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Conventions and Mechanics Review

Common Sentence Writing Mistakes: Fragments and Run-Ons

1. Sentence Fragments

A **sentence fragment**, is a sentence that does not have all of the components needed to make it a sentence (therefor it is a *fragment*, or part, of a sentence). All sentences **must** have:

A subject: The person or thing the sentence is about (eg: Jake, the lake, summer, he/she/they).

A verb: An action or description applied to the subject (eg: ate, sparkled, started, cried).

Put together, the examples above make the following simple complete sentences:

Jake ate. The lake sparkled. Summer started. He/she/they cried.

Sentences like this can also be joined together with connectives or conjunctions (eg: and, but, because, therefore, however, as, etc.) to make compound sentences, such as:

The lake sparkled as summer started.
Jake and Leslie cried.

Some sentences may also have, or need:

An object: Additional things or people in a sentence, which are acted on by the subject. Another way of looking at objects is as the *receivers of the action in a sentence*. In this sentence:

Paul and Gretel ate pizza. Paul and Gretel = Subject, ate = Verb, and pizza = Object

The object is not necessary to make this a complete sentence, but provides more detail. In this sentence:

Paul and Gretel like pizza. Paul and Gretel = Subject, like = verb, and pizza = Object

Unlike the first example, however, the object is necessary to complete the sentence. Consider the sentence without the object:

Paul and Gretel like.

If someone walked up to you and said this fragment, apart from thinking that person is weird, you would immediately be confused and wonder **what** Paul and Gretel like. Pizza? (or some other object, eg: chocolate? Travel?). It is necessary for the sentence to make sense.

When you are writing, or editing, one way to make sure that your work reads well and that you are using proper grammar, is to ensure that each of your sentences makes sense independently (by making sure it has a subject and verb – and object as needed).

Practice: Fix the following sentence fragments. (1 mark each)

1. Ran from the sound in the dark.
2. The school really.
3. Is tall, dark, and handsome.
4. I placed a new license plate.
5. He never even.

2. Run-ons

A **run-on sentence** is made up of more than one complete sentence, joined together without any punctuation or conjunctions when needed. There are four ways to correct run-on sentences:

- Make two complete sentences, by separating the two parts of the run on with appropriate punctuation and capitalization.
- Connect the two sentences with a semicolon.
- Connect the two sentences with a comma or a comma + conjunction (and, because, etc)
- Re-phrase the two sentences to incorporate one idea as less important than, or descriptive of, the other.

Take a look at the following run-on sentence, and see how it can be corrected in each of the four ways.

Run on: April has a dark sense of humour she is always pulling scary pranks on people.

- April has a dark sense of humour. She is always pulling scary pranks on people.
 - April has a dark sense of humour; she is always pulling scary pranks on people.
 - April has a dark sense of humour, and she is always pulling scary pranks on people.
 - April, who has a dark sense of humour, is always pulling scary pranks on people.
- OR
- April, who is always pulling scary pranks, has a dark sense of humour.

Practice: Fix the following run-on sentences. (1 mark each)

1. Pets make life better they give people something to care for.
2. If you want people to like you you have to have a sense of humour you have to be a good listener.
3. The acorn fell from the tree rolled down the hill landing in the river it floated all the way to the village.
4. Don't stare into the sun it's bad for your eyes.
5. Travel the world it will teach you more than school ever did.

3. Multiple verb-tenses and subject/verb agreement

Verb tense refers to whether the action and describing words in your sentences use the past, present, or future (as well as perfect or continuous forms of each) form. A common writing error is to shift verb tenses inappropriately. For the most part, an entire piece of writing should be in the same tense. Academic English essays, for example, are almost always entirely written in present tense (exceptions including discussions of historic events).

Fortunately, this is an easy problem to fix during the editing phase of text creation. Simply choose a preferred tense and pay particular attention to verbs throughout, to make sure they match. Review the table of tense examples below.

Verb	Past	Present	Future
To write	Wrote	Write	Will write
To run	Ran	Run	Will run
To play	Played	Play	Will play
	Past Perfect	Present Perfect	Future Perfect
To write	Had written	Have written	Will have written
To run	Had run	Have run	Will have run
To play	Had played	Have played	Will have played
	Past Continuous	Present Continuous	Future Continuous
To write	Was writing	Am writing	Will be writing
To run	Was running	Am running	Will be running
To Play	Was playing	Am playing	Will be playing

Subject/Verb agreement refers to whether the verb of a sentence properly matches the subject of a sentence (remember subjects and verbs from earlier?). The problem encountered here is when plural verbs are applied to single subjects, or vice versa. Review appropriate subject/verb agreement examples below.

Singular Subject	Singular Verb	Plural Subject	Plural Verb
I	Write	We	Write
The Dog	Runs	The Dogs	Run
He/She	Plays	They	Play
It	Leaves	They	Leave

Practice: Fix the following verb problems. (1 mark each)

1. The student run to the bus.
2. The car had broke down on the way.
3. If you don't like reading, or listen to stories, you didn't understand the benefits.
4. He had speaking in his sleep tonight.
5. I takes longer than necessary to get out of bed in the morning.

4. Punctuation Troubleshooting

Commas

There are five main uses of commas in writing:

1. To pause.
 - As when we broke up run-on sentences, earlier in this unit, for example.
 - e.g: Writing is one of the most enjoyable ways to spend an afternoon, and it helps develop fine -motor skills.
2. To set off expressive words at the start of a sentence.
 - e.g: No, you can't go to the party.
 - Hey, how are you?

3. To list.
 - e.g: I ate waffles, bacon, fresh fruit, and eggs for breakfast
4. To insert additional information (or subordinate clauses).
 - As when we rewrote two parts of a run-on, earlier in this unit. In this format, sentences should be able to run smoothly and be still considered complete if the commas and the words between them were removed.
 - e.g: The strange house, with the broken window, was avoided at Halloween.
 - (Note: "The strange house was avoided at Halloween" would still be an acceptable sentence)
5. When a sentence begins with something that depends on the second half of the sentence.
 - e.g: If you want pizza, order before five.
 - With terror in her eyes, she watched him climb the tower.
 - Having danced all night, they were too exhausted to make it to brunch.

Apostrophes

There are two uses for apostrophes.

1. To signify possession.
 - e.g: Harold's hat
 - The cat's fur
 - The school's expectations
 - *Tip: When words already end with an s, you don't need to add apostrophe + s. Just add an apostrophe at the end.*
 - e.g: The class' opinion.
2. To signify that letters are missing, when words have been joined together (as contractions).
 - Eg: Don't (Do not)
 - Let's (let us)
 - You're (You are)
 - *Note: There are some common exceptions to the rules, which it is important to know*
 - It's = it is. Its = possessive.
 - There's = there is. Theirs = possessive.
 - Who's = Who is. Whose = possessive
 - You're = You are. Yours = possessive (not you's)

Capital Letters

Capitalization is pretty straightforward, but is commonly missed. Make sure you are taking the time to re-check your capitalization. A reminder: capital letters should be used to start sentences, for significant words in titles, and for names.

Practice: Fix the punctuation and capitalization mistakes in these sentences. (1 mark each)

1. queen elizabeth is now the longest reigning english monarch.
2. My favourite show *parks and recreation* isnt on TV anymore.

3. You cant have cookies with nuts in them at tinas school.
4. the walrus tusks were causing him pain.
5. backpacking across canada was lisas dream she couldnt wait to see Calgary toronto niagara falls and montreal.

5. Tricky Words

Some words are more commonly mixed up than others. To avoid making these simple mistakes, review the usage explanations below.

1. "Might have" is often mistakenly replaced by "might of" (the same can be said for should have, would have, etc). While it may sound like people are *saying* "might of" when they speak, this is never grammatically correct – unless you are talking about, for example, the might of the British Empire in the 19th Century. This version of the word "might" is completely different.
2. "Good" is often used in colloquial language in place of "well," but the simple way to think of it is that "Good" is used to describe nouns (things/people) and "Well" is used to describe verbs (actions or states of being). Therefore, you may *be* a good person, but you *feel* well.
3. *The following tricky words are homophones (words that sound the same) that people struggle with. Take a moment to review their differences.*
4. They're = They are. There = over there. Their = possessive, ie: their cat.
5. Then refers to things that happen in order (first we went to dinner, then we watched a movie). Than is used to compare two things (the dinner was better than the movie).
6. Loose is the opposite of tight. Lose is the opposite of win.
7. Choose is to make a choice. Chose is the past tense of choose (I choose to be here today. Yesterday I chose to stay home).
8. Passed refers to moving by something, most commonly in a physical sense. (I passed the pond on my way to work). Past refers to the time/s before the present (In the past, I fell in that pond).
9. To is used when you are going to go somewhere or to do something. Too can be used in place of "also" or to indicate excess. Two is the number.

The following tricky words are differentiated depending on the number of things they refer to.

1. "Between" and "among" – Between is used when you are discussing two things (there was tension between France and England). Among is used when you are discussing more than two (there was tension among the nations of the European Union).
2. "Fewer" and "less" - Fewer is used when you are discussing something countable (something you can number individual units of, Eg: jelly beans, students, minutes). Less is used when you are discussing something uncountable (something you can't number individual units of, but discuss in terms of general size/amount, Eg: soup, education, time).

Practice: Select the correct word, for each of the following sentences. (1 mark each)

1. When my Mum asked me how I was doing, I told her I was doing **good/well**.
2. You should **have/of** asked for help before the bolts got so **loose/lose**.
3. It was **to/too/two** dark to see when we **past/passed** the house.
4. **There/their/they're** dog was super cute, but they couldn't agree on which name to **chose/choose**.
5. Stella could **of/have** gotten lost **among/between** the clothing racks in the department store.

6. General Review:

Improve these sentences. (1 mark each)

1. He spoke to me as if I was a common criminal not even bothering to respectfully look me in the eye.
2. I found a block of apartments and the wall was just clear brick and I was thinking of banksy. I thought of spraying the wall except I only had a few half cans on me.

3. The book teaches readers that awful situations can't stop you to chose your own beliefs and behaviors.
4. Her interests were diverse: she loved painting, dancing, nature, baking pies and trained support animals.
5. The film i watched is called pineapple express it was out in the theatre on the 8th of august 2008 it was directed by David Gordon Green and the film is 111 minutes long.
6. Even though he was suppose to pack two pears of socks, he only packed one and ended up regretting it, deeply.
7. He could of gone his whole life without ever being aloud to find out who it came from.
8. Dust coated the floor and the counter an old metal cash register sat on while cobwebs grew a cross every corner in site.
9. I wish I can run faster than Usain Bolt when my Mother looks at me like that.
10. The count was very friendly but something wasn't right ... he keeps checking out my bear neck when he thinks I'm not looking,
11. I'm sure that you're involvement will have a very big affect on the project, Sam and myself are looking forward to working with you.

12. Andy was not sure how to get there. Rashida's parents place.

13. The students prepared for days without a brake they did not end up passing the test.

14. Ron should had more vegetables when he was growing up, now he is at more risk for heart attack and diabetes.

15. The less people who know the secret the greater the likelihood we will get away with it.

16. He can not stand to dance, singing, or any type of public performance.

17. Because of this no body will ever have the impact by Freddy Mercury in popular music.

18. A long-haired blue-eyed boy, with impeccable taste in desert.

19. Without considering the size of it's teeth Aziz ran forward to pet his new neighbors dog.

20. I was so hungry I ate three slices of banana cream pie and it was delicious.