Sentence problems

The structure of sentences can be a problem for students. You need to be able to identify and revise problem sentences so that your writing is technically correct. When you are communicating in STANDARD English (as required for academic writing), sentences are used to convey a complete thought. As such, all sentences must have the correct grammatical elements and punctuation expected of English sentences. This Academic Skills factsheet introduces you to TWO common sentence problems that you should be aware of in your writing and proofreading:

1. Identifying & revising sentence fragments
2. Identifying & revising run-on sentences

> GRAMMAR CHECKERS will NOT help you much with your sentences (about 20-50% accuracy). Sometimes, you will see a green line to warn you to check for **sentence fragments or run-on sentences**. This signal may be incorrect or miss sentence errors altogether, so proofread your work yourself as well as using the grammar checker.

1. Identifying and revising sentence fragments

Sentence fragments are **incomplete sentences**, so they make your writing grammatically incorrect. Most often, punctuation revisions can be used to correct the problem. Sometimes, you will need to rearrange the sentence order and structure to correct the problem. There are **four** different types of sentence fragments that do not follow the rules for sentence structure.

●**Rule 1:** A sentence is a fragment if it DOES NOT have **a subject**.

Examples

✗ By researching in the library or online is part of the assignment writing process. (NO SUBJECT)

✓ Researching in the library or online is part of the assignment writing process.[1]

✓ Part of the assignment writing process is to research in the library or online.[2]

(POSSIBLE REVISIONS – [1] BY DROPPING THE PREPOSITION 'BY', THE INCORRECT PART OF THE SENTENCE BECOMES THE SUBJECT, OR [2] YOU CAN REARRANGE THE SENTENCE)

●**Rule 2:** A sentence is a fragment if it DOES NOT have **a main verb**.

Examples

✗ Undergraduates working through their course and then on to postgraduate studies. (NO MAIN VERBS)

✓ Undergraduates worked through their course and then went on to postgraduate studies.
(POSSIBLE REVISION – ADD MAIN VERBS)

●**Rule 3:** A sentence is a fragment if it DOES NOT have **a subject and a main verb**.

Examples

✗ Students can achieve a range of marks. From a fail to a high distinction (NO SUBJECT, NO MAIN VERB)

✓ Students can achieve a range of marks from a fail to a high distinction.
(POSSIBLE REVISION – JOIN THE FRAGMENT TO THE PRECEDING SENTENCE, SO THAT THE SENTENCE HAS A SUBJECT AND A MAIN VERB)

●**Rule 4:** A sentence is a fragment if it DOES NOT **make complete sense** on its own, EVEN IF there is a subject and a main verb. A sentence must express at least one complete idea, without which you will be left asking a question: usually WHAT? or WHY?

Examples

✗ The university did not gain the enrolments it was seeking[1]. Although the new units doubled student numbers.[2]
(SENTENCE [2] HAS A SUBJECT AND A MAIN VERB, BUT DOES NOT MAKE SENSE BY ITSELF AS A UNIT OF MEANING)

✓ The university did not gain the enrolments it was seeking even though the new units doubled student numbers.

✓ Although the new units doubled student numbers, the university did not gain the enrolments it was seeking.

✓ The university did not gain the enrolments it was seeking in spite of doubled student numbers in new units.
(POSSIBLE REVISIONS – JOIN THE IDEAS TOGETHER TO MAKE A SINGLE SENTENCE THAT COMPLETES THE IDEA)

2. Identifying and revising run-on sentences

Run-on sentences occur when simple sentences (independent clauses) are joined incorrectly, so they make your writing grammatically incorrect. Most often, punctuation revisions can be used to correct the problem. Sometimes, you will need to rearrange the sentence order and structure to correct the problem. There are **three** main types of run-on sentences that do not follow the rules for sentence structure.

●**Rule 1:** A sentence is a **fused run-on** if two or more independent clauses are run together without any punctuation.

Examples

✗ **X** Lecturers were unknown the students were expected to introduce themselves. (TWO SENTENCES RUN-ON)

✓ The lecturers were unknown. The students were expected to introduce themselves[1].

✓ The lecturers were unknown; therefore, the students were expected to introduce themselves[2].
  (POSSIBLE REVISIONS – [1] MAKE TWO OR MORE SIMPLE SENTENCES, OR [2] USE SENTENCE CONNECTORS)

●**Rule 2:** A sentence has a **comma splice** when two or more independent clauses are run together with only a comma.

Examples

✗ **X** The dates of exam periods can be viewed online, they are scheduled at the end of each semester.(RUN-ON)

✓ The dates of exam periods can be viewed online. They are scheduled at the end of each semester.[1]

✓ The dates of exam periods can be viewed online; they are scheduled at the end of each semester.[2]

✓ The dates of exam periods can be viewed online, and they are scheduled at the end of each semester.[3]

✓ The dates of exam periods can be viewed online; moreover, they are scheduled at the end of each semester.[4]
  (POSSIBLE REVISIONS – [1] MAKE TWO SENTENCES, OR [2] USE A SEMICOLON, OR [3/4] USE SENTENCE CONNECTORS)

●**Rule 3:** A sentence is called an '**and' run-on** if two or more independent clauses are joined with a conjunction and ARE not punctuated correctly.

Examples

✗ **X** Students can participate in the UNE New England Award **and** their voluntary pursuits may count towards an honorary award at the end of their degree. (CORRECT PUNCTUATION MISSING)

✓ Students can participate in the UNE New England Award, and their voluntary pursuits may count towards an honorary award at the end of their degree.

✗ Students can apply for The New England Award **moreover** their voluntary pursuits may assist students' professional development at the University of New England. (CORRECT PUNCTUATION MISSING)

✓ Students can apply for The New England Award**; moreover,** voluntary pursuits may assist students' professional development at the University of New England.
  (POSSIBLE REVISIONS – USE A SENTENCE CONNECTOR AND THE CORRECT PUNCTUATION)

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   │ **Use correct punctuation to join simple sentences together with a connecting word.** │
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1. Use a *comma* (,) *before* these words when you are using them to write **compound sentences** joined by coordinating conjunctions:
   and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet

✓ The dates of exam periods can be viewed online**, and** they are scheduled at the end of each semester.

2. Use a *semicolon* (;) *before* and a *comma* (,) *after* these words/phrases when you are using them to write **compound sentences** joined by **adverbial conjunctions**:
   common examples: also, consequently, for example, furthermore, hence, however, instead, meanwhile, moreover, namely, nevertheless, on the other hand, similarly, still, that is, then, therefore, thus

✓ The dates of exam periods can be viewed online**; futhermore,** they are scheduled at the end of each semester.

3. Use appropriate punctuation if you make a **complex sentence** to join your ideas together**.**

✓ **As** the dates of exam periods can be viewed online**,** they are scheduled at the end of each semester.