Week 2

Comm 1234 Technical Writing Fundamentals

Winter 2016

David Laing

Plan for today

- The point of grammar
- What is a grammatically complete sentence?
- Common grammatical errors in technical writing
  - Sentence fragments
  - Run-on sentences
  - Misplaced modifiers
  - Faulty parallelism
- Time given for grammar exercise

The point of grammar

- Define the following words:
  - Break
  - The
- Need *context*.
- Need to see words *in relation to other words*.

What is grammar?

- Grammar is a set of structural relationships between words.

- Grammar is *necessary* for conveying meaning, which is the whole point of communication.

- E.g.

  – Conveying whole the is grammar *necessary* communication is of point for meaning the which.

Grammatically complete

- A grammatically complete sentence:
  - Contains at least one subject-predicate combination
  - Expresses a complete thought
- E.g.
  - This book summarizes recent criminology research.
  - The smudge tool creates soft effects.
  - My dog, Zorro, ate my paper.

Gurak, L.J. & Lannon J.M. (2016). Strategies for Technical Communication in the workplace. New York: Pearson.

Sentence fragments

- Sentence fragment = grammatically *incomplete*
- E.g.
  - Although the report was not yet complete.
    - Contains a subject-predicate combination
    - BUT, does not express a complete thought.
- Fixed:
  - Although the report was not yet complete, I began editing.

Gurak, L.J. & Lannon J.M. (2016). Strategies for Technical Communication in the workplace. New York: Pearson.

Sentence fragments

- Sentence fragment = grammatically *incomplete*
- E.g.
  - DesignPro, a brand-new desktop publishing program.
    - Contains no verb.
- Fixed:
  - DesignPro, a brand-new desktop publishing program, will be available soon.
  - DesignPro is a brand-new desktop publishing program.

Gurak, L.J. & Lannon J.M. (2016). Strategies for Technical Communication in the workplace. New York: Pearson.

Sentence fragments—exceptions

- Acceptable in commands or exclamations because the subject ("you") is understood:
  - Slow down.
  - Give me a hand.
  - Look out!
- Sometimes acceptable in questions and answers:
  - How? By investing wisely.
  - When? At three o'clock.
  - Who? Bill.

Lannon, J. (2012). *The Writing Process: A Concise Rhetoric, Reader, and Handbook*. New Jersey: Pearson.

Sentence fragments: practice questions

1. Fred is a terrible math student. But an excellent writer.

2. As they entered the haunted house. The floors began to groan.

3. Hoping for an A in biology. Sally studied every night.

Lannon, J. (2012). *The Writing Process: A Concise Rhetoric, Reader, and Handbook*. New Jersey: Pearson.

Run-on sentences

- A run-on sentence contains two or more grammatically complete sentences joined together without a conjunction or semi-colon:
    - For emergencies, we dial 911 for other questions, we dial 088.
    - Sarah did a great job, she was promoted.

Gurak, L.J. & Lannon J.M. (2016). Strategies for Technical Communication in the workplace. New York: Pearson.

Run-on sentences

- For emergencies, we dial 911 for other questions, we dial 088.

- Can be fixed by:
  - Dividing into two sentences:
    - For emergencies, we dial 911. For other questions, we dial 088.
  - Adding a conjunction:
    - For emergencies, we dial 911**, and** for other questions, we dial 088.
    - For emergencies, we dial 911**, but** for other questions, we dial 088.

Gurak, L.J. & Lannon J.M. (2016). Strategies for Technical Communication in the workplace. New York: Pearson.

Run-on sentences

- Sarah did a great job, she was promoted.
- Can be fixed by:
  - Dividing into two sentences:
    - Sarah did a great job. She was promoted.
  - Replacing comma with semi-colon:
    - Sarah did a great job; she was promoted.
  - Adding a conjunction:
    - Sarah did a great job, so she was promoted.
    - Because Sarah did a great job, she was promoted.

Gurak, L.J. & Lannon J.M. (2016). Strategies for Technical Communication in the workplace. New York: Pearson.

Run-on sentences

- Transitional words (*however, therefore, otherwise, thus, consequently*, etc) are often found in the middle of a run-on sentence:
  - At that point the shock sphere is no longer strong enough to heat the air to incandescence, **however**, the sphere is still very strong.
  - Primary bodies are those that are outside the zone of protection, **thus**, they are susceptible to the effects of a direct lightning strike.

Alley, M. (1999). Recognizing Run-ons and Fragments. University Park: the Pennsylvania State University.

Run-on sentences

- If you're using a transitional word in between two complete thoughts, separate by a semi-colon or a period.
  - At that point the shock sphere is no longer strong enough to heat the air to incandescence; **however**, the sphere is still very strong.
  - At that point the shock sphere is no longer strong enough to heat the air to incandescence. **However**, the sphere is still very strong.

Alley, M. (1999). Recognizing Run-ons and Fragments. University Park: the Pennsylvania State University.

Run-on sentences

- If you're using a transitional word in between two complete thoughts, separate by a semi-colon or a period.

  – Primary bodies are those that are outside the zone of protection; **thus**, they are susceptible to the effects of a direct lightning strike.

  – Primary bodies are those that are outside the zone of protection. **Thus**, they are susceptible to the effects of a direct lightning strike.

Alley, M. (1999). Recognizing Run-ons and Fragments. University Park: the Pennsylvania State University.

Run-on sentences

- Transitional words sometimes appear in the middle of a *single* complete thought. This is fine.
  - Both sites produce the same three sources of energy: coal, oil, and natural gas. Both sites, **however**, do not produce these sources in the same proportions.
  - We've been good friends since kindergarten. We do not, **however**, see each other frequently.

Alley, M. (1999). Recognizing Run-ons and Fragments. University Park: the Pennsylvania State University.

Run-on sentences: practice questions

1. Efforts are being made to halt water pollution, however, there is no simple solution to the problem.

2. Bill slept through his final, he had forgotten to set his alarm.

3. Pets should not be allowed on our campus they are messy and sometimes dangerous.

Lannon, J. (2012). *The Writing Process: A Concise Rhetoric, Reader, and Handbook*. New Jersey: Pearson.

Misplaced modifiers

- A modifier is a word or phrase that modifies another word or phrase.
  - **Having worked all day**, she was ready for bed.
  - **Being a good student**, he always attended class.
- A modifier is said to be misplaced if it modifies the wrong word or phrase:
  - **Plunging 1,000 feet into the gorge**, we saw Yosemite Falls.
  - **As a baboon who grew up wild in the jungle**, I realized that Wiki had special nutritional needs.

Pinker, S. (2014). The Sense of Style. New York: Penguin.

Misplaced modifiers

- Plunging 1,000 feet into the gorge, we saw Yosemite Falls.

- Can be fixed by:
  - Reordering phrases:
    - We saw Yosemite Falls plunging 1,000 feet into the gorge.

Pinker, S. (2014). The Sense of Style. New York: Penguin.

Misplaced modifiers

- As a baboon who grew up wild in the jungle, I realized that Wiki had special nutritional needs.

- Can be fixed by:

  - Reordering the phrases:

    - I realized that Wiki, as a baboon who grew up wild in the jungle, had special nutritional needs.

Pinker, S. (2014). The Sense of Style. New York: Penguin.

Misplaced modifiers: practice questions

1. Locked in a vault for 50 years, the owner of the jewels has decided to sell them.

2. When a small boy, a girl is of little interest.

3. Having killed a man and served four years in prison, I feel that Tom Joad is ripe to get into trouble.

Pinker, S. (2014). The Sense of Style. New York: Penguin.

Faulty parallelism

- Whenever words or phrases are used in a list (even of just two items), they must belong to the same category.
  - I **study** and **work**. (verb, verb)
  - She was **smart**, **dedicated**, and **friendly**. (adjective, adjective, adjective)
  - We went to **London**, **Paris**, and **Berlin**. (noun, noun, noun)

Faulty parallelism

- A sentence suffers from faulty parallelism when the items in a list fit into different categories:
  - I am a **student** and **work**. (noun, verb)
  - She was **smart**, **dedicated**, and **walked to school every day**. (**adjective**, **adjective**, **verb phrase**)
  - We went to **London**, **Paris**, and **loved them both**. (**noun**, **noun**, **verb phrase**)

Faulty parallelism

- She was smart, dedicated, and walked to school every day.

- Can be fixed by:
  - Separating the items into two lists according to their categories:
    - She was smart and dedicated, and she walked to school every day.

Faulty parallelism

- We went to London, Paris, and loved them both.
- Can be fixed by:
  - Separating the items into two lists according to their categories:
    - We went to London and Paris, and we loved them both.

Faulty parallelism

1. The company offers special training to help employees move into careers like engineering management, software development, service technicians, and sales trainees.

2. The frustrated customer wanted to exchange the article, to obtain a refund, and she wanted to speak to the manager.

3. Physical and mental health and wellness rest on four pillars: regular exercise, healthy diet, social interaction, and getting sufficient sleep.

Grammar exercise

- Feel free to use the remaining time and ask for my help.

- Make sure you understand these concepts for the first test.

- Exercise due at beginning of class next week.

- Answers to exercise questions can be found here:
  - http://writing.engr.psu.edu/exercises/ grammar_key.pdf