

WRITING TIPS

SENTENCE STRUCTURE REVIEW

Don't make these first three mistakes when you write:

1. Do Not Create Sentence Fragments (SF)

A sentence is like a math equation. It has a very specific way that it is formed and put together. A complete sentence expresses an idea, or ideas, and must have at least one subject (does action) and at least one predicate (the action being done).

Example: "The one with the long hair." This is a sentence fragment, as there is a subject (the one), but there is no predicate (what did the subject do?).

To correct sentence fragments, ask yourself, "Have I got a doer and what is being done by the doer?" You need both parts to have a complete sentence. I ran. (complete sentence because "I" is the subject and "ran" is the predicate (action)).

2. Do Not Create Run on Sentences/Comma Splices (R-O)

What are they?

These occur when you don't join two or more different ideas together properly. The ideas keep going without proper pauses, joiners, or stops and they confuse the reader.

So, to summarize, a complete sentence is an independent clause that can stand alone, and must have a subject (doer) and a predicate (action).

3. Do Not Begin Sentences with Conjunctions

"And," "But," and "Because" are joining conjunctions, and are meant to join two related ideas together, so do not use them to begin sentences. Instead, use the words: "However, ..." or "In addition, ..." or "Furthermore, ..."

Notice that you will need a comma after each to separate it, as these are what we call transitional words, and the voice should pause after reading them.

Things to Know:

Independent clause: a complete thought that can stand alone

Dependent clause: a phrase or group of words that cannot stand alone

Three types of Sentences:

1. **Simple:** one independent clause that must have a subject and a predicate

Example: John (subject) very quickly on his project. (One independent clause – one idea)

2. **Compound:** must have at least two independent clauses that are related to the same idea, and are joined by an idea "joiner."

Examples of Compound Sentences:

Remember that when you join two related independent clauses together, you have three options.

- use a comma **and** a conjunction
- use a dash ("em-dash" created by holding down Alt and Shift and then typing the

- use a dash (“em-dash” created by typing two hyphens together or some computer programs will create the em-dash by holding down the Alt and Shift keys before typing the hyphen)
- use a semicolon (to use a semicolon, both sides of it must be independent clauses and as such, each must be able to stand alone)

Note: A dash or a semicolon replace the comma and conjunction completely (don't use either a comma or a conjunction if you use the dash or the semicolon)

Examples:

Comma + conjunction: **I wanted to go to my friend's house, but my parents said I could not go.**

Semicolon: **I wanted to go to my friend's house; my parents said I could not go.**
(Both sides are independent clauses and can stand alone.)

Dash: **I wanted to go to my friend's house – my parents said I had to do my chores.**
(Both sides are independent clauses and can stand alone.)

3. **Complex:** Sentences must have at least one independent clause and at least one dependent clause, which often gives extra information. This extra information/dependent clause cannot stand alone, as it is not a complete thought, and it is usually offset in commas depending where it is located within the sentence.

Example: **John worked very quickly, as he did every Saturday**, on his project .
(independent clause) (dependent clause)

Example: **After the plane took off, I immediately began to miss my parents.**
(dependent clause) (independent clause)

Rather than a comma or commas, a dash, really known as the “em-dash,” may also be used to separate an independent clause from a dependent clause.

Example: **I had finished all my chores—took me hours!!**
(independent clause) (dependent clause)

Using Ellipsis as Punctuation: How can I use ellipsis in my writing?

Examples:

Although it is not the success in the rodeo arena that we had together that makes him so significant to me...it's the fire and passion he lit in me!

Note that either ellipsis or a dash would work well in the last example.

I knew my friend missed me too....

Use ellipsis where you want the reader to think further or to “draw between the lines.”

Using varied sentence structure is very important. You will want to demonstrate that you have the writing skills to create all types of correct sentences. Some punctuation marks such as the semicolon, dash, or ellipsis should be used sparingly, as overuse will make your writing “overdone.”

WRITING TIPS

Verb Tenses: How do I keep my verb tenses the same throughout my writing?

Decide which verb tense you will use for a piece of writing. The use of present tense creates more excitement, and is usually used for first person. However, past tense is sometimes easier to use, especially when you are writing about the past. Make these choices before you start writing if you can. Once you have finished writing, read the piece over while *only* looking at your verb tenses, as this is effective editing. Make them all the same tense, if they aren't already. Occasionally this may not be possible, and when this occurs, you need to really consider how you will write your ideas without confusing the reader.

Subject and Object Pronouns: Do I use "I" or "me"?

"I" is a subject and does an action of sorts. (I am going to the store.)

"Me" is an object and receives the action, but "me" can never do an action. (He went to the store with me. **or** He and I will go to the store. ("Me" cannot actually do anything, like go to a store.)

Sometimes, you need to mentally change the verb tense to know. Removing the compound subject or object is also a good trick to know if it is a subject or an object.

Example:

John and me ran fast.

Remove the compound subject (John) and you will again see that "me" cannot run anywhere, as "me" does not/cannot do any actions. "Me" is an object, meaning that it receives actions instead! This then ~~must be~~ changed to "I" in order to be correct, as that makes "I" the subject, and "I" can do actions! I can go to the store, but if someone comes along, he/she will be coming with me. ("Me" is receiving the companionship and isn't actually doing anything!)

Present/Past/Past Participle Verb Tenses: Should I use see, saw, or seen?

You only use "seen" when it is preceded by "have, has, or had."

Examples:

Today I see.

Yesterday I saw.

In the past, I have/had seen. **OR** In the past they had seen.

Capitalization: When should I capitalize nouns like “mom/dad/grandma/uncle?”

If Mom or Dad could be replaced with a proper noun, they require capitals. If they have “my” in front of them, they do not. For example, “Mom/Mary and Dad/Bob are nice!” (See how Mom/Dad could be replaced with a real name here? Mom is nice./Dad is nice./Bob is nice.)

“My mom and dad are nice.” (You wouldn’t say “My Bob and Mary are nice.”)

Adverbs: Most adverbs require “ly” at the end.

Example: The horse is nice! - Notice that **nice** is an adjective describing the noun (horse).

The horse runs nicely! - Notice that **nicely** is an adverb describing the verb (runs).

Homophones Often Confused: What “their” do I need to use?

Their	possessive ownership
There	placement (here or there)
They’re	contraction for they are
Too	means also, as well, or a large amount (too many)
Two	the counting number
To	preposition that helps with placement of something, someone (I am going to the store.)

Don’t confuse:

You’re	you are
Your	possessive form showing ownership by a person
Where	reference to a place
Were	linking verb for past verb tense
Our	possessive form of showing ownership by people
Are	linking verb for present tense verb

Subject Reference: Do I use “who” or “that” to refer to nouns/pronouns?

When referring to an inanimate object use “that.”

Example: It was the box **that** fell over.

When referring to a living person/animal use “who.”

Examples: It was my mom **who** did all the work.

It was she **who** did all the work.

It was my cat **who** was smarter than my dog!

Adding Voice: Help! How do I add more voice to my writing?!

Do try to use various punctuation to bring voice to your work. For example, using exclamation marks or ellipsis are both good ideas. Occasionally, you may use both a question mark and an exclamation mark to add voice. Try to write so that a reader has no option except to change tone of voice, should your writing be read aloud. I compare punctuation to writing as a “GPS” to traveling. The GPS tells you where to go, and punctuation tells you how to get there or in this case, how to read something.

When you write, you want to bring as much "voice" to a piece as possible. For example, don't tell me about diving into the water...MAKE ME FEEL THE DIVE...MAKE ME THE DIVER!

Boring: John had always loved diving. He prepared himself at the top of the cliff and looked down into the cold blue water. Could he do it? He edged slowly forward and then jumped. He dove cleanly into the water below.

Better: John had always loved diving!! He couldn't wait for his body to slice through that glassy surface...deep into the cutting cold blue of the lake! He shook out his body, in preparation for the amazing thing that was about to take place. His body hairs sprang outwards in their adrenaline rushed state! Then his toes gingerly snuck forwards, getting closer to the edge with every movement. Finally, he could sense the edge was near. His arms flung high, and his knees scrunched low...and then the damp air was rushing his face! Down, down, down, faster than he had imagined, John sliced through the atmosphere.

His fingers stretched, pointing and reaching, to ensure their tips were the first to dip into the surface, ahead of his pushing body! The dark blue coolness devoured him! He had made it!!

Can you see the difference? Don't talk about it!! Do it!! Make your writing "come alive!"

Using Dialogue: I want to have spoken words in my work. How do I do this?

If you are trying to use dialogue, this is great!! Please review dialogue materials within your lesson materials. Do know:

- You also need to use a **new paragraph for each new speaker** when you are using dialogue/conversation in your writing. This will organize the work, and will make it easier to follow. The first spoken word of each new dialogue must be capitalized.

- All dialogue requires some sort of punctuation to separate speaker tags and spoken words. The rules are a little bit “crazy” here, as you never use a period after spoken words when a speaker tag follows the words, but exclamation marks, question marks, and commas are permissible, and you **MUST** use one of them. This rule changes if your speaker tag is first, and the spoken words are last. In this case you may end with a period if you wish, and you may not end with a comma, as the sentence is now complete. So, to review, when the speaker tag is before the spoken words, you may not use a period after them, but when the spoken words follow the speaker tag you may then choose a period instead of a comma.
- Always include speaker tags in formal assignment work, as even though you will read some novels, where authors do not include the speaker tags, you are still learning, and it is important that you practise this skill the way it really should be done.
- All dialogue still requires some type of punctuation at the end of the spoken words.
- Do an internet search for examples of dialogue punctuation.

Quoting Dialogue

To quote dialogue, you will use both double quotation marks and single quotation marks. You place double quotation marks to show you are using someone else's words, and then you place only the actual spoken words within single quotation marks, as well.

Example: "‘Yesterday was the best day ever!’ screamed the child."

New Paragraphs: When do I need to add a new paragraph?

New paragraphs are always required whenever you change the topic, time, or place. In other words, if you begin with “The next morning,” you are showing a change of time so you need a new paragraph. If you begin with “Once we were back at the ranch,” you are showing a new location or setting so you require a new paragraph. Notice that this type of introductory phrase is always followed by a comma.

Outlines: Why do I have to create a silly outline or do planning?

Outlines are very useful tools, as they do the following:

- Organize your ideas
- Help you know if you have too much or too little information to include
- Help you focus on a certain topic (if it doesn’t directly support the topic it must be omitted.)
- Don't forget that outlines also help you to know if you have enough supporting details about certain things to devote an entire paragraph to it, or if you need to somehow combine some of your ideas. When you combine ideas, this will then change your paragraph topic sentence to show the two ideas being expressed.

Introduction and Conclusion: Help!! I don't know how to start or end my assigned essay!!

It is sometimes difficult to make both your introduction and conclusion long enough. Here are some tips for you:

Introduction:

1. Turn your assigned discussion topic or EQ into a statement (this will be your topic).
2. Always include a general statement that tells what you will discuss, without giving any details. (Remember, your introduction is what I call the "GPS" of your essay, as it will let the reader know where you are going, but specific details will not generally be given here. For example, you need to include the title of the text to which you will refer, and the character you will use as support.
3. You might consider weaving in a good quote that is relevant to your subject matter. Usually a quick Google search will provide this for you. Simply look up "Famous quotes about *your topic*."

Weaving Example: Sam White once said, "Writing is the essence of the soul!"

Conclusion:

1. Summarize your ideas that you have presented in your previous paragraphs. Repeat your introduction ideas using different words.
2. This is where you want to leave your reader with a "profound" and powerful thought regarding the topic of your piece.
3. You may make reference to the quote you used in the introduction, or if you did not use one there, you can now give a relevant quote in the conclusion.

Weaving Example: "The well known (name of person) has said, "give quote here."

Effective Editing: I need to read the same work over several times! Really??!

In order to really edit effectively, the written piece must be read over several times, while you look for different possible errors each time. While we are known multi-taskers, we are also known to seldom do this effectively. Therefore, it is difficult to read for two or more things at once. Focus and concentration is the best way. Another extremely valuable trick is to put your work away for a period of time, so that your brain receives a mental break from it. That way, when you return to it, you will have a more effective "eye" for error!

Editing Tip: What's an easy trick for me to use to edit my work?

Perhaps one of the most effective editing tools is the easiest tool to use! Once you have finished editing your work as well as you are able, find a space where you are very comfortable, and read your work out loud. If your voice wants to pause somewhere, this is a clue you may need punctuation of some sort in this spot. This is usually just a comma to give the reader an indication that there will be a short pause there, and you would include some type of other punctuation, if you want the pause to be longer. Reading your work out loud will also help you to notice things such as lengthy run-on sentences and sentence fragments, as your voice will most often find a fragment to be somewhat "jarring," and if you can't read your work smoothly, you will know there are still some errors within it.

Poetry: Help! My assignment is to write some poetry!

When writing poetry, it is really important that you bring voice to the work, so the reader feels part of the piece. I find the best way to write successful poetry is to write it, and then leave it for the day, and then return to it. You will be surprised by the number of changes you will see that should/could be made to improve the reading experience you will create.

Each and every word must contribute to the meaning. If it does not, then it should be omitted. A common error that I find students doing when writing poetry, is to begin lines with words such as “And” or “Then.” You will realize that in the majority of cases, no meaning is lost when these words are omitted at the beginning of a poetry line, so please do omit them.

Title choice is always super important for all literary works, whether prose or poetry!

Feedback: Is getting lots of feedback comments a bad thing for me?

Never mind the colourful marks I might add to your work! **The amount of colourful feedback you might receive has absolutely nothing to do with the final grade, as it totally depends at which level of writing you are working.** When I feel, your paper is written perfectly, in my mind, I will no longer offer suggestions! Lol...I hope you understand...keep on writing, and please know that my job is to help you continue your journey to even better writing, so even strong writers will still receive many colourful feedback suggestions!