

Usage And Punctuation Standards

Usage Standards

The following discussion of fragments, comma splices, run-on sentences, and agreement problems will demonstrate common usage errors and how to correct them.

Sentence Fragment

Fragments are phrases or dependent clauses punctuated as sentences. Often fragments are corrected by taking out the dependency word (words like “if,” “when,” “because,” “once,” “which” and many others). Fragments are also corrected by adding them to preceding or following sentences which may require the use of a comma or a dash. You may have noticed in your writing that many usage and punctuation errors are related to connecting or separating groups of words. By correctly handling separators and connectors, you can avoid several serious errors.

Error: Although the administration agreed.

Correct: The administration agreed.

Or: Although the administration agreed, the faculty was opposed.

Comma Splice

Comma splices separate two sentences with a comma rather than a period or semicolon. They are corrected using a period, semicolon, comma and a conjunction, or make one sentence depend on the other.

Error: Bill studied his microbiology, Shannon worked on her economics paper.

Correct: Bill studied his microbiology. Shannon worked on her economics paper.

Or: Bill studied his microbiology; Shannon worked on her economics paper.

Or: Bill studied his microbiology, and Shannon worked on her economics paper.

Or: Bill studied his microbiology while Shannon worked on her economics paper

Run-On Sentence

A run-on sentence consists of two sentences run together with no punctuation. You fix them the same way you fix a comma splice .

Error: Martha plays the cello she can't try out for the play.

Correct: Martha plays the cello; she can't try out for the play.

Or: Because Martha plays the cello, she can't try out for the play.

Or: Martha plays the cello, so she can't try out for the play.

Subject/Verb Agreement Error

In writing, subjects must agree with verbs in number, and pronouns (words that replace nouns) must agree with the nouns they replace in number and in gender.

Error: Registration and orientation is scheduled for Friday.

Correct: Registration and orientation are scheduled for Friday.

“Registration” and “orientation” make a plural subject; therefore, they require the plural verb “are.”

Pronoun Reference Error

Both subject/verb and pronoun/referent errors have several other variations, so if you have questions about agreement, check with Mr. Green or on English usage handbook.

Error: A student must always focus their energy on their studies.

Correct: A student must always focus his or her energy on studies.

Or: Students must always focus their energy on studies.

Point-of-View Shift

This problem occurs when you accidentally shift from the “I” point-of-view to the “you” point-of-view or when you shift from talking about people in general to using the pronoun “you.”

Error: I love Mr. Blakley’s ceramics class; you can really express your creativity there.

Correct: I love Mr. Blakley’s ceramic class; I can really express my creativity there.

Error: Students often believe that you can’t get a job in St. George.

Correct: Students often believe that they can’t get a job in St. George.

Punctuation Standards

Many punctuation errors result when writers attempt to connect groups of related words. This is especially true when the comma and the semicolon are used to connect two sentences or (two independent clauses).

Commas with Coordinating Conjunctions

When you join two or more sentences or independent clauses (ICs) with a coordinating conjunction (and, but, nor, or, for, yet, so), you must also place a comma in front of these words to avoid possible confusion.

<u>Sentence (IC)</u>	, and	<u>Sentence (IC)</u>
“	, but	“
“	, nor	“
”	, or	“
”	, for	“
”	, yet	“
”	, so	“

Error: Reber withdrew the student and the dean was notified.

Correct: Reber withdrew the student, and the dean was notified.

Remember, though, don't place a comma in front of all conjunctions—just those that connect two sentences (independent clauses).

Error: Matt finished the calculus problems , and then started to prepare for finals.

Correct: Matt finished the calculus problems and then started to prepare for finals.

Commas with Introductory Elements

Often you will need to place a comma after one word or a group of words that precedes a sentence, (independent clause).

One word, sentence: First, I must pass the exam.

Two words, sentence: For example, I do well in math.

Commas with Subordinate Clauses

One important and common type of introductory element is a subordinate clause (SC). Adding a subordinate conjunction (see the list below) to a sentence turns the sentence from an independent clause into a subordinate clause. These are also referred to as dependent clauses. When a subordinate clause is placed at the beginning of a sentence, it requires a comma.

Writing dependent clauses and punctuating them with a period is the most common source of sentence fragments.

Subordinated Sentence (SC) , Independent Sentence (IC)

Common Subordinate Conjunctions

after, although, as, as if, as though, as long as, because, before, even if, even though, if, in order that, rather than, since, so that, that, though, unless, until, when, whenever, where, wherever, whether, while

Error: When I was young I loved painting landscapes.

Correct: When I was young, I loved painting landscapes.

Error: Since it is almost Christmas I need to start shopping.

Correct: Since it is almost Christmas, I need to start shopping.

When a subordinate clause is placed at the after an independent clause the comma is optional.

Correct: I loved painting landscapes, when I was young.

Correct: I loved painting landscapes when I was young.

Correct: I need to start shopping, since it is almost Christmas .

Correct: I need to start shopping since it is almost Christmas .

Commas with Items in a Series

Place a comma after each item in a series (even use a comma to separate the last two items).

Error: Mary Fran and Mark are in concert choir.

Correct: Mary, Fran, and Mark are in concert choir.

Correct: This paper will discuss the origin of religion, the development of philosophy, and the rise of science.

Commas with Parenthetical (Interrupting) Elements

Use a comma before and after a word or group of words that interrupts the main sentence.

Correct: Addison Everett, Dixie State's Spanish teacher, often takes students to Mexico for language study.

Unnecessary Commas

Generally omit a comma before or after a verb.

Error: Most married students, must hold jobs in addition to going to school.

Correct: Most married students must hold jobs in addition to going to school.

Error: The instructor said, that Amy could appeal the grade.

Correct: The instructor said that Amy could appeal the grade.

Unnecessary Commas

Use commas with coordinating conjunctions only if they separate two or more sentences or join the last two items in a series.

Error: Fred organized the study group, and led the actual discussion.

Correct: Fred organized the study group and led the actual discussion.

Semicolons

The semicolon is like a period, but the semicolon connects, and the period separates. The semicolon functions about the same as a comma and conjunction in joining two sentences.

Error: Re-entry students register first, however, sophomores are next.

Correct: Re-entry students register first; sophomores are next.

Correct: Re-entry students register first; however, sophomores are next.

Apostrophes

Use the apostrophe to show contractions, placing the apostrophe above the omitted letter(s).

Error: Your going to play, aren't you?

Correct: You're going to play, aren't you?

Correct: I'll ask Dr. Rose if it's all right.

Error: The laboratory rat returned to its'/it's cage.

Correct: The laboratory rat returned to its cage.

Use the apostrophe to show possession. Generally, just add an apostrophe and an s to the noun showing possession.

Correct: The student's book was lost

Or: The city's map shows Dixie College.

Or: The children's play yard is a good addition to the college's preschool.

Some plural nouns which show possession already end in "s." For those nouns, just add an apostrophe after the "s."

Correct: The students' schedules were confirmed.

Or: The ladies' classes were mostly in the business area.

Apostrophes are not used to make nouns plural.

Error: Bill sees the error's clearly.

Correct: Bill sees the errors clearly.

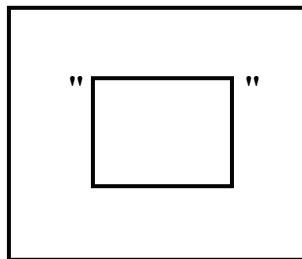
Miscellaneous Punctuation Hints

Periods and commas go inside quote marks unless you're documenting a source in a parenthetical note.

Correct: We have finished the chapter entitled "Social Darwinism."

Parenthetical Note: The report noted that "Americans consume 6 percent of the world's resources" (Meadows 5).

Knowing when to use quotation marks or italics (underlining or bolding) is often a bit confusing. The following graphic helps:



Place quotation marks around article and chapter titles within whole documents. Poems, short stories, essays generally are part of a collection and usually require quotation marks.

Underline or italicize whole documents — books, magazines, newspapers, and plays.