

Writing Tips



Soc Sci 172AW

What is wrong with this sentence?

Howard Zinn argues that the American Revolution did not bring about radical social change, it simply replaced one elite group with another.

What is wrong with this sentence?

Howard Zinn argues that the American Revolution did not bring about radical social change, it simply replaced one elite group with another.



Comma splice

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- A comma splice happens when you connect two independent clauses with a comma. There are three easy ways to fix this:
 - Split the sentence in two.
 - Add a conjunction
 - Add a semicolon

Comma splice fixed

- Howard Zinn argues that the American Revolution did not really bring about radical social change. Instead, it replaced one elite group with another.
- Howard Zinn argues that the American Revolution did not really bring about radical social change because it simply replaced one elite group with another.
- Howard Zinn argues that the American Revolution did not really bring about radical social change; it simply replaced one elite group with another.

What is wrong with this sentences?

Tecumseh had tried to unite Native American tribes against the US government, but Andrew Jackson had succeeded in removing them.

What is wrong with this sentences?

Tecumseh **had** tried to unite Native American tribes against the US government, but Andrew Jackson **had** succeeded in removing them

Past Tense

- When writing about the past, use the simple past tense (verb + ed)
 - Tecumseh **tried** to unite the Native American tribes.
- DO NOT use the past continuous tense (was + verb + ing)
 - Tecumseh **was trying** to unite the Native American tribes.
- DO NOT use the past perfect tense (had + verb + ed)
 - Tecumseh **had tried** to unite the Native American tribes.

Past tense fixed

Tecumseh tried to unite Native American tribes against the US government, but Andrew Jackson succeeded in removing them.

What is wrong with this sentence?

Protesting racism at peaceful rallies, the police were often violent towards civil rights activists.

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were often violent towards civil rights activists.



Dangling Modifier

Dangling participle

- The subject of a dependent clause should match the subject of the sentence.
 - The subject of “protesting racism at peaceful rallies” is “civil rights activists”
 - The subject of “the police were often violent toward civil rights activists” is “the police.”
- So, as it is, the sentence means that the police themselves were protesting racism at peaceful rallies.
- Better to say “The police were often violent towards civil rights activists who protested racism at peaceful rallies.”

Dangling participles, other examples

- Acting in a very racist way, Derrick Bell describes the founding fathers' response to a black woman.
- Soaring through the sky, I watched an airplane from my office window.
- Tired from partying all weekend, the student's draft didn't meet the page requirement.

