

Appendix B focuses on a few of the common types of mechanical mistakes and areas in which care must be taken to maintain appropriate business communications. Grammatical issues include dangling modifiers, document coherence, and parallel structure. Punctuation is also covered as well as style details, such as abbreviations, numbers, and word choice.

GRAMMAR

Questions of grammar include items to do with the structure of sentences and clauses. The Seven C's of Effective Communication in Chapter 2 deals with specific grammatical constructions and recommended usage for business documents.

Dangling Modifiers

Any modifier, which is a word that qualifies in some way another word in the sentence, must clearly relate to the word it modifies. A modifier that is separated from the word it relates to is called a *dangling modifier*. Modifiers can dangle at the beginning of the sentence, within the sentence as a subordinate clause in which some elements are not expressed, or at the end of the sentence. Note the following examples.

At the beginning of a sentence:

Unclear: Expecting an important E-mail message, my computer stayed on all afternoon.

Clear: Expecting an important E-mail message, I checked my mail often during the afternoon.

Explanation: The first example suggests that the computer was expecting the message. Changing the subject of the main clause to "I" removes the dangling modifier.

Unclear: Upset by the team's performance, the arena began to empty.

Clear: Upset by the team's performance, the fans began to leave the arena.

Explanation: The first example suggests the arena was upset by the team's performance. Changing the subject of the main clause to "the fans" corrects the error.

Within the sentence:

Unclear: When only five, my mother taught me how to read.

Clear: When I was only five, my mother taught me how to read.

Explanation: The missing words in the first example (a dangling elliptical clause) make the sentence confusing. The simplest way to correct a dangling elliptical clause is to supply the missing words.

At the end of a sentence:

Unclear: Every member of the project team worked conscientiously, thus producing a project overwhelmingly approved of by the board of directors.

Clear: Because every member of the project team worked conscientiously, we produced a project overwhelmingly approved of by the board of directors.

Explanation: A modifier following the main clause should refer to a definite noun or noun phrase, not to the general idea expressed by the clause.

Coherence

Certain words and phrases help tie sentences together and help make the document coherent. The following chart provides categories and examples of these connecting words and phrases:

Category

Addition (and)

Contrast, concession, dismissal, replacement (but)

Reason (for)

Result, effect (so)

Consequence

Illustration

Similarity

Examples

Also, furthermore, in addition, additionally

However, nevertheless, in contrast, conversely, on the other hand, though, even so, still/yet, in spite of, despite, regardless of this, in any case

For this reason, because of, in view of, with this in mind

Therefore, thus, as a result, consequently, as a consequence, in consequence, hence, accordingly

Then, if so, if not, in that case, in that event, under these circumstances, otherwise

For example, for instance, namely, in particular, for one thing, as an illustration

Similarly, likewise, in the same way, by the same token

Clarification, Identification

In other words, to put it another way, specifically, namely, that is to say

Sequence

First, first of all, at first, firstly, to begin with, second, secondly, next, then, subsequently, afterward, later, meanwhile, to conclude, finally, eventually, at last, lastly, in the end, last but not least

Summation

In conclusion, in sum, to summarize, in short, briefly, to be brief, in a word

Review

As was previously mentioned/ stated/pointed out, as I have said

Generalization

In general, overall, on the whole, all in all

Changing the subject

By the way, incidentally, to change the subject

Returning to the subject

Anyway, at any rate, to return to the point

Parallel Structure

Parallel structure is the use of the same grammatical form or structure for equal ideas in a list or comparison. The balance of equal elements in a sentence helps show the relationship between ideas. Often the equal elements repeat words or sounds.

Parallel

The instructor carefully explained how to start the engine and how to shift gears.
The instructor carefully explained how to start the engine and shifting gears.

Not parallel

Parallel

Joseph liked reading, writing, and driving his car.
Joseph liked reading, writing, and to drive his car.

Not parallel

The following structures call for parallelism:

both ... and ...

Both *by the way she dressed* and *by her casual attitude*, it was clear that she was a relaxed person.

either ... or ...

neither ... nor ...

not only ... but also ...

whether ... or ...

■ Communication Probe

According to most linguists, the words in the above chart are more related to cohesion than to *coherence*. Cohesion refers to the actual links in the text between one word or phrase and another. Coherence, on the other hand, is the quality that makes a text comprehensible and includes issues of semantics and the overall worldview of the communicators. If you have clear lexical and grammatical links in your written document, it is generally coherent, but not always. To illustrate the larger issues involved in coherence, consider this example:

I'm wearing a green hat. In addition, "hats off" means to salute a person or thing. However, things aren't always as they seem. But you have things to do.

Even though the above statements have grammatically correct linking words, the passage makes no sense. Something else is needed for coherence. Sometimes a message is coherent even without overt linking words, as in the following example:

Two-minute warning. The quarterback races the ball down the field. Twenty-five yards to go. Field goal? Offense lines up. No! Touchdown! The crowd roars approval.

The second passage, choppy though it is, makes perfect sense to those who know American football. Keep in mind that coherence is more complex than simply using connective words.

Enkvist, N. E. (1990). Seven problems in the study of coherence and interpretability. In *Coherence in writing: Research and pedagogical perspectives* (pp. 11-15). Connor, U., & John, A. (eds.). Alexandria, VA: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.

PUNCTUATION

A change in punctuation can change the meaning of a sentence. The following punctuation forms are reviewed: period; comma, semicolon, colon, dash, hyphen, exclamation mark, question mark, quotation marks, ellipsis, and apostrophe.

Period

Periods signal the end point of a statement. Periods were formerly called "stops" to signal the end of the idea expressed. Many Asians call a period a "full stop." Use a period in the following cases:

1. To end a complete sentence.

The company operates several divisions throughout the world.