**Modifier Basics**

A modifier is a word, phrase, or clause that modifies—that is, gives information about—another word in the same sentence. For example, in the following sentence, the word "burger" is modified by the word "vegetarian":

***Example:*** I'm going to the Saturn Café for a **vegetarian** burger.

* The modifier "vegetarian" gives extra information about what kind of burger it is.

A modifier can be an adjective (a word that modifies a noun, like "burger"), but it can also be an adverb (a word that modifies a verb):

***Example:***The student **carefully** proofread her draft.

* The adverb "carefully" is the modifier in this example—it modifies the verb "proofread," giving important details about how the proofreading was conducted.

A modifier can even be a phrase or clause, as in the following example:

***Example:*** She studied **in the library**.

* Here, the phrase "in the library" gives us extra information about the verb, "studied*."*

**Misplaced Modifiers**

When a modifier is ambiguously or illogically modifying a word, we consider it a *misplaced modifier*.

***Example:*** Dawood discovered an ancient Indus civilization **using astronavigation**.

* The modifier, "using astronavigation," is unclear in this sentence. Does it modify "Dawood" or "civilization"? A reader will wonder, "Was Dawood using astronavigation? Or was the civilization he discovered using astronavigation?"

***Revision 1:* Using astronavigation**, Dawood discovered an ancient Indus civilization.

* This modifier placement makes it clear that "Dawood" is the one using astronavigation.

***Revision 2:*** Dawood discovered an ancient Indus civilization that used astronavigation.

* This modifier placement makes it clear that the "civilization" used astronavigation.

**Dangling Modifiers**

When a modifier is not modifying a specific word, we call it a *dangling modifier.*

**Example: After consulting a selection of current publications**, research in this area has been sparse.

* In this example, it is not clear who is consulting the selection of current publications. In other words, there is no referent in the sentence.

**Revision 1: After consulting a selection of current publications, I** determined that the research in this area has been sparse.

* Now the subject in the sentence “I” matches the modifier “after consulting a selection of current publications.”

**Revision 2: According to the selection of current publications, research** in this area has been sparse.

* Now the modifier “according to the selection of current publications” matches the subject “research.”

**Run-On Sentences**

A *run-on sentence*occurs when two or more independent clauses (also known as complete sentences) are connected improperly.

**Example**: I love to write papers I would write one every day if I had the time.

There are two complete sentences in the above example:

**Sentence 1**: I love to write papers.  
   
**Sentence 2**: I would write one every day if I had the time.

One common type of run-on sentence is a *comma splice*. A comma splice occurs when two independent clauses are joined with just a comma.

***Example of a comma splice:*** Participants could leave the study at any time, they needed to indicate their preference.

**Sentence 1**: Participants could leave the study at any time.  
   
**Sentence 2**: They needed to indicate their preference.

Some comma splices occur when a writer attempts to use a transitional expression in the middle of a sentence.

***Example of a comma splice:*** The results of the study were inconclusive, therefore more research needs to be done on the topic.

**Sentence 1**: The results of the study were inconclusive  
   
**Transitional expression** (conjunctive adverb): therefore  
   
**Sentence 2:** More research needs to be done on the topic

To fix this type of comma splice, use a semicolon before the transitional expression and add a comma after it. See more examples of this on the [semicolon](https://academicguides.waldenu.edu/writingcenter/punctuation/semicolons) page.

***Revision:*** The results of the study were inconclusive**; therefore,** more research needs to be done on the topic.

You can correct a run-on sentence by connecting or separating its parts correctly. There are several easy ways to connect independent clauses.

**Correcting Run-On Sentences**

A run-on sentence can be fixed by connecting its parts correctly. There are several ways to connect independent clauses.

1. **Use a period.** The easiest way to fix a run-on is to split the sentence into smaller sentences using a period. This revision works especially well with longer sentences. Check, however, to make sure that this solution does not result in short, choppy sentences.

**Revision example**: I love to write papers. I would write one every day if I had the time.

1. **Use a semicolon**. Inserting a semicolon between independent clauses creates a grammatically correct sentence. Using a semicolon is a stylistic choice that establishes a close relationship between the two sentences.

**Revision example**: I love to write papers; I would write one every day if I had the time.

1. **Use a comma and a coordinating conjunction**. A comma, paired with a coordinating conjunction (e.g., "and," "but," or "or"), corrects a run-on sentence. This method emphasizes the relationship between the two clauses.

**Revision example**: I love to write papers, **and** I would write one every day if I had the time.

1. **Use a subordinating conjunction**. Turn one of the independent clauses into a dependent clause. A subordinating conjunction (e.g., "because," "unless," and "although") connects two clauses to create a **complex sentence**. This option works to cement the relationship between the two parts of the sentence and may improve the flow of the clauses.

**Example**: **Because I love to write papers**, I would write one every day if I had the time.

However you decide to revise for run-on sentences, remember that maintaining [sentence variety](https://academicguides.waldenu.edu/writingcenter/scholarlyvoice/sentencestructure) helps to keep the writing clear and interesting for your readers.

**Sentence Fragments**

A *sentence fragment* is a string of words that does not form a complete sentence; there is a necessary component of complete sentence missing. This missing component may be a subject (usually a noun) or a predicate (verb or verb phrase) and/or when the sentence does not express a complete idea.

Here is an example of a fragment with a missing subject.

***Example of a fragment***: Shows no improvement in any of the vital signs.

The sentence above is a fragment since there is no subject (*Who* shows no improvement?). Fragments can be corrected by identifying the missing element and including it.

***Revision*:** **The patient** shows no improvement in any of the vital signs.

Here is an example of a fragment with a missing predicate, or action:

***Example of a fragment***: The doctors, who were using peer-reviewed research articles that contributed to the body of knowledge in their fields, which was obstetrics.

Notice here that although the sentence is quite long, it still contains no action (What are the doctors *doing*?). Once identified, the sentence can be corrected easily.

**Revision:** The doctors, who were using peer-reviewed research articles that contributed to the body of knowledge in their field, **improved their knowledge of**obstetrics.

**Subject–Verb Agreement Rules**

***Key***: subject = **yellow, bold**; verb = green, underline

Subjects **(Nouns and Pronoun**) and verbs must agree in number.

1. If the subject is singular, the verb must be singular too.

**Example: She** writes every day.  
Exception: When using the singular "they," use plural verb forms.  
Example: The participant expressed satisfaction with their job. **They** are currently in a managerial role at the organization.

1. If the subject is plural, the verb must also be plural.

**Example: They** write every day.

Sometimes, however, it seems a bit more complicated than this.

1. When the subject of the sentence is composed of two or more nouns or pronouns connected by ***and*,** use a **plural** verb.

**Example: The doctoral student *and* the committee members** write every day.

**Example**: **The percentage of employees who called in sick *and* the number of employees who left their jobs within 2 years** are reflective of the level of job satisfaction.

1. When there is one subject and more than one verb, the verbs throughout the sentence must agree with the subject.

**Example: Interviews** are one way to collect data and allow researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of participants.

**Example: An assumption** is something that is generally accepted as true and is an important consideration when conducting a doctoral study.

1. When a phrase comes between the subject and the verb, remember that the verb still agrees with the subject, not the noun or pronoun in the phrase following the subject of the sentence.

**Example: The student,**as well as the committee members, is excited.

**Example: The student**with all the master’s degrees is very motivated.

**Example: Strategies** that the teacher uses to encourage classroom participation include using small groups and clarifying expectations.

**Example:** **The focus** of the interviews was nine purposively selected participants.

1. When two or more singular nouns or pronouns are connected by "or"or "nor," use a singular verb.

**Example:** **The chairperson or the CEO**approves the proposal before proceeding.

1. When a compound subject contains both a singular and a plural noun or pronoun joined by "or"or "nor," the verb should agree with the part of the subject that is closest to the verb. This is also called the **rule of proximity**.

**Example: The student *or* the committee members** write every day.

**Example: The committee members *or* the student** writes every day.

1. The words and phrases "each," "each one," "either," "neither," "everyone," "everybody," "anyone," "anybody," "nobody," "somebody," "someone," and "no one" are singular and require a **singular verb**. **Indefinite pronouns** (Body, one, thing words)

**Example: Each**of the participants was willing to be recorded.

**Example: Neither**alternative hypothesis was accepted.

**Example:**I will offer a $5 gift card to **everybody**who participates in the study.

**Example: No one**was available to meet with me at the preferred times.

1. [Noncount nouns](https://academicguides.waldenu.edu/formandstyle/writing/grammarmechanics/nouns#s-lg-box-18085220) take a singular verb.

**Example: Education** is the key to success.

**Example: Diabetes**affects many people around the world.

**Example: The information** obtained from the business owners was relevant to include in the study.

**Example:** **The research** I found on the topic was limited.

1. Some countable nouns in English such as *earnings, goods, odds, surroundings, proceeds, contents,*and *valuables* only have a plural form and take a plural verb.

**Example:** **The earnings** for this quarter exceed expectations.

**Example:** **The proceeds** from the sale go to support the homeless population in the city.

**Example:** **Locally produced goods** have the advantage of shorter supply chains.

1. In sentences beginning with "there is" or "there are," the subject follows the verb. Since "there" is not the subject, the verb agrees with what follows the verb. S-V,

**Example:** There is little **administrative support**. V-S

**Example:** There are many **factors** affecting teacher retention.

1. **Collective nouns** are words that imply more than one person but are considered singular and take a **singular verb**. Some examples are "group," "team," "committee," "family," and "class."

**Example:** **The group** meets every week.

**Example:** **The committee** agrees on the quality of the writing.

However, the plural verb is used if the focus is on the individuals in the group. This is much less common.

**Example:** **The committee** participate in various volunteer activities in their private lives.