

Sentence Structure

Sentence Fragments, Run-ons, Comma Splices, Misplaced Modifiers

Fragments

To recognize fragments, ask yourself these questions:

1. Does a word group lack a subject, and the words are not joined to a complete sentence?
Sitting by the dock of the bay.
2. Does a word group lack a verb, and the words are not joined to a complete sentence?
The actress in the movie.
3. Does a word group that starts with a subordinating conjunction stand alone rather than being joined to a complete sentence?
Because you love me.

To correct the above sentence fragments, join the word group to a complete sentence:

Sitting by the dock of the bay, Joe saw pelicans, sea gulls, and dolphins.
Because you love me, I will marry you.

OR

Add the missing word or words to make the phrase a complete sentence.

The actress in the movie won an Oscar for her role.

Run-ons (or Fused Sentences) and Comma Splices

These two types of sentence errors can make sentences confusing or awkward to read:

I went to Rosemary's Ice Cream Parlor I ordered a peanut butter milkshake.
Margie spent all of her savings now she is flat broke.
Tom decided to move to Los Angeles, he wanted to be an actor.

To fix a fused or a spliced sentence, join the two independent clauses with 1) a period; 2) a semicolon; or 3) a comma plus a coordinating conjunction (f.a.n.b.o.y.s):

Margie spent all of her savings. Now she is flat broke.
Margie spent all of her savings; now she is flat broke.
Margie spent all of her savings, so now she is flat broke.

Misplaced Modifiers

Misplaced modifiers occur when the modifying words, phrases, or clauses 1) are too far away from the part they're modifying or 2) don't modify the right word(s). Look at the following examples:

At the age of sixteen, my dad taught me how to drive a stick shift. (This sounds as if my dad was sixteen years old when he taught me to drive.)

As the president of this honor society, members should be more involved. (Who is the president? Who's talking in this sentence? The members?)

A professional model, all the boys wanted to meet Cindy Crawford. (Who is the model, the boys or Cindy Crawford?)

To correct, add the missing word(s), or make sure the modifying phrase is placed next to what it's modifying:

When I was sixteen, my dad taught me how to drive a stick shift.

As the president of this honor society, ***I*** think members should be more involved.

All the boys wanted to meet Cindy Crawford, ***a professional model***.

Parallelism

Parallel ideas should be expressed in the same grammatical form.

A series of coordinated elements should be parallel in form.

Wrong: I enjoy reading, gardening, and to walk my dogs.

Right: I enjoy reading, gardening, and ***walking my dogs***.

Wrong: You need to finish your homework, clean your room, and feeding the dog before you go out.

Right: You need to finish your homework, clean your room, and ***feed the dog*** before you go out.

Wrong: The union wanted pay increases for every employee and that there would be shorter working hours.

Right: The union wanted ***pay increases and shorter working hours*** for every employee.

The constrictions that follow correlative conjunctions (*both-and, either-or, neither-nor, whether-or*) should be parallel in form.

Wrong: He was neither qualified to lead this country nor was he willing.

Right: He was ***neither qualified nor willing*** to lead this country.