

Common Grammatical and Rhetorical Problems

English 1406/1413/1423

The Ten Most Serious Problems

- ① Sentence Fragments
- ② Comma Splices
- ③ Run-On or Fused Sentences
- ④ Faulty Parallelisms
- ⑤ Misplaced Modifiers
- ⑥ Subject-Verb Agreement Faults
- ⑦ Tense Faults
- ⑧ Pronoun Reference Faults
- ⑨ Possessive Faults
- ⑩ Wordiness

Sentence Fragments (Frag)

- Definition

- A sentence missing one of its crucial parts

- Components of a sentence

- Subject-Predicate-Object

She runs.

John hits Joe.

- Common fragments

- Subordinate clauses

He dropped his teeth. Which had cost him five hundred dollars.

- Appositive phrases

A good example is Rohinton Mistry. A writer of great talent.

- Gerund or participial phrases

Cleopatra is the stronger. Trying to create Antony in her own Egyptian image.

Comma Splices (CS)

- Definition

- Linking two independent or principle clauses with a comma
John hits Joe, Joe hits John back.

- Common Comma Splices

- A short sentence added to a long one

The book describes human evolution in wholly believable terms, comparing the social habits of gorillas and chimpanzees to human behaviour, it is very convincing.

- Sentences with conjunctive adverbs (however, therefore, nevertheless, moreover, furthermore, rather, etc.)

John hit Joe, however, Joe did not hit John back.

- Sentences with transitional phrases (for example, in fact, that is)

Miranda drives too fast, for example, she drove 100km in an 80km zone.

Run-On or Fused Sentences

• Definition

- Linking two independent or principle clauses without appropriate punctuation

John hit Joe Joe hit John.

• Occur where comma splices often occur

The class was not merely dull it was useless.

I went to the supermarket however it was closed.

Faulty Parallelism

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• What is parallelism?

- Creating parallel constructions in sentences to show equivalence

The woman was attractive, intelligent, and articulate.

• What is faulty parallelism?

- Occurs when the parts in a parallel construction are not equivalent

The woman was attractive, intelligent, and expressed herself clearly.

• Common types of faulty parallelism

- Articles or prepositions in a series

A dog, a cat and mouse

By land, sea, or by air

- Faulty pairs

She liked the theatre and dancing.

He was shy but a creative man.

Students are not only organising social activities, but are also interested in political questions.

Misplaced and Misused Modifiers (MM, DM, and SM)

- What are they?
 - poorly placed adjectives, adverbs, or modifying phrases, creating confusion in the sentence
- Incomplete comparisons
 - You must complete all comparisons
The prairies are flatter.
- Squinting Modifiers
 - Modifiers that look in two directions at once
She planned on the next day to call him.
- Dangling Modifiers
 - Modifiers that don't refer to anything or that refer to the wrong thing
While walking to school, the bus went by.
- Split Infinitives
 - Splitting an infinitive form of a verb with an adverb
To boldly go where no man has gone before.

Subject-Verb Agreement Faults (AGR)

👁 Definition

- 👁 Subjects and verbs don't agree in number

👁 Occur in sentences where the subject and verb are widely separated

The grazing ground of both the antelope and the wild horses are west of this range.

👁 Occur when plural constructions fall between subject and verb

The attention of the students wander out the window.

👁 Occur with collective nouns

Her family were bitter about it.

👁 Occur following indefinite pronouns (each, neither, anyone, everyone, no one, none, everybody, nobody) all of which are singular

None of them are going to get to the game on time.

👁 Occur in the "either...or / neither... nor" construction

Neither the make of his car nor the price of his stereo impress us.

Either the parents or the child are to blame.

Tense Faults

- ① Definition

- ① Using inappropriate tense in a sentence

- ① Common tense problems

- ① Deviating from present literary tense

Shakespeare's Miranda was amazed to see a man other than her father.

- ① Shifting tenses mid-paragraph or mid-sentence

Shakespeare's Miranda is surprised to see Ferdinand, but she soon got over her surprise and began to show interest in him.

Pronoun Reference Faults (VPR & AGR)

• Vague Pronoun Reference

- Distant antecedent
- Unclear to whom or what the pronoun refers

In Saskatchewan they grow wheat.

• Pronoun Agreement Faults

- Nominative pronouns

It is me.

She is taller than me.

- Objective pronouns

Charles drove my daughter and I to the park.

Who did you give my phone number to?

- Pronouns before a gerund

His friends didn't like him drinking.

Possessive Faults (Poss)

• Definition

- Misusing or not using an apostrophe to indicate possession

• Common problems

- Just plain forgetting

The sonnets central concern is almost always love.

- It's does not indicate possession

The poem has as it's central theme the permanence of poetry in the face of inevitable death.

- Singular words/names ending in -s require and 's

James's book, Keats's poem

- Plural words/names ending in -s are followed by an apostrophe

The Joneses' car, three days' time

- Compound words take 's on the last word only

my mother-in-law's house

Wordiness (Wdy & PV)

- Wordiness removes clarity and punch from your writing

- Common causes

- Passive voice and overuse of the verb "to be"

Joe is hit by John.

Many men were killed on the front today.

- Verbal stretchers (It is...that, There is...that, use of, etc.)

It is important that one understand whom Shakespeare addresses in his sonnets.

There are many who won't ever have the opportunity to go to university.

Shakespeare makes use of foreshadowing.

- Of-and-which disease

- Try to keep your qualifications to a minimum

- Use no more than 3 ofs in one sentence

Exercises

1. Being washed daily, details in the marble carvings of both monuments are falling off.
2. The five days spent on the beach just relaxing and soaking up the sun.
3. Getting the model aeroplane off the ground was even harder than to build it from a kit.
4. In Econ 150, students meet in small groups for an extra hour each week, these seminars give them a chance to learn from each other.
5. The doctor prescribed a different medication, however, it's too soon to tell if it's working.
6. After getting a degree in education, more experience in the classroom is needed to be a good teacher.
7. I didn't know which job I wanted I was too confused to decide.
8. Travellers going to Europe should consider going in the spring or fall. Because airfares and hotels are often cheaper then.

9. The factory workers were told that they had been fired by the personnel director.
10. The article looked at future uses of computers and what their role will be in the next century.
11. Either the players or the coach are to blame for this weekends poor performance.
12. The decision that was reached by the committee was to postpone the vote.
13. Sonny said in the morning he would look for the dog.