

Grammar Hint of the Week

Sentence Fragments

A sentence is a group of words that expresses a complete thought; in writing it begins with a capital letter and ends with a concluding mark (period, question mark or exclamation point.) Most sentences have a subject and a verb, but an imperative, interrogative or exclamatory sentence may be only one word. (e.g. Wow!, Why? Help!)

A **Sentence Fragment**, however, is a group of words that does not fully express an idea even though it is punctuated as a sentence. To eliminate fragments:

- ◆ Check that you have not made a dependent clause or a subordinate clause stand alone as a sentence. Dependent clauses start with words like *although, because, if, for, or thus, which, since, unless, etc.* They won't work as sentences by themselves even though they have a subject and a verb.

These fragments, or broken sentences, leave the reader suspended in air because they need something else to finish them. The puzzled reader waits to find out what the fragments should be attached to.

Complete Sentences - If a rock group has a hit record, it may break into the big time.

Because a tricky name seems to help a new group, David chose something novel to call his band.

Fragment - David Barrett, manager and leader of the Euphorias, has accepted a gift from his fan club. **Although its members prefer to think of themselves as supporters of the arts.**

Fragment Eliminated - David Barrett, manager and leader of the Euphoira, has accepted a gift from his fan club, **although** its members prefer to think of themselves as supporters of the arts.

- ◆ Check that you have not made a **relative clause** or **appositive** stand alone as a sentence. Words such as **who, which, that, and where** often signal the beginning of a relative clause that must be connected to the main part of a sentence to make sense. An appositive is a group of words that renames a noun. (e.g. Rita, a good friend of mine, works as a counselor.)

Fragment – He was just plain David Barrett. **Who never expected to own a red sports car.**

Fragment Eliminated – He was just plain David Barrett, who never expected to own a red car.

Optional

Two practice exercises are attached for you to try if you wish. We will go over them next week.

Avoiding Sentence Fragments

• Practice 1

Turn each of the dependent-word groups into a sentence by adding a complete thought. Put a comma after the dependent-word group if a dependent word starts the sentence.

Example After I got out of high school

After I got out of high school, I spent a year traveling.

Example The watch which I got fixed

The watch which I got fixed has just stopped working again.

1. After I finished work on Friday

2. Because the class was canceled

3. When my car stalled on the highway

4. The supermarket that I went to

5. Before I left the house

Avoiding Sentence Fragments

◆ Practice 2

Write full sentences that incorporate the following sentence fragments derived from relative clauses or appositives.

1. A car that any connoisseur would appreciate.
2. Which was a gift that would impress anyone.
3. A hobby that certainly isn't for the poor.
4. Who is the favorite among local fans.
5. Which has never happened to him before.

Grammar Hint of the Week

Subject / Verb Agreement

Last week's grammar hint touched on subject/ verb agreement and reminded you that the number of the subject determines the number of the verb.

I. More Subject / Verb Agreement

Some subjects can fool you. The nouns below sometimes seem to be plural, but in fact, they are singular:

each	none	somebody
either	neither	someone
everyone	no one	
everybody	nobody	

Examples:

Everybody thinks John has a sense of humor.

Although both clocks light up in the dark, neither (one) keeps good time.

Everyone is here now.

None of us is perfect.

None takes a singular verb when it means "no one" or "not one," as in the above example. When *none* suggests more than one thing or person, a plural verb must be used

Example: None are so fallible as those who are sure they're right.

2. Words that come between Subject and Verb.

Words between the subject and verb do not affect the number of the verb. The verb agrees with the subject, not with the second noun or nouns.

Examples:

The flavor of the stew, with its rosemary, parsley, sage, garlic and onions, is wonderful.

David, along with his co-workers, is planning an office picnic.

3. Collective Nouns. A collective noun stands for a group of people or things (e.g. team, choir, band, orchestra, jury, committee, staff, family, etc.) Collective nouns as subjects usually take a singular verb, but can be plural, depending on how you treat them in a given sentence or passage. If you decide a noun is singular, use a singular verb; if it's plural, use a plural verb, but be consistent.

Examples.

The Jones couple lives in apartment 3B.

A couple of deadbeats live in apartment 9A.

Grammar Hint of the Week

Verbs

1. Verb Tenses: Be Consistent.

In the active voice, verbs tell us the time of an action, which is called the tense. If you begin writing a sentence, in the present tense, don't shift suddenly to the past, or *visa-versa*. If you begin to write in the past, don't shift without reason to the present.

Examples:

Each day, John exercises in the morning, walks to work, and rides his bike after dinner. (present)

Last year, John exercised every morning, walked to work and rode his bike after dinner. (past)

2. Use the Past Tense to Express Action That Took Place in the Past

For regular verbs in present tense, you need to watch for subject/verb agreement(See Grammar Hint of 5/19/99) However, the simple past tense of most regular verbs ends in "d or ed, and has the same form for each subject.(i.e. I walked, you walked, he/she walked, we walked, they walked.)

Irregular verbs do not form their past tenses by adding "d or ed" to the infinitive, but change their forms in various ways.(A list of troublesome irregular verbs is attached as a resource for you, but use a dictionary when you are in doubt.)

The past participle is the form of a verb used in the *present perfect tense* to express action beginning in the past and continuing into the present. The past participle always takes an auxiliary , or helping verb, usually a form of be, do or have.

Examples:

I have sung in the choir since I was in 6th grade

I've spoken to you about this problem several times, but it is not yet resolved.

LIST OF IRREGULAR VERBS

Irregular verbs have irregular forms in the past tense and past participle. For example, the past tense of the irregular verb *know* is *knew*; the past participle is *known*.

Almost everyone has some degree of trouble with irregular verbs. When you are unsure about the form of a verb, you can check the list of irregular verbs on the following pages. (The present participle is not shown on this list because it is formed simply by adding *-ing* to the base form of the verb.) Or you can check a dictionary, which gives the principal parts of irregular verbs.

<i>Present</i>	<i>Past</i>	<i>Past Participle</i>
arise	arose	arisen
awake	awoke <i>or</i> awaked	awoken <i>or</i> awaked
be (am, are, is)	was (were)	been
become	became	become
begin	began	begun
bend	bent	bent
bite	bit	bitten
blow	blew	blown
break	broke	broken
bring	brought	brought
build	built	built
burst	burst	burst
buy	bought	bought
catch	caught	caught
choose	chose	chosen
come	came	come
cost	cost	cost
cut	cut	cut
do (does)	did	done
draw	drew	drawn
drink	drank	drunk
drive	drove	driven
eat	ate	eaten
fall	fell	fallen
feed	fed	fed
feel	felt	felt
fight	fought	fought
find	found	found
fly	flew	flown
freeze	froze	frozen
get	got	got <i>or</i> gotten
give	gave	given
go (goes)	went	gone
grow	grew	grown
have (has)	had	had
hear	heard	heard
hide	hid	hidden
hold	held	held
hurt	hurt	hurt

<i>Present</i>	<i>Past</i>	<i>Past Participle</i>
keep	kept	kept
know	knew	known
lay	laid	laid
lead	led	led
leave	left	left
lend	lent	lent
let	let	let
lie	lay	lain
light	lit	lit
lose	lost	lost
make	made	made
meet	met	met
pay	paid	paid
ride	rode	ridden
ring	rang	rung
run	ran	run
say	said	said
see	saw	seen
sell	sold	sold
send	sent	sent
shake	shook	shaken
shrink	shrank	shrunk
shut	shut	shut
sing	sang	sung
sit	sat	sat
sleep	slept	slept
speak	spoke	spoken
spend	spent	spent
stand	stood	stood
steal	stole	stolen
stick	stuck	stuck
sting	stung	stung
swear	swore	sworn
swim	swam	swum
take	took	taken
teach	taught	taught
tear	tore	torn
tell	told	told
think	thought	thought
wake	woke or waked	woken or waked
wear	wore	worn
win	won	won
write	wrote	written

Grammar Hint of the Week

Double Negatives.

The double negative is almost always a no-no. It is what you get when you combine a negative or "not" verb (i.e. doesn't, don't) with a negative pronoun (i.e. nothing, nobody) a negative adjective, (i.e. hardly, never) or a negative conjunction, (i.e., neither, nor.) In short, a double negative is a statement in which a second negative word unnecessarily repeats a negative already in the sentence.

The double negative almost always jolts your reader's sense of good usage. If you do lapse into double negatives occasionally when writing first drafts be sure to get rid of them by final copy.

Example:

1. The word "don't" before the word "never" constitutes a double negative.

Correct: I don't ever use sugar in my coffee. (If you use never instead of ever, you'd be guilty of a double negative.)

2. The word "nobody" after "haven't or don't" creates a double negative.

Correct: I haven't seen anybody; or, I don't hear anybody. (If you use nobody instead of anybody, you'd have a double negative.)

3. The word "no" after "doesn't or don't" forms a double negative.

Correct: He doesn't have any money; or I don't have any money. (If you used no instead of any, you'd be using a double negative.)

To avoid double negative construction, check to see that you don't have two "no" words in the same sentence or independent clause. Double negatives can creep into our speech and carry over into our writing, so watch for these grammatical slips in both your oral and written communication.

Grammar Hint of the Week

Run-on Sentences

A sentence is a group of words that expresses a complete thought; in writing it begins with a capital letter and ends with a concluding mark (period, question mark or exclamation point.)

A **Run-on Sentence**, on the other hand, is too long, contains more than one thought that run together, and has no punctuation to mark the break between thoughts.

Example: Rita decided to stop smoking she didn't want to die of lung cancer.

In other run-ons, a comma, known as a *comma splice* is placed between the two complete thoughts; but the comma alone is not enough to join them.

Example: Rita decided to stop smoking, she didn't want to die of lung cancer.

Three methods for avoiding run-on sentences and editing them when they creep into your writing are:

1. Use a period and a capital letter to separate two complete thoughts. That is, make two separate sentences.

Example: Rita decided to stop smoking. She didn't want to die of lung cancer.

2. Use a comma plus a joining word (and, as, but, because, for, or, nor, so, yet etc.) to connect the two complete thoughts; or use joining word alone.

Example: Rita decided to stop smoking, for she didn't want to die of lung cancer.
Rita decided to stop smoking because she didn't want to die of lung cancer.

3. Use a semi colon to connect two complete thoughts.

Example: Rita decided to stop smoking; she didn't want to die of lung cancer.

A practice exercise is attached for you to try if you wish.

One way of correcting a run-on is to use a period and a capital letter at the break between the two complete thoughts. Use this method especially if the thoughts are not closely related or if another method would make the sentence too long.

• **Practice**

Locate the split in each of the sentences on the next page. Reading each sentence aloud will help you "hear" where a major break or split in the thought occurs. At such a point, your voice will probably drop and pause.

Correct the run-on by putting a period at the end of the first thought and a capital letter at the start of the second thought.

Example Gary was not a success at his job. ^HHis mouth moved faster than his hands.

1. Jerry's motorized wheelchair broke down he was unable to go to class.
2. The subway train hurtled through the station a blur of spray paint and graffiti flashed in front of my eyes.
3. Jenny panicked the car had stalled on a treacherous traffic circle.
4. Half the class flunked the exam the other half of the students were absent.
5. One reason for the high cost of new furniture is the cost of good wood one walnut tree in 1982 sold for \$40,000.
6. The wedding reception began to get out of hand guests started to throw cake at each other.
7. Larry's pitchfork turned over the rich earth earthworms poked their heads out of new furrows.
8. There were a lot of unusual people at the party a few of the ladies had shaved heads.
9. Carol talks all the time her tongue is getting calluses.
10. Hundreds of crushed cars were piled in neat stacks the rusted hulks resembled flattened tin cans.

A Warning:

Words That Can Lead to Run-Ons

People often write run-ons when the second complete thought begins with one of the following words:

I	we	there	now
you	they	this	then
he, she, it		that	next

Remember to be on the alert for run-ons whenever you use one of these words in your writing.

Grammar Hint of the Week

The Four S's

1. The letter "s." It stands alone.
2. The plural "s." This is used at the end of a singular noun (a person, place, thing or idea to make it plural. Sometimes we add es or ies depending on the ending of the word we are changing to mean more than one.
3. The possessive "s." This walks hand-in-hand with the apostrophe. To make a word possessive (belonging to) just add an apostrophe and the letter "S." If the word is singular, always add 's, even if the ending is f, z or x. (e.g. Kansas's main crop is corn. Bordeaux's main export is wine. The fox's personality is sly.)

If the word is plural and doesn't already end in s, add 's. (the children's menu had chocolate ice cream.)

If the word is plural and ends in s, just add the apostrophe. (The Willis' car was stolen last night. The cops' attitude was surly.)
4. The "s" of subject-verb agreement. Subjects and verbs must agree. If the subject is singular, so is the verb. (Anita talks, I talk.—both are singular) If the subject is plural, so is the verb (Florence and Anita talk. They talk)

Note: With regular verbs, the verb that agrees with a singular noun --third person singular ends with s, the verb that agrees with I --first person singular has no s, and the verb that agrees with a plural noun has no s at the end. (See the example above.)

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Words To
the Wise

Never-Say-Neversisms

by William Safire

1. Avoid run-on sentences they are hard to read.
2. Don't use no double negatives.
3. Use the semicolon properly, always use it where it is appropriate; and never where it isn't.
4. Reserve the apostrophe for it's proper use and omit it when its not needed.
5. Do not put statements in the negative form.
6. Verbs has to agree with their subjects.
7. No sentence fragments.
8. Proofread carefully to see if you any words out.
9. If any word is improper at the end of a sentence, a linking verb is.
10. Steer clear of incorrect verb forms that have snuck into the language.
11. Take the bull by the hand in leading away from mixed metaphors.
12. Avoid trendy locutions that sound flaky.
13. Never, ever use repetitive redundancies.
14. Everyone should be careful to use a singular pronoun with singular nouns in their writing.
15. I must have told you a million times to resist hyperbole.
16. Also, avoid awkward and affected alliteration.
17. "Avoid overuse of 'quotation "marks" ' "
18. Avoid commas, that are not necessary.
19. A writer must not shift your point of view.
20. And don't start a sentence with a conjunction.
21. Don't overuse exclamation marks!!!!
22. Place pronouns as close as possible, especially in long sentences, as of ten or more words, to their antecedents.
23. Write all adverbial forms correct.
24. Avoid un-necessary hyphenation.
25. When dangling, watch your participles.
26. It is incumbent on us to avoid archaic phrases.
27. Never use a long word when a diminutive one will do.
28. It's hard to imagine a phrase when you will have needed the future perfect.
29. Unqualified superlatives are the worst.
30. Last but not least, avoid cliches like the plague.