**UNIT 2**

**Essentials of Sentence Formation**

**Course Objective:** To provide knowledge of grammatical structures and encourage their appropriate use in

writing.

**Course Outcome:** Recognize and incorporate basic grammar mechanics and sentence variety in writing.

**Topic: Basic Sentence Structure**

**Model Questions:**

1. What is a simple sentence? Give two examples.
2. What is a compound sentence? Give two examples.
3. What is a complex sentence? Give two examples.
4. What is a compound-complex sentence? Give two examples.
5. What is a phrase? Give two examples.
6. What is a clause? Give two examples.
7. Identify each of the following sentences as simple, compound, complex, or compound- complex.

a) While fishing in the blue lagoon, I caught a lovely silverfish.

b) They say if you step on a crack, you will break your mother's back.

**Definitions and Examples of Basic Sentence Elements**

**Independent clause**: An independent clause can stand alone as a sentence. It contains a subject and a verb and is a complete idea.

* **I** like  *chapathi*.
* **He** reads *many books*.

**Dependent clause**: A dependent clause is not a complete sentence. It must be attached to an independent clause to become complete. This is also known as a subordinate clause.

* **Although I like Chapathi ,…**
* **Because he reads many books,…**

**Subject**: A person, animal, place, thing, or concept that does an action. Determine the subject in a sentence by asking the question “Who or what?”

* **I** like **Chapathi**.
* **He** reads many books.

**Verb**: Expresses what the person, animal, place, thing, or concept does. Determine the verb in a sentence by asking the question “What was the action or what happened?”

* I like **Chapathi**.
* He reads many books.
* The movie is good. (The ‘*be’* verb is also sometimes referred to as a copula or a linking verb. It links the subject, in this case "the movie," to the complement or the predicate of the sentence, in this case, "good.")

**Object**: A person, animal, place, thing, or concept that receives the action. Determine the object in a sentence by asking the question “The subject did what?” or “To whom?/For whom?”

* I like **Chapathi**.
* He reads *many books*.

**Prepositional Phrase**: A phrase that begins with a preposition (i.e., in, at for, behind, until, after, of, during) and modifies a word in the sentence. A prepositional phrase answers one of many questions. Here are a few examples: “Where? When? In what way?”

* I like spaghetti for dinner.
* He reads many books in the library.

**English Sentence Structure**

The following statements are true about sentences in English:

* **A new sentence begins with a capital letter.**
  + **H**e obtained his degree.
* **A sentence ends with punctuation (a period, a question mark, or an exclamation point).**
  + He obtained his degree**.**
* **A sentence contains a subject that is only given once.**
  + ~~Smith~~ he obtained his degree.
* **A sentence contains a verb or a verb phrase.**
  + He **obtained** his degree.
* **A sentence follows Subject + Verb + Object word order.**
  + **He**(subject) **obtained** (verb) **his degree** (object).
* **A sentence must have a complete idea that stands alone. This is also called an independent clause.**
  + He obtained his degree.

**Simple Sentences**

A simple sentence contains a subject and a verb, and it may also have an object and modifiers. However, it contains only one independent clause.

Here are a few examples:

* **She** wrote.
* **She** completed *her literature review*.
* **He** organized *his sources* by theme.
* **They** studied *APA rules* for many hours.

**Compound Sentences**

A compound sentence contains at least twoindependent clauses.  These two independent clauses can be combined with a comma and a coordinating conjunction or with a semicolon.

Here are a few examples:

* **She completed her literature review**, and**she created her reference list***.*
* **He organized his sources by theme**;**then, he updated his reference list.**
* **They studied APA rules for many hours**, but**they realized there was still much to learn.**

Using some compound sentences in writing allows for more sentence variety.

**Complex Sentences**

A complex sentence contains at least oneindependent clause and at least one dependent clause. Dependent clauses can refer to the subject (who, which) the sequence/time (since, while), or the causal elements (because, if) of the independent clause.

If a sentence begins with a dependent clause, note the comma after this clause. If, on the other hand, the sentence begins with an independent clause, there is not a comma separating the two clauses.

Here are a few examples:

* *Although she completed her literature review*,**she still needed to work on her methods section.**
  + Note the comma in this sentence because it begins with a dependent clause.
* *Because he organized his sources by theme*,**it was easier for his readers to follow.**
  + Note the comma in this sentence because it begins with a dependent clause.
* **They studied APA rules for many hours** *as they were so interesting***.**
  + Note that there is no comma in this sentence because it begins with an independent clause.
* Using some complex sentences in writing allows for more sentence variety.

**Compound-Complex Sentences**

Sentence types can also be combined. A compound-complex sentence contains at least two independent clauses and at least one dependent clause.

* **She completed her literature review**,**but she still needs to work on her methods section***even though she finished her methods course last semester***.**
* *Although he organized his sources by theme*,**he decided to arrange them chronologically**, and**he carefully followed the MEAL plan for organization.**
* *With pizza and soda at hand*,**they studied APA rules for many hours**, and**they decided that writing in APA made sense***because it was clear, concise, and objective***.**
* Using some complex-compound sentences in writing allows for more sentence variety.
* Pay close attention to comma usage in complex-compound sentences so that the reader is easily able to follow the intended meaning.

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**Topic : Word Order**

**Model Questions:**

**1) Construct meaningful sentences by arranging the words in order.**

Normally, sentences in the English language take a simple form. However, there are times it would be a little complex. In these cases, the basic rules for how words appear in a sentence can help you.

Word order typically refers to the way the words in a sentence are arranged. In the English language, the order of words is important if you wish to accurately and effectively communicate your thoughts and ideas.

## Basic Sentence Structure and word order rules in English

For English sentences, the simple rule of thumb is that the subject should always come before the verb followed by the object. This rule is usually referred to as the SVO word order, and then most sentences must conform to this. However, it is essential to know that this rule only applies to sentences that have a subject, verb, and object.

**For example**

**Subject + Verb + Object**

* He loves food
* She killed the rat

Sentences are usually made of at least one clause. A clause is a string of words with a subject (noun) and a predicate (verb). A sentence with just one clause is referred to as a simple sentence, while those with more than one clause are referred to as compound sentences, complex sentences, or compound-complex sentences.

The following is an explanation and example of the most commonly used clause patterns in the English language.

check mark**Inversion**

The English word order is inverted in questions. The subject changes its place in a question. Also, English questions usually begin with a verb or a helping verb if the verb is complex.

**For example**

Verb + Subject + object

* Can you finish the assignment?
* Did you go to work?

**SVOMPT word order**

### **check markIntransitive Verbs**

Some sentences use verbs that require no object or nothing else to follow them. These verbs are generally referred to as intransitive verbs. With intransitive verbs, you can form the most basic sentences since all that is required is a subject (made of one noun) and a predicate (made of one verb).

**For example**

Subject + verb

* John eats
* Christine fights

### **check markLinking Verbs**

Linking verbs are verbs that connect a subject to the quality of the subject. Sentences that use linking verbs usually contain a subject, the linking verb and a subject complement or predicate adjective in this order.

**For example**

Subject + verb + Subject complement/Predicate adjective

* The dress was beautiful
* Her voice was amazing

### **check markTransitive Verbs**

Transitive verbs are verbs that tell what the subject did to something else. Sentences that use transitive verbs usually contain a subject, the transitive verb, and a direct object, usually in this order.

**For example**

Subject + Verb + Direct object

* The father slapped his son
* The teacher questioned his students

### **check markIndirect Objects**

Sentences with transitive verbs can have a mixture of direct and indirect objects. Indirect objects are usually the receiver of the action or the audience of the direct object.

**For example**

Subject + Verb + Indirect Object + Direct Object

* He gave the man a good job.
* The singer gave the crowd a spectacular concert.

The order of direct and indirect objects can also be reversed. However, for the reversal of the order, there needs to be the inclusion of the preposition “to” before the indirect object. The addition of the preposition transforms the indirect object into what is called a prepositional phrase.

**For example**

Subject + Verb + Direct Object + Preposition + Indirect Object

* He gave a lot of money to the man
* The singer gave a spectacular concert to the crowd.

### check mark**Adverbials**

Adverbs are phrases or words that modify or qualify a verb, adjective, or other adverbs. They typically provide information on the when, where, how, and why of an action. Adverbs are usually very difficult to place as they can be in different positions in a sentence. Changing the placement of an adverb in a sentence can change the meaning or emphasis of that sentence.

Therefore, adverbials should be placed as close as possible to the things they modify, generally before the verbs.

**For example**

* He hastily went to work.
* He hurriedly ate his food.

However, if the verb is transitive, then the adverb should come after the transitive verb.

**For example**

* John sat uncomfortably in the examination exam.
* She spoke quietly in the class

The adverb of place is usually placed before the adverb of time

**For example**

* John goes to work every morning
* They arrived at school very late

The adverb of time can also be placed at the beginning of a sentence

**For example**

* On Sunday he is traveling home
* Every evening James jogs around the block

When there is more than one verb in the sentence, the adverb should be placed after the first verb.

**For example**

* Peter will never forget his first dog
* She has always loved eating rice.

### **[check mark](https://jbiol.biomedcentral.com/)Adjectives**

Adjectives commonly refer to words that are used to describe someone or something. Adjectives can appear almost anywhere in the sentence.

Adjectives can sometimes appear after the verb to be

**For example**

* He is fat
* She is big

Adjectives can also appear before a noun.

**For example**

* A big house
* A fat boy

However, some sentences can contain more than one adjective to describe something or someone. These adjectives have an order in which they can appear before a now. The order is :

**Opinion – size – physical quality – shape – condition – age – color – pattern – origin – material – type – purpose**

If more than one adjective is expected to come before a noun in a sentence, then it should follow this order. This order feels intuitive for native English speakers. However, it can be a little difficult to unpack for non-native English speakers.

**For example**

* The ugly old woman is back
* The dirty red car parked outside your house

When more than one adjective comes after a verb, it is usually connected by and

**For example**

* The room is dark and cold
* Having said that, Susan is tall and big

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**TOPIC: SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT**

**Model Questions:**

* 1. **Identify the subject in the following sentences.**
  2. **Choose the correct form of the verb that agrees with the subject.**

**The Basics**

**Subjects** and **verbs** must AGREE with one another in NUMBER. Thus, if a subject is singular, its verb must also be singular; if a subject is plural, its verb must also be plural.

The **dog** loves people.



singular **subject**

singular verb

correct!

The **dogs** love people.

plural **subject**



plural verb



correct!

**Tip:** To determine whether a verb is singular or plural, ask which form of the verb you would use after the subject **it** and which form you would use with the subject **they**.

Singular examples: **it** eats, sleeps, wishes, has run, has loved, is dreaming

Plural examples: **they** eat, sleep, wish, have run, have loved, are dreaming

**Tip:** Although a noun that ends in an ***s*** is usually plural, a verb that ends in an ***s*** is usually singular (a third-person singular verb in the present tense, to be precise: Jill *loves* hiking.).

**Rules:**

**R1**: Singular subjects takes singular verbs and plural subjects take plural verbs.

**Ex:** The **list** of spare parts **was** long.(singular)/The **lists** of spare parts **were** too long. (plural)

**R2:** Singular antecedents are referred to by singular pronouns and plural antecedents are referents of plural pronouns.

**Ex:** Even an **animal** has **its** own territory. / Even **animals** have **their** own territory.

**R3:** A plural verb is always required after you even when it is used in singular, referring to one person.

**Ex: You were** very helpful during my stay with you.

**R4:** The verb agrees with true subject and not with an intervening plural object of a preposition or any other intervening plural.

**Ex:** The **box** of Nestle’s chocolates **is** missing.

**R5:** Subjects joined by and are usually plural and take plural verbs.

**Ex:** His typewriter **and** my radio **were** stolen.

Ex: Sony **and** Sanjay **are** going to Chennai today.

**Exceptional rule:** If a subject consisting of two singular nouns connected by and refers to the same person or thing, a singular verb is used.

**Ex:** My **best friend and advisor has** changed his mind again.

**Exceptional rule:** When two subjects connected by and are preceded by each, every, or many a, a singular verb is used.

Ex:-**Each** man **and** boy **is** expected to meet his obligation.

**R6:** Words like with, together with, along with, besides, as well as, including, in addition to, etc. do not affect the number of the verb. If the subject is singular, a singular verb is required; if plural, a plural verb.

**Ex:** Our chief competitor, **as well as** ourselves, **is** obliged to increase prices.

Ex: Mrs. Paul, **with** her son and daughter, **is** going to the theatre this evening.

**R7:** If the subject is made up of both singular and plural words connected by or, nor, either….. or, neither….nor, not only….but also, the verb agrees with the nearer part of the subject.

**Ex: Neither** the quality **nor** the **prices have** changed. / **Neither** the prices **nor** the **quality has** changed.

**Ex: Not only** the headmaster **but also** the **teachers ar**e in favour of the expansion of the school.

**R8:** Nouns that are plural in form but singular in meaning such as news, measles, mumps, physics, electronics, tactics, economics and so on, usually take singular verbs.

**Ex:News is** travelling faster than even before.

**Ex:Physics has** fascinated by hostelmate for months.

**R9:** A linking verb usually agrees with its subject, not with its complement.

**Ex:** Excessive absences **were** the reason for his failures. / The reason of his failure **was** excessive absences.

**R10:** Plural verbs are required for many nouns that have no singular form, such as proceeds, goods, ashes, remains, credentials, premises, etc.

**Ex:** The **goods are** being dispatched today by goods train.

**R11:** When the group acts as a unit, the verb should be singular.

**Ex:** The committee **has** agreed to submit its report on Friday. / **The Board of Directors** meets once in a month.

**R12:** When the members of the group are thought of as acting separately, but the verb should be plural.

Ex: The police **were** on the hunt for the murderers.

**R13:** When nouns expressing periods of time, amounts of money, or quantities are considered as a single unit, singular verbs are used.

**Ex:** Hundred Rupees **seems** too much for the job.

**R14:** After such expression as one-half of, two-thirds of, a part of, a majority of---- use a singular verb if singular noun follows of.

**Ex:A part of** the office **is** closed. / **Two-thirds of** the mailing list **has** been typed.

--------use a plural verb when a plural noun follows the of.

**Ex:** Part of the **walls are** to be painted. / The majority of the **staff members live** in a village.

**R15:** The expression the number has a singular meaning and requires a singular verb, whereas the expression a number has a plural meaning and takes a plural verb.

**Ex:The number** of board members **is** very small. / **A number** of board members **were** absent.

**R16:** In sentences containing the words one of, the verb is chosen as follows. In simple form one of or one of the, a singular verb is used.

**Ex:One of** the reasons for his demotion **is** his carelessness.

The sentences containing phrases one of those who or one of things that, a plural verb is required.

**Ex:** Mr. Verma is **one of** our officers **who are** accompanying me.

**R17:** Certain collective nouns through singular in form, are always used in the plural sense and take a plural verb. For example, gentry, cattle, poultry, alphabet, offspring, etc.

**Ex:** These **poultry are** ready for sale. / The **cattle are** gazing near the canal.

**R18:** Certain nouns are always used in singular and followed by singular verbs.

**Ex:** Her **hair has** turned grey now. / All the **machinery is** old.

**R19:** The words each, every, either and neither, used as pronouns or as adjectives, are always singular and require singular verbs.

**Ex: Each** employee **is** responsible for clearing his desk in the evening.

**Neither** of the boys **is** eligible for taking the examination.

**R20:** All, any, more, most, some may be singular or plural depending on the meaning, and take verbs accordingly.

**Ex:All** the **typing has** been finished. / **All** the **reports have** been typed.

**Most** of the goods **have** been sold. / **Most** of the stock **has** been sold, but more of these shirts are due.

**R21:** The titles of books or magazines are considered singular and take singular verbs.

**Ex:The Hindustan Times** still **has** wide circulation.

**R22:** The following words and their compounds are always singular and require a singular verb.

body (anybody, everybody, nobody, somebody) thing (anything, something, everything, nothing)

one(anyone, everyone, someone, no one),

**R23:** A relative pronoun (who, which, that) used as a subject takes a singular or plural verb to accord with its antecedent.

**Ex: Measels** is among the **diseases that are** curable.

This is only **one of the** local papers **that prints** a weekly horoscope.

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**TOPIC: USING TENSES**

**Model Questions:**

**1) Use either simple past or past continuous tense to fill the blanks.**

**2) Fill the gaps with the right tense form.**

**3) Change the tense of the given sentence as directed.**

Tense communicates an event’s location in time. The different tenses are identified by their associated verb forms. There are three main verb tenses: past, present, and future.

In English, each of these tenses can take four main aspects: simple, perfect, continuous (also known as progressive), and perfect continuous. The perfect aspect is formed using the verb to have, while the continuous aspect is formed using the verb to be.

In academic writing, the most commonly used tenses are the present simple, the past simple, and the present perfect.

**Tenses and their functions**

The table below gives an overview of some of the basic functions of tenses and aspects. Tenses locate an event in time, while aspects communicate durations and relationships between events that happen at different times.

| **Tense** | **Function** | **Example** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| [**Present simple**](https://www.scribbr.com/language-rules/tenses/#when-to-use-the-present-simple) | used for facts, generalizations, and truths that are not affected by the passage of time | “She **writes** a lot of papers for her classes.” |
| [**Past simple**](https://www.scribbr.com/language-rules/tenses/#when-to-use-the-past-simple) | used for events completed in the past | “She **wrote** the papers for all of her classes last month.” |
| **Future simple** | used for events to be completed in the future | “She **will write** papers for her classes next semester.” |
| [**Present perfect**](https://www.scribbr.com/language-rules/tenses/#when-to-use-the-present-perfect) | used to describe events that began in the past and are expected to continue, or to emphasize the relevance of past events to the present moment | “She **has written** papers for most of her classes, but she still has some papers left to write.” |
| **Past perfect** | used to describe events that happened prior to other events in the past | “She **had written** several papers for her classes before she switched universities.” |
| **Future perfect** | used to describe events that will be completed between now and a specific point in the future | “She **will have written**many papers for her classes by the end of the semester.” |
| **Present continuous** | used to describe currently ongoing (usually temporary) actions | “She **is writing** a paper for her class.” |
| **Past continuous** | used to describe ongoing past events, often in relation to the occurrence of another event | “She **was writing** a paper for her class when her pencil broke.” |
| **Future continuous** | used to describe future events that are expected to continue over a period of time | “She **will be writing** a lot of papers for her classes next year.” |
| **Present perfect continuous** | used to describe events that started in the past and continue into the present or were recently completed, emphasizing their relevance to the present moment | “She **has been writing** a paper all night, and now she needs to get some sleep.” |
| **Past perfect continuous** | used to describe events that began, continued, and ended in the past, emphasizing their relevance to a past moment | “She **had been writing** a paper all night, and she needed to get some sleep.” |
| **Future perfect continuous** | used to describe events that will continue up until a point in the future, emphasizing their expected duration | “She **will have been writing** this paper for three months when she hands it in.” |

<https://www.scribbr.com/language-rules/tenses/#:~:text=There%20are%20three%20main%20verb,using%20the%20verb%20to%20be>.

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**TOPIC : PUNCTUATION**

**Model Questions:**

**1. Use appropriate punctuation marks in the following sentences.**

Punctuation marks are important in both written and spoken English. In written English, the correct usage of these symbols helps to express the intended meaning of the sentence. In spoken English, punctuation marks denote the pauses and intonations to be used when reading aloud.

**Incorrect punctuation can change the meaning of a sentence.**

For instance, compare the following two sentences:

Let’s eat Mom.

Let’s eat, Mom.

Do you see how the usage of a comma changes the entire meaning in both the sentences? The disappearance of comma in the first sentence indicates that the speaker is asking to eat their Mom, which does not make sense. Whereas, the comma after let’s eat in the second sentence helps to convey the meaning that the speaker is suggesting to their Mom to go and start eating, which sounds more sensible and also saves a life.

**Symbols of Punctuation**

Some of the commonly used punctuation marks are:

• Full Stop (.) – Usually used at the end of a sentence.

• Question Mark (?) – Usually used at the end of an interrogative sentence to form a question.

• Comma (,) – Usually used to denote a pause in a sentence.

• Exclamation Mark (!) – Used to denote shock, surprise, anger or a raised voice.

• Colon (:) – Used to indicate what is to follow next.

• Semi Colon (;) – Used to link two independent clauses not joined by a conjunction or used to separate two independent clauses in place of comma.

• Apostrophe (‘) – Used to show possession or for contraction of word.

• Hyphen (-) – Used to glue words together.

• Slash (/) – Used to separate letters, numbers or words.

• Ellipsis Mark (…) – Used to separate items in a series.

• Round Brackets () – Used to add extra information in a sentence.

• Quotation Mark (” “) – Used to show that someone else has said it.

Punctuation Examples

• She was wearing a beautiful dress.

• What a beautiful piece of music! Who composed it?

• It’s a beautiful dress, but it’s ludicrously expensive.

• Tom was so hungry he ate everything in the house: chips, cold pizza, pretzels and dip, hot dogs, peanut butter, and candy.

• My wife would like tea; I would prefer coffee.

• This is a woman’s hat.

• Sarah had a little lamb/ little lamb whose fleece was white as snow.

• I don’t know … I’m not sure.

• I hope you will be here,” he said.

**Sample Worksheet for Punctuation**

**Use appropriate punctuation marks in the following sentences.**

1. We had a great time in France the kids really enjoyed it

2. Some people work best in the mornings others do better in the evenings

3. What are you doing next weekend

4. Mother had to go into hospital she had heart problems

5. Did you understand why I was upset

6. It is a fine idea let us hope that it is going to work

7. We will be arriving on Monday morning at least I think so

8. A textbook can be a wall between teacher and class

9. The girls father sat in a corner

10. In the words of Murphys Law Anything that can go wrong will go wrong

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**TOPIC: CORRECTION OF COMMON ERRORS**

**Model Questions:**

**1) Examine the sentences carefully and correct the errors.**

Most people write every day for work, school, personal reasons, or hobbies. However, most people aren’t writing experts. Even grammar experts make mistakes when they are writing!

Some errors are more egregious than others. No one expects the average person to know all the ins and outs of English grammar, but these twenty writing errors are some of the most basic mistakes you should avoid when writing.

## Most Common Punctuation Mistakes to Avoid

Punctuation is tricky. Here are the mistakes to avoid.

### **1. Incorrect End Marks**

When you’re in the flow of writing, you might mess up the end punctuation by accident. Sentences can end in a period, a question mark, or an exclamation point. Most sentences are statements or declarative sentences. These should end in a period.

Questions should always end in question marks. Sentences that show heightened emotion like excitement, surprise, or anger are exclamatory sentences. They should end in exclamation points.

**How to Avoid Punctuation Errors:**

* Use the correct end mark
* Don’t splice your commas
* Only use three dots in an ellipses
* Learn the difference between hyphens, en-dashes, and em-dashes
* Use commas appropriately

### **2. Comma Splices**

A comma splice occurs when two independent clauses are combined with nothing more than a comma. Independent clauses are clauses that can stand alone as a sentence. They have a subject and a verb.

There are two main ways to combine independent clauses in the same sentence. First, you can use a semicolon. This is the easiest way to get rid of comma splices. You can also use a comma + a coordinating conjunction.

Here’s what this looks like:

**Comma splice (incorrect):** I went to the grocery store, they didn’t have any milk.

**Semicolon (correct):** I went to the grocery store; they didn’t have any milk.

**Comma + conjunction (correct):** I went to the grocery store, but they didn’t have any milk.

Other ways to get rid of a comma splice include using other punctuation like [em dashes](https://prowritingaid.com/art/2290/em-dash.aspx" \t "_blank) or colons, making one clause a dependent clause with a subordinating conjunction, or separating the clauses into two sentences.

### **3. Too Many Dots in an Ellipsis**

One common error people make is misusing the ellipsis. An ellipsis (...) is used to show thoughts trailing off or to omit words.

The biggest mistake with the ellipsis is using too many dots! An ellipsis only contains three dots. No more, no less. Some style guides allow you to add a period after an ellipsis, so it looks like four dots. But the ellipsis itself is only three!

### **4. Hyphens Instead of Dashes**

Hyphens, en dashes, and em dashes are three very different punctuation marks. A hyphen (-) is one small line typically used to connect two or more words or parts of words (e.g. ex-boyfriend, merry-go-round, skin-tight.)

An en dash (–) is used to show a range, such as a timeframe, numerical range, or serial order. For example, you might write January–March, 2000–2005, or an alphabetical range like Ca–Ch. It’s longer than a hyphen and shorter than an em dash.

An em dash (—) has many uses. It’s the length of two hyphens, but it’s incorrect to just place two hyphens next to each other. Some programs will autocorrect this into an em dash, but others won’t. If you have a numerical pad, write it by using the alt code ALT+0151.

### **5. Missing Commas**

Commas help prevent sentences from becoming run-on sentences. Here are some places to always include a comma:

* Before a coordinating conjunction
* After a dependent clause at the beginning of a sentence
* Between items in lists
* When setting off interjections

### **6. Subject–Verb Agreement**

One of the most common grammar mistakes involves subject–verb agreement. Verbs have different forms depending on the subject. Be careful that you don’t use the wrong verb form for the subject that you’re using.

Here are a couple of examples.

**Incorrect:** She run fast.

**Correct:** She runs fast.

**Incorrect:** We goes to the movies every week.

**Correct:** We go to the movies every week.

### **7. Run-On Sentences**

A run-on sentence is a sentence that is not properly punctuated with commas, semicolons, or other punctuation marks. Punctuation marks, like periods, commas, and semicolons, are used to show a natural pause in speech. They help separate information so your writing doesn’t sound like someone is speaking in fast-forward mode.

Take a look at this run-on sentence:

**I went to the store I needed to buy milk but they were out.**

Whew! That’s a mouthful. Let’s see how punctuation can help fix this.

**I went to the store. I needed to buy milk, but they were out.**

### **8. Incorrect Verb Tense**

Not only do verbs have different forms for different subjects, they also have different forms depending on tense and mood. Use the correct tense in your writing and don't switch between tenses.

**Incorrect:** I went to the store next week.

**Correct:** I will go to the store next week.

**Incorrect:** I used to danced ballet.

**Correct:** I used to dance ballet.

### **9. Pronoun–Antecedent Agreement**

Just like subjects and verbs need to agree, so do pronouns and their antecedents. An antecedent is the noun to which a pronoun refers. The pronoun must match in number (singular or plural) and person (first, second, or third person with matching gender).

In the example below, there are two or more teachers. The pronoun must be plural, not singular.

**Incorrect:** The co-teachers wrote her names on the board.

**Correct:** The co-teachers wrote their names on the board.

### **10. Sentence Fragments**

To be a standalone sentence, a sentence must contain a subject and a verb. If it doesn’t have both, it is a sentence fragment.

**Incorrect:** Goes to the movies on Sundays.

**Correct:** She goes to the movies on Sundays.

### **11. There/They’re/Their**

There is an adverb that usually refers to a location, e.g. Put it over there.

They’re is a contraction of they + are, e.g. They’re getting married next month.

Their is a possessive pronoun, e.g. Who is catering their wedding?

### **12. Its/It’s**

Its is a possessive pronoun, e.g. Where is its owner?

It’s is a contraction of it + is, e.g. It’s snowing outside!

### **13. To/Too/Two**

To is a preposition, e.g. Fly me to the moon.

Too is an adverb that means in excess or also, e.g. She is too short for the ride.

Two is the written form of the number 2, e.g. We’ve been together for two years.

### **14. You’re/Your**

You’re is a contraction of you + are, e.g. You’re my best friend.

Your is a possessive pronoun, e.g. Here is your book.

### **15. Than/Then**

Than is a preposition used for comparisons, contrasts, or exceptions, e.g. He is taller than his brother.

Then is an adverb, usually dealing with time, e.g. Back then, I lived in Manhattan. Then I moved to Los Angeles.

### **16. Sentence Sprawl**

Sometimes, we might write sentences that are just too long. They aren’t run-on sentences because they are punctuated correctly. But superfluous commas and too many equally weighted phrases can bog down your writing.

Here’s an example:

**We went to the grocery store because we needed milk, but they were out of milk, so we went next door to the convenience store, and they had milk, but it was so expensive.**

All of those commas are correct, but it reads like we are rambling! Separate sentences like this to prevent sprawl.

### **17. Vague Pronoun Reference**

If you’re writing a sentence with multiple nouns that have the same pronoun, it’s easy to confuse readers with vague pronoun use.

**Vague:** Dad told Jeremy to fuel up his car before he left.

Does "his" refer to Dad or Jeremy? What about "he?" Reword sentences like this to be clearer.

### **18. Faulty Parallelism**

Parallel structure refers to using the same pattern of words or phrases in a sentence. The structure should match throughout a sentence.

**Incorrect:** I like to dance, to cook, and swimming.

**Correct:** I like to dance, to cook, and to swim. OR I like dancing, cooking, and swimming.

### **19. Incorrect Word Choice**

Avoid using the wrong word when you write so that your meaning is clear. Even words that are synonyms might not be interchangeable. For example, your grandma might be old but she isn’t antique or fossilized! Pay attention to connotation and tone when choosing synonyms.

### **20. Wordiness**

Even if your grammar and spelling are perfect, wordiness can make your writing hard to read. Be succinct and clear in your writing.

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