

GOALS

- Learn why mastering sentence structure is important in writing
- Understand seven problems writers commonly encounter with sentence structure
- Learn and apply rules for correct sentence structure in exercises and writing assignments

What technological advances are of most interest to you and how are they beneficial? Do they have any drawbacks?

LEARN WHAT THE ERROR IS

Errors with Sentence Structure

A **sentence-structure** error is an error in which part of the grammatical structure of a sentence is incorrect. There are several types of sentence-structure errors, including missing sentence parts, unnecessary repetition of the subject of a sentence, two clauses joined that do not fit together in a sentence, or problems with parallel structure. **Fragments** (sentences that are less than complete) and **run-on** sentences (two or more sentences that are joined with no connecting word or punctuation) are sentence boundary problems, which are also addressed in this unit. As you work through this unit, remember that a complete sentence in English must have at least a subject and a verb. The editing symbol for sentence-structure errors is *ss*.

You need to be aware that sentences marked *ss* may also have other errors, but your instructor may choose not to mark them. For instance, in the sentence *By assisting to a person who does not needs help can be embarrassing*, there is an overall problem with sentence structure. The sentence does not have a subject. (Note: *By assisting to a person who does not needs help* is not a sentence subject; it is an introductory phrase.) However, the sentence also contains a verb-form (*a person who does not needs help*) and a preposition error (*by assisting to*). However, the most serious problem with the sentence is its incorrect sentence structure.

Sentence-structure errors are global (more serious) errors. As such, they not only cause readers great difficulty in understanding a piece of writing but also are highly noticeable to readers. In the sentence, *A person who does not exercise regularly is not because they don't care their health*, the reader has to go back and mentally change the sentence to *A person's failure to exercise regularly may not indicate a lack of concern about his or her health* to make it correct and to be able to comprehend it. Thus, the reader must edit the text while reading its content. Sentence-structure errors are also highly noticeable to readers in the academic and professional worlds because writers are expected to have good control of sentence structure. Thus, writers who are making sentence-structure errors will want to give high priority to reducing these errors in their writing.

Suggestions for Reducing Errors

- Try to determine if there is a pattern in the sentence-structure errors you are making. Examine your essays and ask yourself whether your

sentence-structure errors are of one particular type or of several different types.

- Once you know what your sentence-structure problems are, study the specific rules in this unit. Then, if you know you have a tendency to omit the verb *to be* in your sentences, for example, you can begin to consciously monitor your writing for this error.
- If possible, try to figure out why you are making sentence-structure errors. For example, perhaps you are having difficulty with leaving out or repeating the subject of a sentence because such a structure is permitted in your native language or perhaps it is a structure you need to study further and practice.
- Read extensively in English. Although you may not notice its impact on your writing immediately, reading will help you become more familiar with English sentence structure and help you improve your ability to write correct sentences in English.

Write answers to the following questions. Share your answers with another student.

1. What are two different kinds of sentence-structure problems?
2. Why do sentence-structure errors make a piece of writing particularly difficult for the reader to comprehend?

Check Your
Understanding

GRAMMAR JOURNAL ENTRY 7 SENTENCE STRUCTURE

Respond to the following in your grammar journal.

1. Write about your career plans and goals. If you are a student, discuss what ideas you have about your future career. If you are already working, discuss whether or not you are satisfied with your current position or whether you hope to do something different.
2. Underline or highlight five sentences in your response to question 1. Then, mark the subject and the verb in each sentence. If the sentence has other parts that you can identify (for example, a prepositional phrase or an object), mark those also.

UNDERSTAND COMMON PROBLEMS

This section presents seven problems that writers commonly encounter with sentence structure. First, take the pre-test to see what you already know about sentence structure. When you finish, check your answers on page 352. Then, carefully study each problem and the examples that illustrate it. Pay particular attention to those problems that correspond to the pre-test questions you had difficulty with. Remember that becoming aware of the types of errors you most often make with sentence structure will increase your chances of avoiding these errors in your writing.

Pre-test

What Do You Already Know?

Test your ability to recognize and correct errors with sentence structure.

- A** Correct the marked sentence-structure errors. These are examples of the seven common problems that are presented in this unit.

Problem 1 In my opinion, speaking in English easier than writing in English.

Problem 2 Is a very interesting point you have raised.

Problem 3 My summer internship, for example, it is one way for me to obtain valuable work experience.

Problem 4 My parents are first-generation immigrants to the United States, and they communicate mostly native language.

Problem 5 After celebrating a holiday and having time off makes it difficult to start studying again.

Problem 6 At present, I am finishing a project and also I start a new one.

Problem 7 If you are working as an attorney, the problem is not the quantity of work itself it is the responsibility you feel for your clients.

- B** Correct the one error in each of the following sentences. (The errors are not in any particular order.)

1. Malnutrition in children is a problem in many poor countries
childhood obesity is a growing problem in the United States.
2. Is a very hard adjustment to have a roommate if a student has always
had a single room at home.

3. Unlike lots friends who like dining out in restaurants, I prefer to eat at home.
4. Most of the athletes at my university they have full scholarships.
5. Students in a recent survey reported that they liked the new library but wanting a new gym as well.
6. If they have not studied enough, most students think the test they are taking very hard.
7. In the beginning of a new school year is difficult for teachers and students.

Seven Common Problems

Problem 1

The verb to be is missing.

Incorrect: My cousin probably a very rich man in Vietnam since he owned many houses.

Correct: My cousin was probably a very rich man in Vietnam since he owned many houses.

Incorrect: There many majors to choose from on this campus.

Correct: There are many majors to choose from on this campus.

SELF-HELP STRATEGY: Be particularly careful to include the verb to be when it is needed in English, particularly if the verb to be does not exist or is used in a different way in your native language. Also be aware that be is often contracted and is hard to hear in spoken English.

Problem 2

The subject of a sentence or clause is missing.

Incorrect: When we meet new people and start living in a totally new environment is scary.

Correct: Meeting new people and living in a totally new environment is scary.

Note: In the incorrect sentence above, the adverb clause beginning with *when* cannot be the subject of the verb *is*. Thus, the sentence does not have a subject.

Incorrect: When realized his son^{ss} was frequently skipping class, Mr. Simon was angry.

Correct: When he realized his son was frequently skipping class, Mr. Simon was angry.

Incorrect: Is an interesting class^{ss} in which I am learning a great deal.

Correct: It is an interesting class in which I am learning a great deal.

SELF-HELP STRATEGY: Make sure all verbs have subjects when you are making statements in English. The verb *to be* sometimes requires the "dummy subject" *it* as in the example above or in the structure [*it is* + adjective]. (*It is easy to park on campus. It is useful to have a dictionary.*)

Note: Verbs in the imperative or command form have an implied subject *you*, as in the sentence *Feel free to leave early.* (The implied subject is *you*.)

Problem 3

The subject of a sentence has been unnecessarily repeated.

Incorrect: The mechanic he said^{ss} the car's brakes were worn.

Correct: The mechanic said the car's brakes were worn.

SELF-HELP STRATEGY: Remember that, in conversation, English speakers sometimes repeat the subject of a sentence as in the incorrect example above. In formal writing, however, this kind of repetition is incorrect.

Problem 4

Words in a sentence are missing.

Incorrect: They do not want their children to grow up in a broken family^{ss} father's or mother's love.

Correct: They do not want their children to grow up in a broken family without a father's or mother's love.

Problem 5

Two clauses or phrases and a verb have been used that do not work together grammatically.

Incorrect: He also knew that he didn't possess ^{ss} enough power to against the current government.

Correct: He also knew that he didn't possess enough power to fight against the current government.

Incorrect: ^{ss} As my brother said to my mother that he did not feel like having children.

Correct: My brother said to my mother that he did not feel like having children.

Correct: As my brother said to my mother, he does not feel like having children.

Incorrect: ^{ss} In the article, "Vitamin C Under Attack," by Mario Nevares, explains some possible negative effects of taking large doses of vitamin C.

Correct: In the article, "Vitamin C Under Attack," Mario Nevares explains some possible negative effects of taking large doses of vitamin C.

Note: This error is sometimes called *mixed sentence structure*.

Incorrect: My advisor told me to find the article online ^{ss (not //)} and that reading it as soon as possible was necessary.

Correct: My advisor told me to find the article online and to read it as soon as possible.

Incorrect: Most successful students are skilled at taking notes, summarizing, ^{ss (not //)} and are able to read critically.

Correct: Most successful students are skilled at taking notes, summarizing, and reading critically.

Note: Your instructor may mark this kind of error *ss (not //)*.

Problem 6

Parallel structure has not been used when needed.

Problem 7

A sentence boundary problem has occurred.

Either the sentence is a fragment (less than a complete sentence), a run-on sentence (two complete sentences with no punctuation between them), or a comma splice (two complete sentences connected with a comma).

Incorrect: On the river rafting trip, please bring clothes that will dry quickly and keep you warm polyester and wool are the best. ^{ss (ro)}

Correct: On the river rafting trip, please bring clothes that will dry quickly and keep you warm. Polyester and wool are the best.

Incorrect: After having had the experience of traveling abroad. An individual has a broader perspective on the world. ^{ss (frag)}

Correct: After having had the experience of traveling abroad, an individual has a broader perspective on the world.

Incorrect: Lidia keeps her passport in a security pocket when she travels, ^{ss (cs)} she then knows where it is at all times.

Correct: Lidia keeps her passport in a security pocket when she travels; she then knows where it is at all times.

Note: Your instructor may mark these errors *ss (frag)* for a fragment, *ss (ro)* for a run-on sentence, or *ss (cs)* for a comma splice.

REVIEW GRAMMAR SOLUTIONS

Understanding English Sentences

If you learn the following important information about English sentence structure, you will be able to avoid many of the sentence-structure problems illustrated above. However, English sentence structure is complex and cannot be covered in full detail in these guidelines.

1. A sentence is a group of words that can stand by itself as a complete idea. It must have at least a subject and a main verb in order to be complete. For example, the sentence *Cats meow* is complete because *cats* is the subject and *meow* is the main verb. Some verbs require objects or complements to follow them in order to make the sentence complete. For example, *The wall is red* is a complete sentence because it has a subject (*the wall*) and a verb (*is*). However, it also needs a complement to make it complete (*red*). The sentence, *John gave a speech* is a complete sentence because it has a subject (*John*) and a verb (*gave*). *John gave* is not a complete sentence because the verb needs a direct object (*a speech*) to make it complete.

2. Sentences are sometimes defined as having a subject and a predicate. The predicate is the verb or verb phrase and all of its complements (such as adverbs, direct and indirect objects, auxiliary verbs, and prepositional phrases).

Examples:

subject *predicate*
The wall / is red.

subject *predicate*
John / gave a speech.

Note: A verb in the imperative, or command form, does not have a stated subject in English because the subject *you* is implied, as in the sentence, *Please give me your e-mail address*, where the verb *give* is a command. The imperative is the only type of verb that does not need a stated subject in an English sentence.

3. Standard word order for sentences in English is [subject-verb-object] or [subject-verb complement]. For more information on word order in sentences, see Unit 8, “Word Order.”

4. A sentence must have at least one independent clause. A dependent clause is not a complete sentence even though it has a subject and a verb. However, when a dependent clause is connected to an independent clause, the entire structure is a complete sentence. When you write sentences of more than one clause, make sure that the two clauses you have chosen fit together correctly. If not, you will have a mixed construction or a sentence-structure error, as illustrated in Problem 5.

Examples:

New York is on the east coast of the United States. (independent clause = complete sentence)

While New York is on the east coast of the United States. (dependent clause = not a complete sentence)

While Los Angeles is on the west coast, New York is on the east coast of the United States. (one independent clause and one dependent clause = complete sentence)

5. The subject of a sentence can be one of the following:

- a noun (*the book; Maria; an engineer*)
- a pronoun (*I; you; he, she, it; we; they*)
- a noun clause (*what the engineer said; that you were late*)
- a gerund or infinitive (*reading; to read*)

For more information on verb phrases, see Unit 2, "Verb Forms."

Note: A prepositional phrase (*in the article by Leon Smith; at the movies*) cannot serve as a sentence subject.

6. The verb in a sentence can be one main verb or a main verb in a verb phrase.

Examples:

Norman bicycles to work every day. (main verb)

Norman has been bicycling to work every day for a year. (verb phrase: main verb with two auxiliary verbs preceding it)

Avoiding Sentence Boundary Problems

1. A complete sentence begins with a capital letter (upper case) and ends with a punctuation mark (a period, a question mark, or an exclamation point), as shown in the following examples:

Examples:

Employees generally have a four-day weekend for Thanksgiving.
Do employees have a four-day weekend for Thanksgiving?
I am so happy that this coming weekend is a four-day weekend!

2. A fragment is less than a sentence. The sentence that follows is not complete because it is a dependent clause and needs to be connected to an independent clause to make it a complete sentence.

Examples:

(Fragment) Even though employees generally have a four-day weekend for Thanksgiving.

(Revision) Even though employees generally have a four-day weekend for Thanksgiving, some will have to remain on call for emergencies.

Avoid fragments by making sure that your sentences have at least a subject and a main verb and one independent clause.

3. A run-on sentence is defined as two sentences that have not been separated by any punctuation. The sentence that follows is a run-on because it consists of two independent clauses without any punctuation. These clauses must be separated by a punctuation mark or be joined with a connecting word.

Examples:

(Run-on) Living away from home for the first time has been a learning experience for me I have become a much more independent and self-sufficient person.

(Revision 1) Living away from home for the first time has been a learning experience for me, I have become a much more independent and self-sufficient person.

(Revision 2) Living away from home for the first time has been a learning experience for me, for I have become a much more independent and self-sufficient person.

4. A comma splice is a type of run-on sentence in which two independent clauses are incorrectly separated with a comma instead of a period or semicolon.

Examples:

(Comma splice) One option is to listen to music, another option is to watch a video.

(Revision 1) One option is to listen to music; another option is to watch a video.

(Revision 2) One option is to listen to music, Another option is to watch a video.

(Revision 3) One option is to listen to music, while another option is to watch a video.

(Revision 4) One option is to listen to music, but another option is to watch a video.

(Revision 5) One option is to listen to music; however, another option is to watch a video.

Avoid run-on sentences and comma splices by making sure that complete sentences (independent clauses) end with either a period, question mark, or exclamation mark. You can also join two independent clauses with a connecting word (for example: *and*, *but*, *for*, *after*, *before*, *while*, *because*) or with a semicolon or colon.

Using Parallel Structure

Whenever one or more items in a sentence are joined by the words *and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, *yet*, these parts of the sentence should be parallel in structure. That is, they should have the same grammatical form (for example, all infinitives, all noun clauses, or all prepositional phrases).

Examples of Parallel Structure

Verbs (infinitives):

I like to swim, to surf, and to waterski.

Verbs (base forms):

I like to swim, surf, and waterski.

Verbs (gerunds):

I enjoy swimming, surfing, and waterskiing.

Verbs (present participles):

While he was thinking about the class lectures and reviewing some articles, he got an idea for his term paper.

Prepositional phrases:

Nowadays, social networking websites are used heavily by many people and in many different ways.

Nouns:

Next week Kazu has to work on a term paper, a problem set, and a laboratory report.

Noun clauses:

Professor Allen has promised that the exam will be graded by 5:00 PM and that the scores will be posted online by 5:30 PM.

Adjectives:

The teacher is friendly and helpful but somewhat disorganized.

IMPROVE YOUR WRITING STYLE

IMPROVING SENTENCE VARIETY

Although every complete sentence needs to have a subject and a verb, the subject does not always have to be the first word in a sentence in English. You can improve sentence variety in your writing by using other kinds of structures at the beginning of some of your sentences.

A time word or phrase:

Yesterday we decided to go on a hike in the mountains.

An infinitive phrase to show purpose:

To avoid being indoors all day, we decided to go on a hike in the mountains.

A dependent clause:

Because the weather was so beautiful, we decided to walk on the beach.

A prepositional phrase:

In my hometown, a beautiful lake attracts visitors and residents alike.

An adverb:

Certainly, I can see your point.

A transitional word or phrase:

On the other hand, I can see you have a point, even though I do not fully agree.

VARYING SENTENCE LENGTH

Vary the length of your sentences. Although in academic writing, long and complex sentences are common, including a short sentence in a text from time to time is very effective because it helps change the rhythm of the text. Shorter sentences are also effective ways to provide emphasis.

PRACTICE WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED**EXERCISE 1**

Directions: Some of the following sentences contain sentence-structure errors. First, decide whether a sentence is correct (C) or incorrect (I). Then, rewrite the incorrect sentences.

I 1. Molecular genetics a field that is progressing very quickly.

Molecular genetics is a field that is progressing very quickly.

___ 2. To know their native language should be proud instead of embarrassed.

___ 3. She wonders whether studying so hard worth it.

___ 4. Engineering 101, it is the course that I spend the least time on.

___ 5. Room 100 Smith Hall is one of the largest classrooms on my campus it can hold around 500 students.

___ 6. As grow up, many children develop attitudes they will later have as adults.

___ 7. To improve her writing skills, Ana keeps a writing journal and reads as much as possible.

___ 8. Astronauts need to be prepared for every obstacle that could encounter in space.

___ 9. When she has time, Kim likes to take bike rides, read novels, and visiting her friends.

___ 10. The office is well equipped has a lot of antique furniture.

___ 11. By putting up beautiful art has made me feel more relaxed in my office.

EXERCISE 2

Directions: Some of the following sentences have parallel-structure problems. First, decide whether the sentence is correct (C) or incorrect (I). Then, rewrite any incorrect sentences.

I 1. That Jack arrived late and his not being prepared angered his supervisor.

That Jack arrived late and that he was not prepared angered his supervisor.

_____ 2. That is Dr. Wood, my thesis advisor and who chairs the
Chemistry Department.

_____ 3. In college, what classes you take and when you take them is
generally your own decision.

_____ 4. His job involves washing lab equipment, to set up experiments,
and recording data.

_____ 5. Sitting in a coffee shop and search the Internet is one of my
favorite evening activities.

_____ 6. I spent the day in San Francisco walk on the Golden Gate
Bridge, visiting Chinatown, and do many other things.

EXERCISE 3

Directions: Complete the following sentences in your own words. Make
sure you use parallel structure.

1. Three things I enjoy doing in my free time are

2. We are looking for the following characteristics in a job applicant:

3. Several good places to go for a bicycle ride in my area are

4. Below are some ways to avoid feeling homesick in a new environment:

• *Stay active*

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

EXERCISE 4

Directions: Four of the following sentences have sentence-boundary problems, while one is correct. Circle the number of the correct sentence. Correct the incorrect sentences.

1. The most useful class I took was statistics, it was very challenging for me.
2. Thus far, school is more fun than work however I find the studies quite hard.
3. Statistics is a very useful class for me, as I am learning how to analyze my research data.
4. Chicago is such an interesting city I love going there.
5. Another reason why some people do not exercise regularly. Simply a lack of time.

EXERCISE 5

Directions: Copy at least five sentences from one of your textbooks, a journal, a news article, or a magazine. Examine each sentence carefully and look at its structure. Try to notice how the sentences are constructed, including how each sentence begins and how each is punctuated. Label the subject and main verb and note whether the sentence is made up of one or more clauses.

Post-test

What Do You Know Now?

A Correct the marked sentence-structure errors.

1. My teacher, who uses computers, she asks the students to tell her about new grammar resources they have discovered on the Internet.
2. My teacher older but she has a lot of energy and experience.
3. As for the class in advanced physics is going very well.
4. By having the students come in for conferences is helping them learn individually and work on specific problems in their writing.
5. The grammar that will be covered on the grammar exam is as follows: sentence structure, finding the correct verb tense, verb form, dependent clauses, modals, and reviewing conditional sentences.
6. My grandparents they like to visit us often.
7. How to solve that problem not clear to me.
8. The best formula for success college is to study hard, find a study group, and exercise.
9. When students first get to college is a difficult adjustment because high school is so different.
10. As many new students find out after their first tests that they must study harder than before.

B Find the sentence-structure errors and rewrite the sentences.

1. Depending on the weather and the time of year determines which route we take.

2. Eating, watching the football game, and we talked a lot added up to a wonderful Thanksgiving Day.

3. My sister Susan, she works harder than any person I know.

4. By memorizing the formulas will help me pass the chemistry exam.

5. Getting good grades a must in today's competitive world.

C Identify sentence boundary problems in the following sentences. Label each sentence as *ro* (run-on), *cs* (comma splice), or *frag* (fragment). Then, correct the sentence.

___ 1. Intercultural marriages are becoming more common however some people still think that they will not work.

___ 2. Even though it is summer.

___ 3. At the end of a semester, students usually feel very stressed, what is worrying them is all the work they have to complete before final exams.

___ 4. It is going to snow tonight, drivers need to be very cautious on the highways.

___ 5. Although we have talked about this problem many times before.

___ 6. My mother would dedicate time to studying grammar and making vocabulary lists as a way to learn new vocabulary in English all this work did not help her that much because she really needed to go out and speak English in public.

D Complete each sentence below with a parallel structure.

1. The four courses I am taking this quarter are _____.
2. I get really nervous when I think about what I have to study this week
and _____.
3. Next week, when I do not have any midterms, I am going to read a
book, _____.
4. The two universities which my sister is thinking of applying to are
_____.