

IDS Writer's Companion

In order to do well in Senior Writing Requirement classes a student must be able to show competence in the following aspects of composition:

Note: Below, in bold, you will find the symbols that most professors use while grading your essays.

Organizing an essay on a set topic, developing ideas logically and systematically (**coh**-coherence), and supporting these ideas with the necessary evidence, quotations or examples (**documentation?**);

1. Organizing a paragraph -- ¶;
2. Documenting essay properly with parenthetical references (or notes) and bibliography or works cited (format);
 - a. Writing grammatical sentences, avoiding the following common mistakes:
 - b. Run-on sentences -- **run-on**
 - c. Comma splices -- **CS**
 - d. Sentence fragments -- **frag**
 - e. Dangling and misplaced modifiers – **DM and MM**
 - f. Unclear pronoun references -- **ref**
 - g. Subject-verb agreement -- **S-V agr**
 - h. Faulty parallelism -- **//st**
 - i. Possessive fault -- **possess?**
 - j. Active-passive voice confusion -- **passive**
 - k. Tense sequences -- **tense**
 - l. Wordiness, clutter, awkwardness -- **awkw**
3. Spelling the common words correctly (**sp**) and choosing the appropriate word (**ww** – the wrong word)
4. Punctuating sentences correctly (**punct**)

Run-On Sentences

Run-on sentences are two separate, complete sentences that have been joined improperly without the proper punctuation. These sentences are awkward and difficult to read, and one of the most basic and common grammar mistakes in student essays. They can be fixed either by adding the proper punctuation and words to make the joined sentences grammatically correct, or by separating them into two separate sentences. Both strategies can be equally effective.

Example A

- The boy loved to run he could run for hours without growing tired.

FIXES

1. This sentence is a run on because it contains two separate sentences that are complete on their own without any punctuation to join them or period to separate them. “The boy loved to run” is a complete sentence, and so is “He could run for hours and hours without growing tired.
2. Either split the sentence into two separate sentences, or use the proper punctuation and a coordinating conjunction (such as “and”) to join them into a single, grammatically correct sentence.

Coordinating Conjunction	The boy loved to run. He could run for hours without growing tired.
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Coordinating Conjunction	The boy loved to run, and he could run for hours without growing tired.
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OR

OR (Semi-colon)

Comma/ Semi-colon Fix	The boy loved to run; he could run for hours without growing tired.
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NOTE: The use of semi-colons to fix a run-on sentence is grammatically correct. However, while some professors love to see the use of semi-colons in this way, there are a few professors who dislike this style. Ask your professor or pay attention to their preferences to find out whether you should use this strategy in your writing or not.

When there are two clauses in a single sentence without any kind of punctuation to separate them, the sentence is a run-on.

There are also other strategies you can use for fixing run-on sentences that are less obvious but can make the sentences flow better. It is important to know every way to fix a run-on sentence so that the fixes can be varied and not make the sentences seem repetitive.

Subordinating Conjunctions & Transitional Words

Run-ons can be fixed by adding a subordinating conjunction at the beginning of the sentence (words such as although, after, although, before, unless, as, because, even though, if, since, until, when, while), along with a comma to signal a break between the two clauses.

The same effect can be achieved by adding a transitional word paired with a semi-colon between the two clauses in the run on, which joins the two separate sentences to make them whole.

Both of these strategies can have a graceful effect and make the writing as a whole appear more varied.

Example B

- The dragon was enormous and terrifying it did not appear eager to attack the knight.

FIXES

Subordinating Conjunction Fix	Although the dragon was enormous and terrifying, it did not appear eager to attack the knight.
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Transitional Word Fix	The dragon was enormous and terrifying; however, it did not appear eager to attack the knight.
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Example C

- The ocean was calm beneath the surface were deadly riptides that could drag the strongest swimmer out to sea.

FIXES

Here is a table of all the strategies that can be used to fix a Run-on sentence. All can work on a single sentence and change the way that the sentence flows.

Separate Sentences	The ocean was calm. However, beneath the surface were deadly riptides that could drag the strongest swimmer out to sea.
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Punctuation & Coordinating Conjunction	The ocean was calm, but beneath the surface were deadly riptides that could drag the strongest swimmer out to sea.
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Semi-colon	The ocean was calm; but beneath the surface were deadly riptides that could drag the strongest swimmer out to sea.
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Subordinating Conjunction	Although the ocean was calm, beneath the surface were deadly riptides that could drag the strongest swimmer out to sea.
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Transitional Word	The ocean was calm; however, beneath the surface were deadly riptides that could drag the strongest swimmer out to sea.
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Comma Splices

"I have been fighting over commas all my life." Mark Helprin.

One very common error in sentence construction is the comma splice. Comma splices are seen when two full sentences are joined improperly with a comma rather than separated by a period or correctly joined by a semi-colon.

Example of a sentence with a comma splice

- I wanted to do my best at the race on Saturday, I made sure to drink plenty of water the night before to stay hydrated.

We can correct for this sentence in 3 simple ways.

- I wanted to do my best at the race on Saturday; I made sure to drink plenty of water the night before to stay hydrated.

In this example, a semicolon was used to separate the two separate parts of the sentence. What a comma cannot join correctly, a semi-colon often can.

- I wanted to do my best at the race on Saturday. I made sure to drink plenty of water the night before to stay hydrated.

This example uses a period to separate the sentence into two separate, shorter sentences. Longer is not always better; it is often more advantageous to make sure that your sentences are clear, precise, and correct.

- I wanted to do my best at the race on Saturday, so I made sure to drink plenty of water the night before to stay hydrated.

In the case of this sentence, the comma was retained correctly by adding the conjunction word "so" to the sentence. That simple "so" after the comma shows the relationship that the first part of the sentence has with the second, and makes the comma correct and no longer a comma splice. Other conjunctions are: and, but, for, nor, or, and yet.

Commas can be a very useful tool for expressing the parts of sentences or showing the reader where to pause. However, the incorrect usage of a comma can be as problematic as its absence. Read your sentences over out loud to find comma splices. If you find a comma in a place where you would not normally pause or that needs a greater pause such as a period or semi-colon, then you've probably found a comma splice in your work.

Further Examples of Comma Splices

Sentence A

- There are lots of mosquitoes out tonight, I got close to the fire so the smoke would drive them away.

FIXES

- There are lots of mosquitoes out tonight; I got close to the fire so the smoke would drive them away.

- There are lots of mosquitoes out tonight. I got close to the fire so the smoke would drive them away.
- There are lots of mosquitoes out tonight, so I got close to the fire so the smoke would drive them away.

Sentence B

- I hate scary movies, I love scary books.

FIXES

- I hate scary movies; I love scary books.
- I hate scary movies. I love scary books.
- I hate scary movies, but I love scary books.

Sentence C

- It is possible that unicorns are not genetically related to horses at all, there is little fossil evidence to show that they evolved from Eohippus.

FIXES

- It is possible that unicorns are not genetically related to horses at all; there is little fossil evidence to show that they evolved from Eohippus.
- It is possible that unicorns are not genetically related to horses at all. There is little fossil evidence to show that they evolved from Eohippus.
- It is possible that unicorns are not genetically related to horses at all, as there is little fossil evidence to show that they evolved from Eohippus.
- It does not matter how long or short a sentence is. If it contains a comma splice, then it is considered a run-on sentence and is grammatically incorrect.

Examples of Comma Splices from Emory Student Essays

Emory Student Sample A

- "He immediately requested to be able to return to the Solovetsky Monastery, however Ivan insisted that he was the only one capable of filling the role of Metropolitan."

FIXES

This comma splice includes the "however" as an attempt to link the two sentences. However, it is not a conjunction and is insufficient with the comma to make this sentence grammatically correct. Note that, in the first two fixes, a comma is added after the "however" as an additional measure to make the sentence grammatically correct.

- "He immediately requested to be able to return to the Solovetsky Monastery; however, Ivan insisted that he was the only one capable of filling the role of Metropolitan."
- "He immediately requested to be able to return to the Solovetsky Monastery. However, Ivan insisted that he was the only one capable of filling the role of Metropolitan."
- "He immediately requested to be able to return to the Solovetsky Monastery, but Ivan insisted that he was the only one capable of filling the role of Metropolitan."

Emory Student Sample B

- "Little Masha weaves in-and-out of the plot in such a way as to seem incidental or even superfluous to the average viewer, however, when one considers the supernatural if not sacred position that orphans often fulfill in Russian folk tradition, her true relevance becomes more obvious."

FIXES

There seems to be a trend of students believing that if they simply add a "however" after the comma causing a comma splice, the sentence becomes grammatically correct. However, this is not the case. Such sentences can only be corrected for by the use of a conjunction, a semi-colon, or a period that breaks the parts into two separate sentences. (Also, as a side note, the "in-and-out" should not have dashes between these words.)

- "Little Masha weaves in and out of the plot in such a way as to seem incidental or even superfluous to the average viewer; however, when one considers the supernatural if not sacred position that orphans often fulfill in Russian folk tradition, her true relevance becomes more obvious."
- "Little Masha weaves in and out of the plot in such a way as to seem incidental or even superfluous to the average viewer. However, when one considers the supernatural if not sacred position that orphans often fulfill in Russian folk tradition, her true relevance becomes more obvious."
- "Little Masha weaves in and out of the plot in such a way as to seem incidental or even superfluous to the average viewer, but when one considers the supernatural if not sacred position that orphans often fulfill in Russian folk tradition, her true relevance becomes more obvious."

Emory Student Sample C

"But the accusations would not stop there, the oprichniki were getting especially agitated by the Metropolitan's public stance against them."

FIXES

The fixes for this comma spliced sentence seem clear enough. By following the previous examples of the sentences before, it is simple to fix this sentence by an added conjunction or punctuation mark. However, the conjunction that must be used in the case of this sentence is a new one from the examples that came before.

- "But the accusations would not stop there; the oprichniki were getting especially agitated by the Metropolitan's public stance against them."
- "But the accusations would not stop there. The oprichniki were getting especially agitated by the Metropolitan's public stance against them."
- "But the accusations would not stop there, as the oprichniki were getting especially agitated by the Metropolitan's public stance against them."

Emory Student Sample D

"The altercation continued, Philipp said that his faith drove him to speak the truth in front of the Tsar, to make him aware of his sins no matter the consequences."

FIXES

The interesting thing about this sentence is that it has two separate instances of comma splices. Therefore, fixing one comma splice is not enough to make the sentence correct. When fixing double splices, it is a good stylistic approach to vary your fixes so that the sentence reads more elegantly and does not awkwardly repeat itself.

- "The altercation continued. Philipp said that his faith drove him to speak the truth in front of the Tsar, and to make him aware of his sins no matter the consequences."
- "The altercation continued, and Philipp said that his faith drove him to speak the truth in front of the Tsar. He needed to make him aware of his sins no matter the consequences."
- "The altercation continued, and Philipp said that his faith drove him to speak the truth in front of the Tsar; to make him aware of his sins no matter the consequences."

Emory Student Sample E

"Philipp's position on the Tsar was always very clear—he was strongly opposed to the Oprichnina and the actions that the Tsar was taking to rule Russia, however, he would do whatever he could to sway the Tsar to peacefulness."

FIXES

- "Philipp's position on the Tsar was always very clear—he was strongly opposed to the Oprichnina and the actions that the Tsar was taking to rule Russia; however, he would do whatever he could to sway the Tsar to peacefulness."
- "Philipp's position on the Tsar was always very clear—he was strongly opposed to the Oprichnina and the actions that the Tsar was taking to rule Russia. However, he would do whatever he could to sway the Tsar to peacefulness."
- "Philipp's position on the Tsar was always very clear—he was strongly opposed to the Oprichnina and the actions that the Tsar was taking to rule Russia, and he would do whatever he could to sway the Tsar to peacefulness."

Sentence Fragments

The opposite of the run-on sentence, Sentence Fragments are sentences that are incomplete and do not communicate sufficient information to be grammatically correct. While they can be used in creative writing and other informal settings for artistic purposes, they are improper to use in formal essays, such as those written for college classes.

Yes/No Question Test

There is an easy trick to figuring out whether your sentence is a Sentence Fragment. Use the "Yes/No Question Test" and turn your sentence into a yes or no question. If that question makes sense, then your sentence is not a fragment. However, if the question does not make sense, you have a Sentence Fragment that you need to fix.

Example Sentences

- I loved riding that big grey horse.
- Riding that big grey horse.

Yes/No Question Test

- Did I love riding that big grey horse? (Question makes sense = Passed!)
- Did riding that big grey horse? (Question does NOT make sense = Failed)

Answer:

- Sentence "a" makes sense as a yes or no question. Sentence "b" does not. Therefore, "b" is a sentence fragment and "a" is grammatically correct.

Five Types of Sentence Fragments

1. Missing Subject, Verb, or Both

A group of words without a subject, verb, or both is a Sentence Fragment. Grammatically correct sentences need subjects and verbs to be whole. You can find these kinds of Sentence Fragments using the Yes/No Question Test.

Example A

- The author of East of Eden, a beautiful book about a man trying to find love and forgiveness.
- John Steinbeck is the author of East of Eden, a beautiful book about a man trying to find love and forgiveness.

Yes/No Question Test

- Is the author of East of Eden, a beautiful book about a man trying to find love and forgiveness? (Nonsense Question = Failed)
- Is John Steinbeck the author of East of Eden, a beautiful book about a man trying to find love and forgiveness? (Question Makes Sense = Passed!)

2. Including An "-ing" Verb Without a Form of Verb "to be"

These kinds of Sentence Fragments are formed when a verb ending in "-ing" is used in a sentence without a form of the verb "to be." Test for these kinds of Sentence Fragments the Yes/No Question method.

Example B

- Bran was learning to wield a sword.
- Learning to wield a sword.

Yes/No Question Test

- Was Bran learning to wield a sword? (Passed!)
- Was learning to wield a sword? (Failed)

A verb ending in "-ing" is insufficient in itself to construct a grammatically correct sentence.

3. Dependent Clauses Without an Independent Clause

As the name implies, Dependent Clauses are "dependent" upon independent clauses within a sentence. They require support, and must be attached to independent clauses. If they are alone, they create the third type of Sentence Fragment.

Types of Dependent Clauses

- Dependent clauses that begin with a transitional word.
 - These words help to transition a sentence from one thing to another.
 - Some transitional words: Although, because, when, if, while (to name a few).
- Dependent clauses that begin with relative pronouns.
 - Relative pronouns introduce relative clauses, which modify ideas, words and phrases in the sentence.
 - Some relative pronouns: who, whom, which, that, whose (to name a few).
- If you do not attach a dependent clause to an independent clause, you will end up with a Sentence Fragment.

Example C

- While he was waiting for night on the beach, William met the love of his life.
- While he was waiting for night on the beach.

Yes/No Question Test

- While he was waiting for night on the beach, did William meet the love of his life? (Passed!)
- While he was waiting for night on the beach? (Failed)

4. Sentences Beginning with Coordinating Conjunctions

Coordinating conjunctions cannot begin grammatically correct sentences. They always create Sentence Fragments.

This can be tricky because it may make the Sentence Fragment longer than its grammatically correct form, but it is still a fragment.

Examples of Coordinating Conjunctions: and, for, so, yet, or, nor.

A sentence can begin with "but" however.

Example D

- So I went away to a far off land.
- I went away to a far off land.

Yes/No Question Test

- Did so I go away to a far off land? (Failed)
- Did I go away to a far off land? (Passed!)

5. Beginning Phrases With Prepositions

Much like the dependent clauses covered above in the 3rd example, Prepositions need to be attached to independent clauses in order to make a complete sentence. If they have no support from an independent clause, they will form a Sentence Fragment. You can spot these kinds of errors by sentences that start to say something and then never seem to finish revealing their subject.

Example E

- During the war of the Black Sands, the captain lost his thumb and forefinger.
- During the war of the Black Sands.

Yes/No Question Test

- Did the captain lose his thumb and forefinger during the war of the Black Sands? (Passed!)
- Did during the war of the Black Sands?

How Sentence Fragments Occur, and How to Fix Them

It is common for Sentence Fragments to occur within the context of other sentences. Sometimes the Sentence Fragment can be solved by adding it to the sentences coming before or after it. However, this is only appropriate when it makes sense to do so.

Example F

- The ship was old, but it was still beautiful.
- This sentence is grammatically correct sentence
- Draped with strands of pearl and seaweed.

This sentence, however, which is describing further the ship from the previous statement, is a Sentence Fragment. This can be fixed by combining these two sentences into one, cohesive whole. There are often multiple correct ways of doing this. Just be careful that you are not creating a grammatical error while combining the two.

FIXES

- The ship was old, but it was still beautiful; draped with strands of pearl and seaweed.
- The ship was old, but it was still beautiful, as it was draped with strands of pearl and seaweed.

However, there is another correct and easy way to fix Sentence Fragments. By adding what they are missing, or taking away what is making them a Fragment, you can make your Fragments into sentences capable of standing alone.

Example G

Draped with strands of pearl and seaweed.

FIXES

- It was draped with strands of pearl and seaweed.
- The ship was draped with strands of pearl and seaweed.
- Draped with strands of pearl and seaweed, the ship shone pale and ghostly in the moonlight.

Fix I and II add the sentence's subject to the beginning of the sentence. "Ship" and "It" serve to stabilize the sentence by adding a noun to the beginning of the sentence. In the III fix, the beginning was left alone, but more was added to the end to support the beginning with the subject, "ship". There are almost always multiple ways to fix a Sentence Fragment. Experiment until you find the fix that works best for the sentence.

Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers

Misplaced Modifiers and dangling modifiers are phrases within a sentence that are not placed properly and cause confusion because of their “misplacement.” They cause illogical sentences that are both grammatically incorrect and difficult to understand. Modifiers should modify nouns, adding further information that gives the reader a greater understanding of the noun. However, Misplaced Modifiers have the opposite effect and confuse the reader. The way to fix these grammar mistakes is to move the Misplaced Modifier or dangling modifier to its proper place in the sentence. We will call Misplaced Modifiers MM for short, and Dangling Modifiers DM in the charts.

1. Misplaced Modifiers

Example A

MM Sentence	A rose sat on the chair that was deep red.
Modifier	“that was deep blue”
Problem?	The modifier is talking about the “rose” and yet the way it is placed in the sentence, after the noun “chair” makes it should as though it is the chair that is deep red. Move the modifier around to follow the noun that it is meant to modify.
Fix	A deep red rose sat on the chair.

Following this example, discover Misplaced Modifies in sentences and move them around so that it is clear which noun in the sentence they are modifying. The sentences below are more examples of sentences with Misplaced Modifiers and how they can be corrected. Sometimes the modifier could be made to apply to either noun, depending on the author’s intent. However, it is always necessary in the case of Misplaced Modifiers to move it in order to make the sentence’s meaning clear.

Example B

- The white stag ran through the forest that was beautiful.
 - Depending on what you are going for, you would fix this sentence in different ways.
 - If it is the forest that is beautiful, you should make it clearer that it is the forest being modified.
 - However, if it is the white stag that is beautiful, make this clearer by moving the modifier to be closer to the noun “stag.”

FIXES

If “beautiful” modifies “forest” :	The white stag ran through the beautiful forest.
If “beautiful” modifies “stag” :	The beautiful white stag ran through the forest.

Example C

- The storyteller summarized the story for the new listeners told the night before.
 - The modifier “told the night before” appears to be modifying the noun “the new listeners” which does not make sense.
 - “Told the night before” SHOULD be modifying “the story.”
 - Move the Misplaced Modifier next to “story” in order to make it clear what is being modified.
 - Unlike in Examples A, B, and D, this sentence has only one correct way to fix it that makes sense.

FIX

“told the night before” modifies “story” :	The storyteller summarized the story told the night before for the new listeners.
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Example D

- Her lovely hair flowed in the water that was dark.

If “dark” modifies “hair” :	Her lovely dark hair flowed in the water.
If “dark” modifies “water” :	Her lovely hair flowed in the dark water.

2. Dangling Modifiers

Dangling Modifiers are another way in which modifiers can be misused to create awkward sentences. They often occur with modifiers ending with “-ing” and dangle from the end of sentences, illogically connected to the main part of the sentence.

To fix Dangling Modifiers, you may choose either to add a subject to the Dangling Modifier, or put the subject right after the Dangling Modifier. *Dangling Modifiers will be shortened to “DM” in the following tables.

Example E

DM Sentence	Walking through the woods, the autumn leaves crunched beneath my boots.
Problem?	“Walking through the woods” appears to modify “the autumn leaves” even though the leaves cannot walk through woods. Fix the DM by either moving the subject to the end, or adding the subject to the DM phrase.
Fix: Move the subject to the end	The autumn leaves crunched beneath my boots as I walked through the park.
Fix: Add the subject “I” to the DM	Walking through the park, I felt the autumn leaves crunch beneath my boots.

Unclear Pronoun References

Pronouns always reference nouns in a sentence. When the pronoun incorrectly references a noun or is not specific enough, the result is confusing sentences that are unclear and difficult to understand. Fix these unclear pronoun references by making it clear what noun the pronoun is referring to.

Example A

- Both the black dog and the tabby cat loved his fish.
 - There are two nouns in this sentence: “dog” and “cat.”
 - The pronoun in the sentence is “his.”
 - Is “his” referring to the dog or the cat? It is unclear in this sentence. Further information or a sentence restructuring is required to make the Pronoun Reference clear.
 - Specify whether the pronoun “his” is referring to the dog or the cat.

FIX

- Both the black dog and the tabby cat loved the dog’s fish.

While using multiple nouns in a sentence, make sure that your pronouns are clearly referring to one of the nouns. There are several main rules for using pronouns in a sentence.

1) Eliminate Ambiguity

Example B

- The man promised the boy that no one would hurt him.
 - The two nouns in the sentence are “man” and boy”.
 - The pronoun “him” could refer to either a man or a boy. Therefore, the pronoun usage has too much ambiguity. It is an Unclear Pronoun Reference.
 - Fix this by making it clear which noun the pronoun is referring to.
 - If this makes the sentence awkward you can also be creative and find other means of making the pronoun reference clear, such as the use of speech in the second fix.

FIXES

- The man promised the boy that no one would hurt the boy.
- “No one will hurt you,” the man promised the boy.

The pronoun “they” should not be used when referring to unspecified nouns or persons. When you use an unspecific pronoun such as “they” in a sentence, it must refer to a specific noun in order to be clear.

Example C

- They loves dragons and has many dreams of flying and flame.
 - The pronoun in this sentence, “they,” is easy to find, but the noun is not.
 - There is no clear noun that “they” could be referring to.
 - Fix this by either replacing “they” with a specific pronoun or noun.

FIXES

- She loves dragons and has many dreams of flying and flame.
- Judy loves dragons and has many dreams of flying and flame.

Much like the example above, you should only use “it” and “that” when referring to a specific noun or phrase. If these pronouns are used for UNSPECIFIC nouns or phrases, then they will create an Unclear Pronoun Reference.

Example D

- When the man and his horse have completed their journey across the desert and lay down in the sand, it symbolizes the end of the journey of life and the rest that comes after.
 - The pronoun here, “it” is unclear because it cannot be referring to any specific noun.
 - Using “it” for analysis in a paper can cause problems if you do not use it to refer to a specific noun or phrase.
 - Fix this sentence by restructuring so that you do not have to rely on “it.”

FIXES

- When the man and his horse have completed their journey across the desert, both lay down in the sand, symbolizing the end of the journey of life and the rest that comes after.

2) Pronoun Number

Pronouns must agree in number with their nouns. The “number” of a pronoun and noun is essentially whether it is plural or singular. If the noun is a plural noun, the pronoun referring to it must also be plural. If the noun is singular, the pronoun referring to it must be singular as well.

Plural Pronoun w/ Singular Noun

- Each person should be kind to their pets.
 - In this example, the noun “person” is singular and the pronoun “their” is multiple in number.
 - Make either the noun plural or the pronoun singular so that they match in number in order to correct this sentence.

FIXES

- People should be kind to their pets.
- Each person should be kind to his or her pets.

Singular Pronoun w/ Plural Noun

- The horses pranced in his paddock.

FIXES

- The horses pranced in their paddock.
- The horse pranced in his paddock.

3) When the conjunction “and” is used to join two nouns in a sentence together, the pronoun referring to those nouns must be plural.

Example E

- The Jabberwock and the Jubjub bird are monsters; it fights with the man bearing the vorpal blade.

FIX

- The Jabberwock and the Jubjub bird are monsters; they fight with the man bearing the vorpal blade.

4) When using the conjunctions “or” and “nor,” the pronoun must agree in number with the closest noun that the pronoun is referring to.

Example F

- Neither the doe nor the stag escaped from their hunter.

FIX

- Neither the doe nor the stag escaped from his hunter.

Subject-Verb Agreement

Subject-verb agreement indicates the proper relationship between the form of the verb and its subject. The verb must always agree with its subject in person (I, you, s/he, it, they) and number (singular, plural). Because of the various ways sentences can be organized, subjects can sometimes be hard to find; they can be camouflaged by intervening phrases and inverted word order.

Therefore, in order to avoid using the wrong verbal structure, we must be able to easily find the subject of each sentence without difficulty and this will ensure subject-verb agreement.

(a) Watch for modifying phrases beginning with prepositions like *on*, *of*, or *in* that come between the subject and the verb.

- **A box** (of nails) *was* on the workbench.
- **One** (of the football players) *is* not on the bus.
- Only **one person** (in five) *knows* the name of the British prime minister.

(b) Watch for inverted sentences beginning with *there* and *here*.

- Wrong: There is a great many people at the game.
 - Corrected: There are a great many *people* at the game.
- Wrong: Here is the most interesting *games* of chance.
 - Corrected: Here are the most interesting *games* of chance.
- Remember: *there* and *here* never serve as subjects of sentences.

(c) Do not confuse the subject with the subject complement.

- His **primary concern** was the sick *employees*.
- Helmut's **chief interest** was antique *automobiles*.
- My **favorite meal** is *meat and potatoes*.
- The **only things** I like are many *books*.

(d) Recognize singular subjects that appear to be plural.

- **Politics** *is* a popular sport in our community.
- **Economics** *is* not in our school calendar this semester.
- **Pediatrics** *is* a branch of medicine.

Remember, collective nouns take singular verbs when referring to a group as a single unit; however, when they refer to a group as a body of individual members, they take plural verbs.

- The committee is submitting its report.
 - (used as a single unit)
- The committee are working in small groups.
 - (used as a body of individual members)

Logic should tell you when the collective noun is expressed as an indivisible whole; usually the word *members* is appended to the noun to indicate plurality: jury members, committee members, team members, etc.

(e) Singular subject nouns can take plural verbs, but if they refer to the same thing, or function as a unit, they take singular verbs.

- A pen and a pencil are the tools of my trade. (two things)
- My best friend and confidant has joined the armed forces. (one person)
- Law and order is the issue. (one issue)

(f) Compound subjects with *each* or *every* take singular verbs.

- *Each* biology student, chemistry student, and physics student *is* responsible for his or her lab equipment.
- *Every* blonde, redhead, and brunette *was* judged according to her talents, not her hairstyle.

(g) Compound subjects joined by *either...or*, *neither...nor* take singular verbs when both subjects are singular, and they take plural verbs when both subjects are plural. When, however, one subject is singular and the other is plural, the verb agrees with the closer subject.

- Either Charles or Helene *is* chairing the meeting.
- Neither her pies nor her cakes *were* given prizes at the country fair.
- Either the principal or the students *control* the student council's budget.
- Neither the actors nor the director *was* satisfied with the stage lightning.

(h) Single subjects with intervening phrases like *together with*, *along with*, *in addition to*, and *as well as* take singular verbs.

- My sister, *along with* her girlfriend, *is* going on the class picnic.
- Tom's stereo, *as well as* his car, *was* repossessed by the finance company.
- Andre's notebook, *together with* his history text, *was* stolen from his locker.

Note: The commas around these phrases always separate them from the subjects of the sentences.

(i) When the subject is a title, it always takes a singular verb.

- Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* *is* coming to our local theatre next week.
- *The Russians* *was* an excellent television documentary.
- *Cats* *has been* one of the most successful Broadway musicals in the last five years.

Faulty Parallelism

When writing, it is important to make sure that the tenses and word choices of the sentences you compose stay consistent within the paper. However, it is just as important to make sure that words and tenses within those sentences also do not conflict. If they disagree with each other, this is the grammar mistake of faulty parallelism. Because it can be very subtle, it can be easy to miss if you do not read over your sentences carefully. During the editing process, be sure that within each sentence, the words you are using agree with one another.

Example of Faulty Parallelism

Example A

- When I make a sandwich, I like to include mayonnaise, avocado, turkey, and sometimes I add the tomatoes.

FIX

- Where does this particular sentence go wrong? This sentence's purpose is to list and describe a set of things, namely what the speaker includes on their sandwich. At the end, extra detail is given about the tomatoes added, which is perfectly alright. What gives this sentence its Faulty Parallelism is its use of "the" before "tomatoes" when the other food items had no article before them. This is a faulty structure. The sentence must be balanced in this way, or it becomes a faulty parallel that is awkward and distracts the reader.
 - Remove the "the" article before the noun "tomatoes."
- When I make a sandwich, I like to include mayonnaise, avocado, turkey, and sometimes, I add tomatoes.
- Each example of Faulty Parallelism may require its own slightly different fix. There are various kinds of Faulty Parallelism. We cover an example of each and arm you with the tools to rebalance and repair these badly constructed sentences.

The Five Types of Faulty Parallelism

1. Lists of Words that Do Not Match

This was the case in the example shown above. The articles in the lists did not match.

Whenever you make a list or a series of two or more things in a sentence, be sure to check for this kind of Faulty Parallelism.

Example A

- He ran through the forest blindly, stumbling over roots, stumps, and the thorn bushes.

FIX

- He ran through the forest blindly, stumbling over roots, stumps, and thorn bushes.
 - The faulty parallelism of this sentence lies in the disagreement of the article "the" before "thorn bushes."
 - To fix this, "the" is removed from the final item of the list to make it agree with the others: "roots" and "stumps."

Example B

- The Harry Potter book series has fans of all ages, genders, and many backgrounds.

FIX

This kind of list can be fixed in the same way. In this case, the addition of "many" makes the sentence unbalanced and awkward, causing a Faulty Parallel. Remove "many" to fix the sentence; the same meaning will still be conveyed.

- The Harry Potter book series has fans of all ages, genders, and backgrounds.

2. *Uncoordinated Conjunctions*

Conjunctions (and, or, but, for, so, yet, or nor) are used to connect parts of a sentence. Proper use of conjunctions help to create sentence flow and can make your sentences graceful, clear, and elegant.

However, improper use, such as when the conjunctions in a sentence are uncoordinated or do not match, can cause a faulty parallel.

Example C

- Anna Karenina yearns for excitement and to find love.
 - This sentence does not work because "excitement" and "to find love" are both linked and they do not agree.
 - "Excitement" is a noun and "to find love" is an infinitive verb.
 - In order to fix the faulty parallel in this sentence, both linked words must be made to agree.

FIXES

- Anna Karenina yearns for excitement and love.
- Anna Karenina yearns to experience excitement and to find love.

Example D

- In the beginning, Draco Malfoy seems to be the main antagonist, but soon the reader realizes that Voldemort was far more evil.
 - The faulty parallel in this sentence is caused by a disagreement in the tense used in the beginning of the sentence and the later part of the sentence.
 - Draco Malfoy is compared and linked to Voldemort. He "seems to be" is using the present tense, while Voldemort is described with "was", which is past tense.
 - Correct this by making the tenses agree. Either stick to past tense, or present tense, and only change when appropriate to do so, such as when referencing things in the past.

FIXES

- In the beginning, Draco Malfoy seemed to be the main antagonist, but soon the reader realizes that Voldemort was far more evil. (Changing both to past tense)
- In the beginning, Draco Malfoy seems to be the main antagonist, but soon the reader realizes that Voldemort is far more evil. (Changing both to present tense)

3. Conjunctions That Do Not Correlate

Correlating Conjunctions are linked to each other in a specific, formulaic way. Imagine the first part of the sentence is A, and the second part is B. These are the ways in which the sentence may be structured with conjunctions that must correlate in order to be grammatically correct.

- Either A or B
- Neither A nor B
- Both A and B
- Not only A but also B
- Whether A or B

On first glance, this looks a lot more like an algebraic equation than the structure of the English language. Once you see examples of these structures you will begin to see the kinds of sentences that these simple formula's represent.

Example E

- The knight not only broke the code of honor, but also was endangering the entire realm.
 - Part A of this sentence is "broke", while part B is "was endangering".
 - These two parts do not agree, as "broke" is in a different form than "was endangering." Because of this lack of coordination between the conjunctions, the sentence is a faulty parallelism.

FIXES

- The knight not only broke the code of honor, but also endangered the entire realm.
- The knight was not only breaking the code of honor, but also endangering the entire realm.

Example F

- In that old horror story, it is unclear whether the main character is speaking to the old ghost, or a new ghost.
 - This is grammatically incorrect because "the old ghost" and "a new ghost" do not agree in form. To fix this, change them to agree.

FIXES

- In that old horror story, it is unclear whether the main character is speaking to the old ghost, or is talking to a new one.

4. Comparisons/Contrasts Misusing "Than" or "As"

- This can be seen, for example, when using phrases such as "more than" or "as much as" to compare two things in a sentence.
- These comparing and contrasting sentences need to agree in form, or they are faulty parallels.
- This can be a subtle kind of Faulty Parallel that is easy to let slip past. Be sure to read your comparative and contrasting sentences carefully for form agreement to ensure that you do not make this error.

- Many reflective essays make use of comparing and contrasting as a way of analyzing multiple things at once. Make sure to check these kind of essays especially for this error, as you will be using many of these sentence types.

Example G

- Arya does not seem to like her sister Sansa as much as she liked her brother Jon Snow.
 - In this sentence, the linked words that are comparing Sansa and Jon do not agree in form. The first one uses "like" and the second uses "liked."
 - To fix this, make both forms agree, and stay consistent within the sentence.

FIXES

- Arya does not seem to like her sister Sansa as much as she likes her brother Jon Snow.
- Arya did not seem to like her sister Sansa as much as she liked her brother Jon Snow.

5. Mismatching Function Words

Function words get their name because they serve functions. Simple enough. These words are the gears and cogs of sentences, ensuring that the sentence moves and operates correctly. Using the wrong function words together can cause a sentence to jam and stop working properly, causing a faulty parallel.

***Remember: The function word that begins one clause, must begin all others in that sentence as well.**

Function Words

- prepositions (to, by, in, for)
- articles (a, an, the)
- the infinitive (to)
- introductory words (that, who, which, because, when)

Example H

- J.R.R. Tolkien wrote about the terrific battles of Middle-earth and brave souls who fought them.
 - This sentence is incorrect because the article "the" was used before "terrific battles," and therefore needs to appear before "brave souls" as well.

FIX

- J.R.R. Tolkien wrote about the terrific battles of Middle-earth and the brave souls who fought them.

Example I

- Some readers believe that Tolstoy is too verbose of a writer, and his book War and Peace is not a great masterpiece.
 - The first part of the sentence uses the introductory word "that" before "Tolstoy." Therefore, the second subject, "his book" needs to be introduced by this same Function Word.

FIX

- Some readers believe that Tolstoy is too verbose of a writer, and that his book War and Peace is not a great masterpiece.

Emory Student Samples

The following sentences are taken from Emory student papers and are examples of the various kinds of faulty parallels.

Emory Student Sample A

- "The Tsar told the Metropolitan that he should agree with the ways of the Tsar, but Philipp, yet again displaying his iron-willed stance, did not waiver amidst the anger of the monarch."
 - This uses tenses and forms that do not agree with each other. "Told," does not agree with "displaying," as the first is past and the second present.

FIX

- "The Tsar told the Metropolitan that he should agree with the ways of the Tsar, but Philip yet again displayed his iron-willed stance, and did not waiver amidst the anger of the monarch."
 - Several changes needed to be made in order to make fix the faulty parallel jamming this sentence's efficiency.
 - The comma after "Phillip" was taken out, as it was a crutch the author used to attempt to make a grammatically incorrect sentence flow better.
 - "Displaying" was changed to "displayed," to match the past tense "told," and an "and" was added before "did not waiver" to finish up the corrections.
 - The sentence has now become grammatically correct from several small and precise adjustments. Adding more commas will not fix the Faulty Parallel within the sentence.

Possessive Fault

Possessive Fault is when a possessive is used incorrectly. Wrongly using Possessive words can make your sentence grammatically incorrect, difficult to read, and muddle your meaning.

Possession may be indicated by 's, ', or a different form of the word (such as "their"), depending on the situation. Not indicating possession when appropriate, indicating possession when NOT appropriate, or using the wrong kind of possessive signal can all create a Possessive Fault.

Here are a few examples of how Possessive Faults can occur.

Example 1

- The wizards practiced with they're wands every day.
 - "They're" is actually a shortened version of "they are".
 - This sentence is trying to indicate that "the wizards" are the ones possessing the "wands."
 - The correct form is the possessive "their."

FIX

- The wizards practiced with their wands every day.

Example 2

- The wand's cores contain many kinds of magical substances.
 - Wands is a plural, therefore it is incorrect to use "'s" as though it is singular.
 - Instead, use wands', adding a possessive apostrophe after the "s" to indicate plural possessive.

FIX

- The wands' cores contain many kinds of magical substances.

There are many other specific situations in which it is important to indicate possessiveness correctly. We will go through the 6 different situations in which possessives can be used, and how to use them correctly.

1. Singular Nouns

The possessives of singular nouns should end in 's. There are two schools of thought when it comes to ending singular nouns such as names that end in "s." Take, for example, the name Atticus. Atticus ends in an "s" and some prefer to make such names possessive by simply adding a possessive ' to the end of the name. Others feel it more correct to end in another "'s".

Example A

- Atticus' children were always getting into mischief.

FIXES

- Atticus's children were always getting into mischief.

The same also holds true with common nouns such as the word “class.” When making such a noun plural, you can either choose to add an extra “s” or simply an apostrophe at the end of “class.”

Example B

- The classes attention was mesmerized by the teacher’s rendition of medieval history.
- This is not a correct way to show that “class” is possessive. It merely made the singular noun “class”, into a plural noun, “classes,” even though the possessive sounds the same spoken as the plural form of the noun. An apostrophe or “’s” needs to be added in order to make “class” possessive.

FIXES

- The class’s attention was mesmerized by the teacher’s rendition of medieval history.
- The class’ attention was mesmerized by the teacher’s rendition of medieval history.

Both are generally considered correct, but if your professor specifically states that they prefer one way over another, it is wiser to stick to their version. Most professors, however, will consider both versions grammatically correct.

2. Plural Nouns

Unlike possessive singular nouns, plural nouns have only one correct way of showing possession. However, there are two different kinds of possessive nouns: those that end in an s or an s/z sound, and those that do not. Treat these differently when indicating possession by using the following techniques.

1) Add an apostrophe (no extra “s”) to the end of a noun ending in s or an s/z sound.

Example C

- The horses hay shone golden and beautiful in the dim sunlight.

FIX

- The horses’ hay shone golden and beautiful in the dim sunlight.

Even when the plural noun does not end in an actual “s,” if it ends in an s/z sound then you also add only an apostrophe to the end of the word.

Example D

- Moose hooves are durable and allow them to move at great speeds.

FIX

- Moose' hooves are durable and allow them to move at great speeds.

2) However, if the plural possessive noun doesn't end with an actual "s", or an "s" or "z" sound, then add an apostrophe "s" or "'s".

Example F

- Sometimes, peoples cruelty can be astounding.
 - The plural of "people" does not end in an "s," therefore you have one option when making this plural noun possessive. You must add an apostrophe "s" or "'s".

FIX

- Sometimes, people's cruelty can be astounding.

3. Compound Nouns

When dealing with compound nouns, such as "brother-in-law" or "fire-fly," add the possessive "s" or "" to the last word or part of the compound. When making this noun possessive, follow all other previously established rules regarding possessive grammar.

Example G

- He thought his mother-in-laws face was surprisingly kind.

FIX

- He thought his mother-in-law's face was surprisingly kind.

Example H

- The fire-flys tail was a lovely, luminous glow.

FIX

- The fire-fly's tail was a lovely, luminous glow.

4. Joint Ownership

When indicating that two or more people or things own something, you only put a possessive “s”, apostrophe “s”, or apostrophe, on the last noun.

Example I

- Megans and Kyles computer was very fast and stayed cool with a complex water-cooling system.

FIX

- Megan and Kyle’s computer was very fast and stayed cool with a complex water-cooling system.

5. Possessive Pronouns

Below is a list of Possessive Pronouns in their proper forms:

I			
my	mine		
you	your	yours	
she	her	hers	
he	his	his	
us	our	ours	
they	their	theirs	
it	its	its	

These pronouns do not need to have an apostrophe “s” or apostrophe added in order to make them possessive. They change forms in order to become the proper kind of possessive for each situation. If you think you may be making mistakes with possessive pronouns, copy this table down and keep it with you while editing your work. Check each possessive pronoun you use to ensure you are using the correct form of the pronoun. It is easy to confuse possessive pronouns with contractions such as “it’s” (which stands for “it is”) and “they’re” (which is short for “they are”). Be sure to check the proper possessive form and try to memorize them until you know them by intuition.

Example J

- The hamster is you’re responsibility, and your’s alone.

- This is the wrong form of “you” to indicate possession. “You’re” is short for “you are.” “Your” and “yours” are the proper possessive forms.

FIX

- The hamster is your responsibility, and yours alone.

Example K

- Smokey is they’re hamster, and has always been their’s.

FIX

- Smokey is their hamster, and has always been theirs.

Example L

The hamster preferred it’s sunflower seeds to the its’ almonds.

FIX

The hamster preferred its sunflower seeds to its almonds.

6. Indefinite Pronouns

Indefinite pronouns are not treated the same as Possessive Pronouns, because they are not specific about their ownership. Examples of Indefinite

Pronouns are:

- one
- somebody
- else

There are others, but they all follow the rules of possessive nouns in which an apostrophe “s” is added to show possession.

Example M

- The horse that broke out of its crossties is somebody elses problem.
 - “Elses” is not a word. An apostrophe “s” must be added to the end of “else” in order to show possession for this Indefinite Pronoun.

FIX

- The horse that broke out of its crossties is somebody else’s problem.

Example N

- She could hear the sound of somebodies car smashing into her mailbox.

FIX

- She could hear the sound of somebody's car smashing into her mailbox.

Example O

- A person should have the freedom and ability to make ones own way in life, yet still have access to help if they need it.

FIX

- A person should have the freedom and ability to make one's own way in life, yet still have access to help if they need it.