3-3b **Avoiding Three Common Sentence Faults**

As you craft your sentences, beware of three common traps: fragments, run-on (fused) sentences, and comma-splice sentences. If any of these faults appears in a business message, the writer immediately loses credibility.

One of the most serious errors a writer can make is punctuating a fragment as if it were a complete sentence. A *fragment* is usually a broken-off part of a complex sentence. Fragments often can be identified by the words that introduce them—words such as *although, as, because, even, except, for example, if, instead of, since, such as, that, which*, and *when*. These words introduce dependent clauses, as italicized in the following fragment examples. They should not be punctuated as sentences. Make sure such clauses always connect to independent clauses, as shown in the revisions.

DON'T FRAGMENT	DO ✓ REVISION
✗ *Because most transactions require a permanent record.* Good writing skills are critical.	✓ Because most transactions require a permanent record, good writing skills are critical.
✗ The recruiter requested a writing sample. *Even though the candidate seemed to communicate well.*	✓ The recruiter requested a writing sample even though the candidate seemed to communicate well.

A second serious writing fault is the **run-on (fused) sentence**. A sentence with two independent clauses must be joined by a coordinating conjunction (*and, or, nor, but*) or by a semicolon (;) or separated into two sentences. Without a conjunction or a semicolon, a run-on sentence results.

DON'T RUN-ON SENTENCE	DO ✓ REVISION
✗ Many job seekers prepare traditional résumés some also use websites as electronic portfolios.	✓ Many job seekers prepare traditional résumés. Some also use websites as electronic portfolios.
✗ One candidate sent an e-mail résumé another sent a link to her Web portfolio.	✓ One candidate sent an e-mail résumé; another sent a link to her Web portfolio.

A third sentence fault is a **comma splice**. It results when a writer joins (splices together) two independent clauses with a comma. Independent clauses may be joined with a coordinating conjunction (*and, or, nor, but*) or a conjunctive adverb (*however, consequently, therefore*, and others). Notice that clauses joined by coordinating conjunctions require only a comma. Clauses joined by a conjunctive adverb require a semicolon and a comma. To rectify a comma splice, try one of the possible revisions shown here:

DON'T COMMA SPLICE	DO ✓ REVISIONS
✗ Some employees prefer their desktop computers, others prefer their tablets.	✓ Some employees prefer their desktop computers, but others prefer their tablets.
	✓ Some employees prefer their desktop computers; however, others prefer their tablets.
	✓ Some employees prefer their desktop computers; others prefer their tablets.

3-3c Favoring Short Sentences

Because your goal is to communicate clearly, you should strive for sentences that average 20 words. Some sentences will be shorter; some will be longer. The American Press Institute reports that reader comprehension drops off markedly as sentences become longer.[5] Therefore, in crafting your sentences, think about the relationship between sentence length and comprehension.

Sentence Length	Comprehension Rate
8 words	100%
15 words	90%
19 words	80%
28 words	50%

Instead of stringing together clauses with *and*, *but*, and *however*, break some of those complex sentences into separate segments. Business readers want to grasp ideas immediately. They can do that best when thoughts are separated into short sentences. On the other hand, too many monotonous short sentences will sound "grammar schoolish" and may bore or even annoy the reader. Strive for a balance between longer sentences and shorter ones. Your grammar-checker and spell-checker can show you readability statistics that flag long sentences and give you an average sentence length.

3-4 Developing Business Writing Techniques

Business writers can significantly improve their messages by working on a few writing techniques. In this section we focus on emphasizing and de-emphasizing ideas and using active and passive voice strategically.

3-4a Developing Emphasis

When you are talking with someone, you can emphasize your main ideas by saying them loudly or by repeating them slowly. You could even pound the table if you want to show real emphasis! Another way you could signal the relative importance of an idea is by raising your eyebrows or by shaking your head or whispering in a low voice. But when you write, you must rely on other means to tell your readers which ideas are more important than others. Emphasis in writing can be achieved primarily in two ways: mechanically and stylistically.

Achieving Emphasis Through Mechanics. To emphasize an idea in print, a writer may use any of the following devices:

Underlining	Underlining draws the eye to a word.
Italics and boldface	Using *italics* or **boldface** conveys special meaning.
Font changes	Selecting a large, small, or different font draws interest.
All caps	Printing words in ALL CAPS is like shouting them.
Dashes	Dashes—used sparingly—can be effective.
Tabulation	Listing items vertically makes them stand out:

1. First item
2. Second item
3. Third item

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 4

Improve your writing by emphasizing important ideas, employing the active and passive voice effectively, using parallelism, and preventing dangling and misplaced modifiers.

Other means of achieving mechanical emphasis include the arrangement of space, color, lines, boxes, columns, titles, headings, and subheadings. Today's software and color printers provide a wonderful array of capabilities for setting off ideas. More tips on achieving emphasis are coming in Chapter 4, in which we cover document design.

Achieving Emphasis Through Style. Although mechanical devices are occasionally appropriate, more often a writer achieves emphasis stylistically. That is, the writer chooses words carefully and constructs sentences skillfully to emphasize main ideas and de-emphasize minor or negative ideas. Here are four suggestions for emphasizing ideas stylistically:

Use vivid, not general, words. Vivid words are emphatic because the reader can picture ideas clearly.

DON'T GENERAL	DO✔ VIVID
✗ The way we seek jobs has changed.	✔ The Internet has dramatically changed how job hunters search for positions.
✗ Someone will contact you as soon as possible.	✔ Ms. Rivera will telephone you before 5 p.m. tomorrow, May 3.

Label the main idea. If an idea is significant, tell the reader.

DON'T UNLABELED	DO✔ LABELED
✗ Consider looking for a job online, but also focus on networking.	✔ Consider looking for a job online; but, *most important*, focus on networking.
✗ We shop here because of the customer service and low prices.	✔ We like the customer service, but the *primary reason* for shopping here is the low prices.

Place the important idea first or last. Ideas have less competition from surrounding words when they appear first or last in a sentence. Observe how the concept of *productivity* can be emphasized by its position in the sentence:

DON'T MAIN IDEA LOST	DO✔ MAIN IDEA EMPHASIZED
✗ Profit-sharing plans are more effective in increasing *productivity* when they are linked to individual performance rather than to group performance.	✔ *Productivity* is more likely to be increased when profit-sharing plans are linked to individual performance rather than to group performance.

Give the important idea the spotlight. Don't dilute the effect of the main idea by making it share the stage with other words and clauses. Instead, put it in a simple sentence or in an independent clause.

DON'T MAIN IDEA LOST	DO ✓ MAIN IDEA CLEAR
✗ Although you are the first trainee we have hired for this program, we had many candidates and expect to expand the program in the future. (The main idea is lost in a dependent clause.)	✓ You are the first trainee we have hired for this program. (Simple sentence)

De-emphasizing When Necessary. To de-emphasize an idea, such as bad news, try one of the following stylistic devices:

Use general words.

DON'T EMPHASIZES HARSH STATEMENT	DO ✓ DE-EMPHASIZES HARSH STATEMENT
✗ Our records indicate that you were recently fired.	✓ Our records indicate that your employment status has recently changed.

Place the bad news in a dependent clause connected to an independent clause that contains something positive. In sentences with dependent clauses, the main emphasis is always on the independent clause.

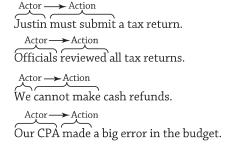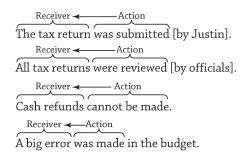| DON'T EMPHASIZES BAD NEWS	DO ✓ DE-EMPHASIZES BAD NEWS
✗ We cannot issue you credit at this time, but we have a special plan that will allow you to fill your immediate needs on a cash basis.	✓ Although credit cannot be issued at this time, you can fill your immediate needs on a cash basis with our special plan.

3-4b Using the Active and Passive Voice Effectively

In active-voice sentences, the subject, the actor, performs the action. In passive-voice sentences, the subject receives the action. Active-voice sentences are more direct because they reveal the performer immediately. They are easier to understand and usually shorter. Most business writing should be in the active voice. However, passive voice is useful to (a) emphasize an action rather than a person, (b) de-emphasize negative news, and (c) conceal the doer of an action.

Active Voice	Passive Voice
Actor → Action Justin must submit a tax return.	Receiver ← Action The tax return was submitted [by Justin].
Actor → Action Officials reviewed all tax returns.	Receiver ← Action All tax returns were reviewed [by officials].
Actor → Action We cannot make cash refunds.	Receiver ← Action Cash refunds cannot be made.
Actor → Action Our CPA made a big error in the budget.	Receiver ← Action A big error was made in the budget.

3-4c Developing Parallelism

Parallelism is a skillful writing technique that creates balanced writing. Sentences written so that their parts are balanced, or parallel, are easy to read and understand.

To achieve parallel construction, use similar structures to express similar ideas. For example, the words *computing, coding, recording,* and *storing* are parallel because the words all end in *-ing*. To express the list as *computing, coding, recording,* and *storage* is disturbing because the last item is not what the reader expects. Try to match nouns with nouns, verbs with verbs, and clauses with clauses. Avoid mixing active-voice verbs with passive-voice verbs. Your goal is to keep the wording balanced in expressing similar ideas.

DON'T LACKS PARALLELISM	DO✔ ILLUSTRATES PARALLELISM
✗ The policy affected all vendors, suppliers, and *those involved with consulting.*	✓ The policy affected all vendors, suppliers, and *consultants*. (Matches nouns.)
✗ Our primary goals are to increase productivity, reduce costs, and *the improvement of product quality.*	✓ Our primary goals are to increase productivity, reduce costs, and *improve product quality*. (Matches verbs.)
✗ We are scheduled to meet in Atlanta on January 5, *we are meeting in Montreal on the 15th of March*, and in Chicago on June 3.	✓ We are scheduled to meet in Atlanta on January 5, *in Montreal on March 15*, and in Chicago on June 3. (Matches phrases.)
✗ Shelby audits all accounts lettered A through L; accounts lettered M through Z are audited by Andrew.	✓ Shelby audits all accounts lettered A through L; Andrew audits accounts lettered M through Z. (Matches clauses.)
✗ Our Super Bowl ads have three objectives: 1. We want to increase product use. 2. Introduce complementary products. 3. Our corporate image will be enhanced.	✓ Our Super Bowl ads have three objectives: 1. Increase product use 2. Introduce complementary products 3. Enhance our corporate image (Matches verbs in listed items.)

3-4d Escaping Dangling and Misplaced Modifiers

For clarity, modifiers must be close to the words they describe or limit. A modifier dangles when the word or phrase it describes is missing from its sentence—for example, *After working overtime, the report was finally finished*. This sentence says that the report was working overtime. Revised, the sentence contains a logical subject: *After working overtime, we finally finished the report*.

A modifier is misplaced when the word or phrase it describes is not close enough to be clear—for example, *Firefighters rescued a dog from a burning car that had a broken leg.* Obviously, the car did not have a broken leg. The solution is to position the modifier closer to the word(s) it describes or limits: *Firefighters rescued a dog with a broken leg from a burning car.*

Introductory verbal phrases are particularly dangerous; be sure to follow them immediately with the words they logically describe or modify. Try this trick for detecting and remedying many dangling modifiers. Ask the question *Who?* or *What?* after any introductory phrase. The words immediately following should tell the reader who or what is performing the action. Try the *Who?* test on the first three danglers here:

DON'T — DANGLING OR MISPLACED MODIFIER	DO — CLEAR MODIFICATION
✗ Skilled at graphic design, the contract went to DesignOne.	✓ Skilled at graphic design, DesignOne won the contract.
✗ Working together as a team, the project was finally completed.	✓ Working together as a team, we finally completed the project.
✗ To meet the deadline, your Excel figures must be sent by May 1.	✓ To meet the deadline, you must send your Excel figures by May 1.
✗ The recruiter interviewed candidates who had excellent computer skills in the morning.	✓ In the morning the recruiter interviewed candidates with excellent computer skills.
✗ As an important customer to us, we invite you to our spring open house.	✓ As you are an important customer to us, we invite you to our spring open house. *OR*:
	✓ As an important customer to us, you are invited to our spring open house.

3-5 Drafting Well-Organized, Effective Paragraphs

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 5
Draft well-organized paragraphs that incorporate (a) topic sentences, (b) support sentences, and (c) transitional expressions to build coherence.

Good business writers develop well-organized paragraphs by focusing on a single main idea. The sentences in their paragraphs cohere, or stick together, by using transitional expressions.

3-5a Crafting Topic Sentences

A paragraph is unified when it develops a single main idea. That idea is usually expressed in a topic sentence, which may appear at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of the paragraph. Business writers generally place the topic sentence first in the paragraph. It tells readers what to expect and helps them understand the paragraph's central thought immediately.

3-5b Developing Support Sentences

Support sentences illustrate, explain, or strengthen the topic sentence. One of the hardest things for beginning writers to remember is that all support sentences in the paragraph must relate to the topic sentence. Any other topics should be treated separately. Support sentences provide specific details, explanations, and evidence. The following example starts with a topic sentence about flexible work scheduling and is followed by three support sentences that explain how flexible scheduling could work. Transitional expressions are italicized:

> **Topic sentence:** Flexible work scheduling could immediately increase productivity and enhance employee satisfaction in our organization.

> **Support sentences:** Managers would maintain their regular hours. For many other employees, *however*, flexible scheduling provides extra time to manage family responsibilities. Feeling less stress, employees are able to focus their attention better at work; *therefore*, they become more relaxed and more productive.

3-5c Building Paragraph Coherence

Paragraphs are coherent when ideas are linked—that is, when one idea leads logically to the next. Well-written paragraphs take the reader through a number of

Figure **3.4** Transitional Expressions to Build Coherence

To Add or Strengthen	To Show Time or Order	To Clarify	To Show Cause and Effect	To Contradict	To Contrast
additionally	after	for example	accordingly	actually	as opposed to
accordingly	before	for instance	as a result	but	at the same time
again	earlier	I mean	consequently	however	by contrast
also	finally	in other words	for this reason	in fact	conversely
beside	first	put another way	hence	instead	on the contrary
indeed	meanwhile	that is	so	rather	on the other hand
likewise	next	this means	therefore	still	previously
moreover	now	thus	thus	yet	similarly

steps. When the author skips from Step 1 to Step 3 and forgets Step 2, the reader is lost. Several techniques allow the reader to follow the writer's ideas:

- **Repeat a key idea by using the same expression or a similar one:** *Employees treat guests as VIPs. These VIPs are never told what they can or cannot do.*
- **Use pronouns to refer to previous nouns:** *All new employees receive a two-week orientation. They learn that every staffer has a vital role.*
- **Show connections with transitional expressions:** *Hospitality is our business; consequently, training is critical.* (Use transitions such as *consequently, however, as a result*, and *meanwhile*. For a complete list, see Figure 3.4.)

3-5d Controlling Paragraph Length

Although no rule regulates the length of paragraphs, business writers recognize the value of short paragraphs. Paragraphs with eight or fewer printed lines look inviting and readable. Long, solid chunks of print appear formidable. If a topic can't be covered in eight or fewer printed lines (not sentences), consider breaking it into smaller segments.

SUMMARY OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES

3-1 Apply Phase 2 of the 3-x-3 writing process, which begins with formal and informal research to collect background information.
- Apply the second phase of the writing process (prewriting) by researching, organizing, and drafting.
- Collect information by answering questions about what the receiver needs to know and what the receiver is to do.
- Conduct informal research for routine tasks by looking in the company's digital and other files, talking with the boss, interviewing the target audience, organizing informal surveys, and brainstorming for ideas
- Conduct formal research for long reports and complex problems by searching electronically or manually, investigating primary sources, and organizing scientific experiments.

3-2 Organize information into strategic relationships.
- For simple messages, make a quick scratch list of topics; for more complex messages, create an outline.
- To prepare an outline, divide the main topic into three to five major components.