, and *time reports* on the first of the month.

Incorrect: He always hands in *his* payroll sheets, *data cards*, and *his* time report on the first of the month.

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