Writing Module
Structural Elements of a Sentence

This module and the module on sentence clarity will provide you with refresher information about the key rules regarding sentence construction. These are essential to apply when writing papers.

The module about structural elements of a sentence is divided into three sections:

1. Sentence fragments
2. Main clauses that are not connected properly
3. Parallel construction

Sentence Fragments

A sentence needs:
- a subject
- a verb
- an expression of a complete thought

A sentence needs a subject and a verb and must express a complete thought.

Which of these examples are sentence fragments?

> Expensive marketing campaigns, generally out of reach for most small businesses.

> Without question, responsibility for quality control is in the hands of all employees.

You can easily identify that the first example, "Expensive marketing campaigns, generally out of reach for most small businesses," is a sentence fragment because it does not have a verb.

The second example is a complete sentence because it has a subject, *responsibility*, and a verb, *is*.

However, there are times when it's more challenging to identify a sentence fragment. We are going to address three cases.

Long Fragment

The first type of error that is difficult to identify is a long fragment.

> When the company first started, even when the company was struggling to survive, James Martin, undeniably the largest financial backer, as well as its most public advocate.

> This example has a subject, James Martin, but no verb for the subject.

If you aren't sure whether or not a sentence is complete, ask yourself these three questions:

1. What is the subject?
2. What is the verb?
3. Does the sentence express a complete thought?

The Dependent Clause has a Subject and Verb but does not Express a Complete Thought

A second type of fragment error that is difficult to identify occurs when a dependent clause has a subject and verb but does not express a complete thought. This type of sentence fragment often starts with one of the following words:

▪ *after*	▪ *before*	▪ *unless*
▪ *although*	▪ *even if*	▪ *until*
▪ *as*	▪ *even though*	▪ *when*
▪ *as if*	▪ *if*	▪ *whenever*
▪ *if*	▪ *in order to*	▪ *whether*
▪ *because*	▪ *since*	▪ *while*

Let's look at an example of this type of error:

> Although she was initially pumped up about the project.

> This is a sentence fragment because it does not express a complete thought, even though it has a subject and verb.

Sentence or not?
- What is the subject?
- What is the verb?
- Does it express a complete thought?

When this type of error occurs, there are two ways to fix it. The **first way to fix this error is to drop the first word**. For this example, the corrected sentence would be:

> She was initially pumped up about the project.

This sentence now has a subject and verb, and a complete thought is expressed.

The **second way to fix this error is to combine the fragment with a main clause to form a complete thought**. For this example, the corrected sentence would be:

> Although she was initially pumped up about the project, Gina quickly discovered the project was going to be a big headache.

Caution: When proofreading your papers, confirm that all of your sentences have a subject, a verb, and a complete thought.

Two Main Clauses are Connected Improperly

A second type of fragment error that is difficult to identify occurs when two main clauses are connected improperly.

A main clause can stand alone as a complete sentence. However, two or more main clauses are sometimes combined together so that the writing does not sound choppy.

> For example, two main clauses that are complete sentences are:

> Keith ran out of luck.

> Julie continued to win.

These two sentences could remain separate, but reading them could sound choppy. Combining these two short sentences together would eliminate this problem. Be aware, however, of the three types of errors that can occur when connecting two sentences.

1. Failure to use punctuation between the main clauses.
2. Placing a comma between two main clauses but failure to add a connecting word.
3. Using a confusing or inappropriate connecting word.

Properly combine short sentences together to eliminate choppiness and improve flow in your writing.

The first type of error occurs when no punctuation is used between the main clauses.

Using the previous two sentences, an example would be:

Keith ran out of luck Julie continued to win.

This is incorrect.

A second error occurs when a comma is placed between the two main clauses but no connecting word (e.g., *and*, *or*, *but*, *yet*, *for*, *so*) is added. Using the previous two sentences once again, an example would be:

Keith ran out of luck, Julie continued to win.

This is also incorrect.

A third error occurs when a confusing or inappropriate connecting word is used. Using the previous two sentences once again, an example would be:

Keith ran out of luck, *or* Julie continued to win.

This is also incorrect. Even though a connector word was used, the new sentence does not make sense.

Connector words used when combining two main clauses include: *and, or, but, yet, for,* and *so.*

There are three ways to connect two main clauses together:
1. Add a comma after the first main clause.
2. Add a connector word that makes sense.
3. Add the second main clause.

Using the previous two sentences, examples of connecting them correctly are:

Keith ran out of luck, *but* Julie continued to win.

Keith ran out of luck, *while* Julie continued to win.

Keith ran out of luck, *yet* Julie continued to win.

All of the connector words are appropriate, because each sentence makes sense.

Methods to connect two main clauses:
1. Add a comma after the first main clause.
2. Add a connector word that makes sense.
3. Add the second main clause.

When connecting two main clauses into one sentence: add a comma after the first clause, use an appropriate connector word so the new sentence makes sense, then add the second main clause.

Parallel Construction

There are three areas of importance that involve parallel construction.
1. Use a list of items
2. Use correlatives in a sentence
3. Make comparisons

Use a List of Items

Each item on the list must be grammatically equal. In other words, you need to use the same pattern of word(s) for each item. Do not mix forms within the list.

> The production manager was asked to write his report quickly, accurately, and thoroughly.

In this example, the list consists of quickly, accurately, and thoroughly. All of the items use the same word pattern (i.e., they are all adverbs).

Now let's look at another example:

> The doctor told the patient that he should get a lot of sleep, that he should not eat too much, and do some stretching exercises before beginning his five-mile run.

This list includes items that consist of more than one word, so it is a little more difficult to determine whether the items all have the same word pattern. Some hints to make the pattern easier to see are:
- Place the items in a column.
- Say the list out loud, and listen to the rhythm or repetition of the sounds.

In this example, listen to the pattern of the items in the list:
- that he should get a lot of sleep
- that he should not eat too much
- do some stretching exercises

Do not mix forms in a list.

How to identify word patterns:
- Place items in a column.
- Say the list out loud.

The last item does not fit the pattern of the other two items. You can correct the problem in two ways.

The first way to correct the problem is by adjusting the last item to match the pattern of the other two items. The sentence would read:

> The doctor told the patient that he should get a lot of sleep, that he should not eat too much, and that he should do some stretching exercises before beginning his five-mile run.

This sentence has parallel construction but is very wordy with all the occurrences of "that he should" in the sentence.

A second approach to correct the sentence is by taking out the repeating phrase and placing it at the beginning of the list. The sentence would read:

> The doctor told the patient that he should get a lot of sleep, eat an appropriate amount of food, and do some stretching exercises before beginning his five-mile run.

The first rule to remember about parallel construction is: The items in a list should all have the same word pattern.

Use of Correlatives in a Sentence

The second area of importance with parallel construction occurs when correlatives are used in a sentence.

Common correlatives are:
- *either…or…*
- *neither…nor…*
- *both…and…*
- *not only…but also…*

The elements following correlative terms must use the same word pattern.

When using correlatives, the element immediately following the first correlative term must have the same word pattern as the element following the second term. For example,

> Those employees wishing to participate in the event should either contact HR by telephone or should send e-mail to HR.

The sentence contains the correlative, *either...or*. The first element is "contact HR by telephone." The second element is "should send e-mail to HR." Examination of these two elements reveals that they do not have the same word pattern. To correct the problem, modify either the first or the second element to match the other element.

Here are two examples that are both correct.

> Those employees wishing to participate in the event should either contact HR by telephone or send e-mail to HR.

> Those employees wishing to participate in the event either should contact HR by telephone or should send e-mail to HR.

To second rule to remember about parallel construction is: When a sentence contains a correlative, the elements immediately following each correlative term must have the same word pattern.

Making Comparisons

The second area of importance with parallel construction occurs when comparisons are made in a sentence. Normally, one of the following words (or phrases) connects the two elements that are being compared:
- *than*
- *as*
- *similar to*
- *like*

Each element being compared must have the same word pattern.

For example:

> Organizational structure is as important as maintaining morale of the employees.

The comparison word being used is *as*. The first element is "Organizational structure." The second element is "maintaining morale." These two elements do not have the same word pattern, so one of the elements must be corrected to match the other.

Comparison words:
- *than*
- *as*
- *similar to*
- *like*

Elements being compared must have the same word pattern.

One way to correct this sentence is:

> Organizational structure is as important as the morale of the employees.

The elements now match.

The third rule to remember about parallel construction is: When comparing two elements in a sentence, the elements must have the same word pattern.

The key thing to remember with parallel construction is that the **elements always must have the same word pattern**.

The key to parallel construction is that **all elements must use the same word pattern**.

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