

Common Writing Errors

Comma Errors, Spelling/Typographical Errors and
Grammar Errors

Comma Errors

Introductory Clauses

- Introductory clauses are dependent clauses that provide background information or "set the stage" for the main part of the sentence, the independent clause.
- **Clue:** Introductory clauses start with adverbs like *after*, *although*, *as*, *because*, *before*, *if*, *since*, *though*, *until*, *when*, etc.
 - *If they want to win*, athletes must exercise every day. (introductory dependent clause, main clause)
 - *Because he kept barking insistently*, we threw the ball for Smokey. (introductory dependent clause, main clause)

Introductory Phrases

- Introductory phrases set the stage for the main action of the sentence, but they are not complete clauses.
- Common introductory phrases include prepositional phrases, appositive phrases, participial phrases, infinitive phrases, and absolute phrases.
 - *To stay in shape for competition*, athletes must exercise every day. (introductory infinitive phrase, main clause)
 - *Barking insistently*, Smokey got us to throw his ball for him. (introductory participial phrase, main clause)
 - *After the adjustment for inflation*, real wages have decreased while corporate profits have grown. (introductory prepositional phrases, main clause)

Introductory Words

- Introductory words like *however*, *still*, *furthermore*, and *meanwhile* create continuity from one sentence to the next.
 - The coaches reviewed the game strategy. *Meanwhile*, the athletes trained on the Nautilus equipment.
 - Most of the evidence seemed convincing. *Still*, the credibility of some witnesses was in question.

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**“I have trouble with punctuation. I just don’t
have any comma sense.”**

When to Use a Comma:

- after an introductory clause. (Does the introductory element have a subject and verb of its own?)
- after a long introductory prepositional phrase or more than one introductory prepositional phrase. (Are there more than five words before the main clause?)
- after introductory verbal phrases, some appositive phrases, or absolute phrases.
- if there is a distinct pause. (When you read the sentence aloud, do you find your voice pausing a moment after the introductory element?)
- to avoid confusion. (Might a reader have to read the sentence more than once to make sense of it?)

When NOT to Use a Comma:

- “ after a brief prepositional phrase. (Ex: *Jack and Jill went up, the hill.* There should be no comma.)
- “ to separate the subject from the predicate. (Ex: *The professor of my Japanese class, gave a quiz yesterday.* There should be no comma.)
- “ after *but or and* in a compound sentence. (Ex: *They went downtown, but, they did not stay long.* The comma should only be in front of the *but.*)
- “ before *and* when it is joining two subjects, two objects, or two verbs. (Ex: *Sam went to the store to buy eggs, and milk.* There should be no comma.)

“Is there a comma before the word ‘and’ at the end of a series?”

- If you’re writing for a newspaper or magazine, **NO**. Newspapers and magazines want to save space whenever possible.
 - *The reporter saw flood, fire and famine.*
- If you're writing a letter or a paper for school, the answer is usually **YES**.
 - *The reporter saw flood, fire, and famine.*

Spelling and Typographical Errors

SPELLING

- ✓ DO NOT rely solely on spell checker! It DOES NOT catch everything!
- ✓ *“Spell check will not find words which are miss used but spelled rite”.*
- ✓ Spell checker will not find the following errors:
 - ✓ Proper names, such as “Smith” or “Jones”.
 - ✓ Improper use of homonyms, such as their/there, to/too/two, or affect/effect.
 - ✓ Errors related to specialized words not included in their lexicon.
 - ✓ Typographical faux pas.

Typographical Errors

- ✘ Read aloud. Reading a paper aloud encourages you to read every little word.
- ✘ Print your paper. It helps catch typos and spelling errors when you read from a printed document.
- ✘ Isolate each line with a straightedge (blank piece of paper) and point to each word with a pencil or pen.

OOPS!

Avoid Typos

OOPS!

- ✘ Always read through your writing slowly. If you read at a normal speed, you won't give your eyes sufficient time to spot errors
- ✘ Read from the end rather than the beginning of a line so that you can't get caught up in what you're saying.
- ✘ Ask another person to read your paper. He/she may catch mistakes you missed.
- ✘ Put aside your paper for some time and then come back to it and proofread it once again.

Grammar Errors

Subject/Verb Agreement

- If your subject is singular, your verb must also be singular. If your subject is plural, your verb must also be plural.

"The boy eats the pie."

"The people eat the pie."

- To fix subject/verb agreement errors:
 - **Isolate the main verb in each sentence.**
 - **Then match that verb to its subject and make sure they agree in number.**
- The trick is to make the numbers agree (i.e. one thing IS/two things ARE).

Apostrophes

☞ The apostrophe has three uses:

- * to form possessives of nouns
- * to show the omission of letters
- * to indicate certain plurals of lowercase letters.

☞ Apostrophes are **NOT** used for possessive pronouns or for noun plurals, including acronyms.

1) To form possessives of *nouns*

- ☞ To see if you need to make a possessive, turn the phrase around and make it an "of the..." phrase.
 - *the boy's hat = the hat of the boy three days'*
 - *journey = journey of three days*

- ☞ If the noun after "of" is a building, an object, or a piece of furniture, then no apostrophe is needed!
 - *room of the hotel = hotel room*
 - *door of the car = car door*
 - *leg of the table = table leg*

2) To show the omission of letters

- ☞ Contractions have one or more letters/numbers missing, thus showing an example of this type of omission:

don't = do not

I'm = I am

he'll = he will

'60 = 1960

3) To indicate certain *plurals of lowercase letters*

- ☞ Here the rule appears to be more typographical than grammatical (E.g. "three ps" versus "three p's")

- ☞ To form the plural of a lowercase letter, place 's after the letter.
 - There is no need for apostrophes indicating a plural on
- ☞ capitalized letters, numbers, and symbols (though keep in mind that some editors, teachers, and professors still prefer them).
 - **The 1960s were a time of great social unrest.**
 - **There are two G4s currently used in the writing classroom.**

Apostrophes

👉 Don't use apostrophes for possessive pronouns or for noun plurals.

- possessive pronouns already show possession -- they don't need an apostrophe (EX: *His, her, its, my, yours, ours* are all possessive pronouns)

| WRONG | CORRECT |
|---|---|
| 1) His' book | His book |
| 2) A friend of yours' | A friend of yours |
| 3) She waited for 3 hours' to get a ticket. | She waited for 3 hours to get a ticket. |
| 4) The group made it's decision. | The group made its decision |
| ***It's is a contraction for "IT IS". It is NOT the same thing as its. | Its is a possessive pronoun meaning "BELONGING TO IT". |

Sentence Fragments

● Three Main Fragment Types:

- 1) a phrase or clause that is disconnected from an independent clause (sentence)
- 2) a main clause that lacks either a subject or a verb
- 3) a clause that contains a complete sentence but cannot stand alone because of a misplaced or unnecessary word

Sentence Fragments

- When a phrase or clause is disconnected from an independent clause, use the proper punctuation to connect them.
- Example:
 - **Incorrect:** The University has resources to help you with writing. Such as grammar handbooks, dictionaries, and documentation style books.
 - **Correct:** The University has resources to help you with writing, such as grammar handbooks, dictionaries, and documentation style books.

Sentence Fragments

- When a fragment lacks either a subject or a verb, add the appropriate element to make it a sentence.
- Example:
 - **Incorrect:** An appointment with a doctor.
 - **Correct:** An appointment with a doctor can help improve your health.

Sentence Fragments

- When the fragment contains a complete sentence but cannot stand alone because of a misplaced or unnecessary word, remove the word that prevents the fragment from being a sentence.
- Example:
 - **Incorrect:** By paying too much attention to grammar and punctuation can cause you to overlook higher order concerns like thesis development.
 - **Correct:** (get rid of By) Paying too much attention to grammar and punctuation can cause you to overlook higher order concerns like thesis development.

Run-on Sentences

 A blend of two or more complete sentences into one without proper punctuation and/or linking word.

DaVinci was a great painter, he was also an inventor.

 How you can fix this run-on sentence:

- 1) DaVinci was a great painter. He was also an inventor.
- 2) DaVinci was a great painter; he was also an inventor.
- 3) DaVinci was a great painter, and he was also an inventor.

To Fix Run-On Sentences:

- Place a period between the two complete thoughts.
- Place a semi-colon between the two complete thoughts.
- Place a comma and a linking word between the two complete thoughts.

Pronoun Errors

Pronoun Errors

- Errors that occur when pronouns do not agree in number with the nouns to which they refer.
- If the noun is singular, the pronoun must be singular.
- If the noun is plural, the pronoun must be plural as well.

Incorrect: Everybody must bring their own lunch.

Correct: Everybody must bring his or her own lunch.

Additional Resources

Useful WebPages

- <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>
- <http://www.drgrammar.org/errors.shtml>
- <http://garbl.home.comcast.net/~garbl/writing/>
- <http://www.powa.org/>
- http://www2.actden.com/Writ_Den/Tips/paragrap/