

Common mistakes in writing

A. Grammar Pre-Test

Correct all the errors in the following sentences. The errors focus on the topics covered in the this appendix: sentence fragments, run-on sentences, parallelism, subject-verb agreement, pronouns, who/whom, sentence variety, and dangling/misplaced modifiers. If the sentence is CORRECT, write C. (p.110)

1. Crying during her acceptance speech, the best actress award was presented to Nicole Kidman.
2. I don't want to be an architect because I don't like it.
3. After I came to America.
4. I studied all night for the midterm, I'm sure I got an A.
5. A janitor's salary is higher than a teacher.
6. Neither the students nor I are going to the reception.
7. Collecting seashells are my hobby.
8. Me and my brother are majoring in sports management.
9. Return the library book to whomever is at the reception desk.
10. I moved into an apartment. I threw out all my old notebooks. I bought some new furniture.
11. I only read half the assignment.
12. Examining the sapphire, the jeweler discovered an imperfection.
13. Whom I know.
14. I always have and always will eat breakfast.
15. The population of Massachusetts is greater than Rhode Island.
16. My sister has been a nurse, actress, and designed stages.
17. Every sophomore, junior, and senior are required to update e-mail information.

18. A number of students in my English class is planning to complete an extra-credit project.

19. My roommate, she is planning to attend the summer session.

20. Who do you think will win the upcoming elections?

B. Grammar Rules and Exercises

1. Sentence Fragments

■ A fragment error is an incomplete sentence that does not express a complete thought. It may be missing a subject, a verb, or part of a subject or verb. It can also be a dependent clause that needs an independent clause.

Incorrect: Because I came to America.

The sentence should read, *Because I came to America, I met many Americans.* This dependent clause is *not* a sentence because it needs an independent clause to complete its meaning.

Incorrect: More students going to school.

The sentence should read, *More students are going to school.* The incorrect sentence contains an incomplete verb, which also creates a sentence fragment.

Incorrect: For me is very easy to understand people from Mississippi.

The sentence should read *For me it is very easy to understand people from Mississippi.* The incorrect sentence is missing a subject.

Incorrect: A class that is enjoyable.

The sentence should read, *A class that is enjoyable makes me interested in the subject.* This dependent clause is *not* a sentence because it needs a verb to complete its meaning.

2. Run-on Sentences

■ A run-on error is two or more sentences joined together without a word to connect them or a punctuation mark to separate them. If you put a comma between them, it is still incorrect. This error is called a comma splice.

Incorrect: Sometimes I like to be with one or two friends, sometimes I like to be with a large group of friends.

There are five ways to correct this run-on:

1. Make two sentences.

Although your sentences will be grammatically correct, this is not the best way to solve the problem. It creates two choppy simple sentences instead of one complex one.

Sometimes I like to be with one or two friends. Sometimes I like to be with a large group of friends.

2. Use a coordinating conjunction (the word 'FANBOYS' can help you remember the coordinating conjunctions: *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*).

Sometimes I like to be with one or two friends, but sometimes I like to be with a large group of friends.

3. Use a semicolon. You can use a semicolon between two closely related sentences. Be careful not to overuse this punctuation mark.

Sometimes I like to be with one or two friends; sometimes I like to be with a large group of friends.

4. Use a transitional adverb (however, therefore, consequently, etc.). Be careful of the punctuation in this construction. Subject verb; transitional adverb, subject verb.

Sometimes I like to be with one or two friends; however, sometimes I like to be with a large group of friends.

5. Make one of the clauses a dependent clause.

Although sometimes I like to be with one or two friends, sometimes I like to be with a large group of friends

Run-on/Fragment Sentence Exercise 1

Label the following as sentences (S), fragments (F), or run-ons (RO). If sentences are F or RO, correct them.

_____ 1. For example, if you're going to buy a watch.

_____ 2. Learning English is not easy, it takes up your time and energy.

_____ 3. A good roommate who is quiet.

_____ 4. Getting out of the city for a camping trip.

_____ 5. My problem is the irregular verbs.

_____ 6. I spent three months looking for an apartment I couldn't find anything under \$1,000 a month.

_____ 7. Twelve required courses in math and statistics.

_____ 8. What is your major?

_____ 9. A two-week vacation is a very short time to experience another country.

_____ 10. She couldn't understand the directions, she asked her friend for help.

Run-on/Fragment Sentence Exercise 2

From these sentences written by nonnative speakers, label the following as sentences (S), fragments (F), or run-ons (RO). If sentences are F or RO, correct them.

1. First who like to spend time with close friends can do many things in a short time.

_____ 2. I think children should be required to help with household tasks as soon as they are able to do so because parents can give their children some knowledge and include them as family members.

_____ 3. Second, when you are with a large number of friends.

_____ 4. Let me give an example, when I was in the first year of college, I always used to be with two of my friends.

_____ 5. Well, those are my basic points for wanting to go there, I hope that now you understand my desire.

_____ 6. I would probably choose Spain I think that this choice may create confusion with the readers, but I will give my reasons.

_____ 7. Regardless of gender, age, religion, and nationality, a teacher's role in learning is enormous because a teacher is a guide who will help open my eyes to some specific field which is totally unknown.

_____ 8. I prefer to have a teacher because if I learn by myself, maybe something mistake.

_____ 9. Sometimes when I have problems.

_____ 10. Two reasons.

_____ 11. Are teacher better computers?

_____ 12. When I was a child, I grew up in the countryside, I think it is a nice place for children's education.

_____ 13. When I saw a fire in the kitchen.

_____ 14. Through their personal experiences such as training.

_____ 15. If I don't have experience with it.

_____ 16. After having explained the advantages of having had a lifelong best friend and the disadvantages of going out with a diverse group of friends, I prefer to spend time with one or two close friends than with a large number of friends.

_____ 17. No matter what you think.

_____ 18. Even though unrelated to their occupation in the future.

_____ 19. Because I am a person who can feel nature beautifully, who helps other people, and who knows social rules.

_____ 20. However, sometimes I would like just to be with one or two of my friends rather than with a large number of friends.

3. Parallelism

■ In writing, one must construct a sentence making sure its parts are parallel, or the sentence will be off balance. Always try to balance similar structures, especially in lists and series or around connecting words within your sentences. In order to make sure your writing is parallel,

make sure you understand the following points:

■ Connect sentence parts with coordinating conjunctions.

■ A good clause or phrase combines the same kinds of words, phrases, or clauses. Combine a noun with a noun, not a noun with an adjective.

I. Words

1. Noun - noun

Recession or inflation will lead to disaster.

2. verb - verb

The pharmacist weighed and measured the medicine.

3. adjective adjective

The child was little, yet surprisingly strong.

With three or more items in a series, use commas.

The play was funny, enjoyable, and short.

4. adverb- adverb

He ran quickly but carefully.

II. Phrases (groups of words that lack either a subject or a verb)

1. a(n) adjective noun

He is a serious student but a hilarious comic.

2. verb adverb

Karen swims quickly yet talks slowly.

3. prepositional phrase- prepositional phrase

David eats in the morning and in the afternoon.

III. Clauses (groups of words that include a subject and a verb)

1. adjective clause - adjective clause

Peter is a colleague who teaches math and who conducts the orchestra.

2. noun clause - noun clause

I know that you are smart and that you are nervous.

■ Connect similarly constructed sentences with paired conjunctions. Instead of two short sentences, always try to combine sentences. :

Both ... and (takes a plural verb)

Both Susan and Jenny study Italian.

Not only ... but also

Laura not only jogs but also lifts weights.

Either ... or

Either the teacher or I am right.

Neither ... nor

Neither the football players nor the soccer players take afternoon classes.

The subjects that come after the but also, or, and nor determine the verb.

Either the teacher or the students erase the whiteboard every day.

Either the students or the teacher erases the whiteboard every day.

When these pairs are used, they must be followed by parallel types of words, phrases, or clauses.

- Whenever possible, put as many words as you can before the conjunction.

Incorrect: I want either to go to Mexico and Brazil.

The sentence should read I want to go to either Mexico or Brazil.

- Do not omit necessary words. Oftentimes omitted articles, auxiliaries, and prepositions affect parallel structure.

Incorrect: I always have and always will eat breakfast.

The sentence should be: I always have eaten and always will eat breakfast.

Incorrect: Mark gave me an apple, pear, and oranges.

The sentence should be: Mark gave me an apple, a pear, and oranges.

Incorrect: I was interested and surprised by the story.

The sentence should read I was interested in and surprised by the story.

Incorrect: The population of Japan is greater than Korea.

The sentence should read The population of Japan is greater than that of Korea.

Incorrect: Joanne is as tall if not taller than her sister.

The sentence should read Joanne is as tall as if not taller than her sister.

Parallelism Exercise 1

Make the following sentences parallel. In some cases, there may be more than one correct answer.

1. The apartment was beautiful, expensive, and had a lot of space.
2. If you're going to use this recipe, you'll need a pepper, onion, and tomato.
3. Our teacher is interesting: she plays piano, writes poetry, and is a painter of watercolors.
4. I always have and always will sing in the shower.
5. Please turn down the television, or will you go to sleep?
6. Michael hopes his dedication, ability, and that he is considerate will help him get the job.

7. Daniel is a happy child and sleeps soundly.
8. Jodie Foster is a great actress and directs movies well.
9. The books on the top shelf are older than the bottom shelves.
10. At the University of Pennsylvania, morning classes are far more popular than the afternoon.

Parallelism Exercise 2

Complete each of the following sentences by adding words, phrases, or clauses that are parallel to the italicized words. There are many possible answers.

1. I was in favor of either painting the walls purple or _____.
2. Matt found what he needed in the desk: a ruler, a pen, and _____.
3. The square was crowded with young tourists studying their guidebooks, eating lunches from backpacks, and _____.
4. Moving to a new apartment means I'll have to decide what to keep, what to give away, and _____.
5. During our coffee break we ate blueberry muffins that were small but _____.
6. The hats and coats were piled everywhere: on the bed, on the chairs, and even _____.
7. Bonnie knew neither what to say in her letter of application nor _____.
8. Either the government will ban smoking in public buildings or _____.
9. Molly walked across the square and _____.
10. In the morning newspaper I read that plans for a second airport are being considered and _____.

4. Subject-Verb Agreement

■ Every complete sentence has a subject and a verb. The verb in every independent or dependent clause must agree with its subject. Although there is usually no problem in finding the subject and making sure it agrees

with its verb, there are several exceptions and rules to learn.

Choose the correct form of the italicized verb.

1. Neither of the books that I ordered (has, have) come yet.
2. A number of students (hopes, hope) to graduate this June.
3. I can never remember if seven times eight (is, are) fifty-six or fifty-nine.
4. The president, with his wife, (is, are) planning to visit Hawaii.
5. Each of the students maintaining the required average (is, are) going to receive a scholarship.
6. Inside my pocketbook (is, are) my calculator, lunch, and keys.
7. Measles (has, have) reappeared among the kindergarten children.
8. The number of students in this year's freshman class (is, are) 212.
9. Eight miles (is, are) a lot to jog every day.
10. Indonesian (is, are) a very difficult language for Americans to learn.
11. The Dutch (loves, love) good bread.
12. The United States (is, are) more than two hundred years old.
13. Twenty dollars (is, are) a lot to spend for a pair of socks.
14. The news about the earthquake (is, are) surprising.
15. The police (is, are) exercising more nowadays.
16. Some of the students (is, are) taking an incomplete in the class.
17. Physics (is, are) taught by Dr. Roberts this term.
18. My scissors (isn't, aren't) sharp. Can I borrow yours?