



DOUGLAS COLLEGE

Learning Centre

Mixed Sentence Structure Problem: Double Verb Error

Using more than one verb in the same clause or sentence can lead to sentence structure errors. Often, the writer splices together two parts of a sentence that need to be kept separate. See the example below:

People own cars must pay high costs for insurance.

Subject	Verb	Object	Prepositional Phrase
<i>People</i>	<i>own</i>	<i>cars</i>	
←	<i>must pay</i>	<i>high costs</i>	<i>for insurance</i>

The table above shows that a subject for one of the verbs **is blank** or missing. In other words, the second verb must pay seems to have no subject because People, the subject of the first verb own, has already been used.

This handout shows several ways to fix this kind of “double verb” error.

Ways to Fix Double Verb Errors:

1. Add “that, which, or who”

Often the easiest way to fix a double verb error is to add a relative pronoun (such as “**that, which, or who**”) so that you create a new subject for one of the verbs. The example problem sentence at the beginning of this handout can be fixed in this way.

People [who own cars] must pay high costs for insurance.

Subject	Verb	Object	Prepositional Phrase
<i>People</i>	<i>must pay</i>	<i>high costs</i>	<i>for insurance</i>
↑ <i>who</i>	<i>own</i>	<i>cars</i>	

However, you must be careful to add the relative pronoun (e.g., *who*, *which*, *that*) to the correct verb to make the sentence have the right meaning. For example, the following sentence does not make sense:

Error: *People have cars who must pay high costs for insurance.*

Here is another example sentence which can be fixed with “which” or “that.”

Incorrect sentence: *I found a path goes to the river.*

Correct sentence: *I found a path that goes to the river.*

2. Add a different subordinator

“That” and “which” are not the only subordinators to use. Subordinators such as “because” and “if” also help connect separate ideas. See the example below:

If people own cars, they must pay high costs for insurance.

3. Avoid “It is” and “There are” beginnings

Many double verb errors occur in sentences that begin with *It is* and *There are*. Look at the following example:

Error: *There is too much rain falls in Vancouver.*

Subject	Verb	Object*	Prepositional phrase
<i>There</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>too much rain</i>	
	<i>falls</i>		<i>in Vancouver.</i>

Correction: *Too much rain falls in Vancouver.*

Subject	Verb	Prepositional phrase
<i>Too much rain</i>	<i>falls</i>	<i>in Vancouver.</i>

The best way to fix this error is to avoid, when possible, using “It is” and “There are” in your writing. Do the following exercise to practice fixing double verb errors in this way.

* Although some verbs, such as “Be” verbs and intransitive verbs, do not strictly take objects, to keep the chart simple, we are calling what comes after the verb the object; a more accurate term in this case is complement.

Exercise 1:

To fix the errors below, remove the “there” or “it” phrase that starts each sentence.

1. There are many children die of malnutrition in the Third World.
2. It is Global Warming causes changes in weather patterns.
3. There are many changes have happened in the past ten years.
4. Each year there is a large number of students leave their homes and travel to Canada.

4. Make two sentences:

A second easy approach to fixing double verb sentences is to finish the first clause with a period, and then start a new sentence by adding a subject to the second verb.

Incorrect sentence: *I found a path goes to the river.*

Correct sentence: *I found a path. It goes to the river.*

Subject	Verb	Object
<i>I</i>	<i>found</i>	<i>a path.</i>
<i>It</i>	<i>goes</i>	<i>to the river.</i>

5. Change the word form and word order:

Incorrect Sentence: *People own cars must pay high costs for insurance.*

Correct Sentence: *Car owners must pay high costs for insurance*

6. Delete one verb:

Change the structure of the sentence so that there is only one verb. This often means using a preposition (such as “in, on, of, by, for”) instead.

Incorrect sentence: *I found a path ~~goes~~ to the river.*

Correct sentence: *I found a path to the river.*

Subject	Verb	Object	Prepositional phrase
<i>I</i>	<i>found</i>	<i>a path</i>	<i>to the river.</i>

7. Change the form of the second verb:

This is a more advanced approach; it involves changing the second verb into a gerund, an infinitive, or a participle.

Incorrect sentence: *I found a path goes to the river.*

Correct sentence: *I found a path going to the river.*

For more work on this approach, see the following Learning Centre handout ("Verbals: Idiomatic Uses of Gerunds and Infinitives" -- GR3.50) or do an internet search for online sites about:

- gerunds and infinitives
- reducing clauses to phrases

8. Do not use the "object of a preposition" as the subject for a verb.

As with the object of a verb, an object of a preposition cannot also be used as the subject of a new verb. Look at the following example:

Error: *Most people agree with education is part of our life.*

Subject	Verb	Object*	Object of a preposition
<i>Most people</i>	<i>agree</i>		<i>with education</i>
	<i>is</i>	<i>part</i>	<i>of our life.</i>

In this example, education is functioning as the object of the preposition with. It finishes the first clause, so it cannot also be used to begin the second clause. As the chart above shows, the verb is has **no subject**. Nouns that come after prepositions cannot also be used as grammatical subjects of the second verb.

* Although some verbs, such as "Be" verbs and intransitive verbs, do not strictly take objects, to keep the chart simple, we are calling what comes after the verb the object; a more accurate term is complement.

Practice Exercises:

Practice fixing the errors in the following sentences using some of the strategies for fixing double verbs in sentences.

Exercise 2

Fix the sentences below in at least two different ways. Please note that you cannot fix every problem sentence in the same ways. Different problems require different solutions.

1. The number of people own cell phones increased from near zero to over twenty million.
2. Some drivers use cell phones take away their attention from the road.
3. Mary is a young girl likes to play instead of work.
4. The boss is afraid about his plans for his company will be ruined.
5. The woman is Marion is single and joined the company not long ago.
6. Culture Shock is an emotional reaction results from not being able to understand or predict the behavior of people in the new culture.
7. The first problem relates to the Chinese government took back Hong Kong in 1997.

8. Hockey is one of the most popular sports in Canada is played inside and outside.
9. The lawyers studied the case for many months finally won an appeal for their client.
10. Typewritten assignments are easy to read are easy for teachers to mark.
11. We have a free catalogue features our full line-up.
12. According to a report of the Royal Commission showed that unequal wages benefited white workers.
13. The price is low but it is good quality for people don't want to spend too much money.
14. In the 1800's, prejudice was one reason for Chinese people had only low paying jobs in Canada.
15. It is East Asia and the Pacific the rate of HIV infection is growing rapidly.

Double Verb Error – ANSWER KEY**Exercise 1:**

1. ~~There are~~ many children die of malnutrition in the Third World.
2. ~~It is~~ Global Warming causes changes in weather patterns.
3. ~~There are~~ many changes have happened in the past ten years.
4. Each year ~~there is~~ a large number of students leave their homes and travel to Canada.

Exercise 2

The answers below show several different ways to fix each sentence.

1. The number of people who own cell phones increased from near zero to over twenty million.
The number of people with cell phones increased from near zero to over twenty million.
The number of people owning cell phones increased from near zero to over twenty million.
Many people now own cell phones. The number increased from zero to over twenty million.
2. Some drivers use cell phones, which takes away their attention from the road.
Some drivers use cell phones. This takes away their attention from the road.
Using cell phones takes drivers' attention away from the road.
3. Mary is a young girl who likes to play instead of work.
Mary is a young girl. She likes to play instead of work.
Mary, a young girl, likes to play instead of work.
The young girl Mary likes to play instead of work.
4. The boss is afraid about his plans. He fears his company will be ruined.
The boss is afraid that his plans for his company will be ruined.
5. The woman is Marion is single and joined the company not long ago.

The woman, Marion, is single and joined the company not long ago.
 Marion is a single woman. She joined the company not long ago.

6. Culture Shock is an emotional reaction which results from not being able to understand or predict the behavior of people in the new culture.
 Culture Shock is an emotional reaction. It results from not being able to understand or predict the behavior of people in the new culture.
 Culture Shock, an emotional reaction, results from not being able to understand or predict the behavior of people in the new culture.
 Culture Shock is an emotional reaction resulting from not being able to understand or predict the behavior of people in the new culture.
 Culture Shock is an emotional reaction of not being able to understand or predict the behavior of people in the new culture.
7. The first problem relates to the Chinese government, which took back Hong Kong in 1997.
 The first problem relates to the Chinese government. It took back Hong Kong in 1997.
 The first problem is that the Chinese government took back Hong Kong in 1997.
 The first problem relates to the Chinese government taking back Hong Kong in 1997.
8. Hockey, which is one of the most popular sports in Canada, is played inside and outside.
 Hockey is one of the most popular sports in Canada. It is played inside and outside.
 Hockey, one of the most popular sports in Canada, is played inside and outside.
9. The lawyers who studied the case for many months finally won an appeal for their client.
 The lawyers studied the case for many months. They finally won an appeal for their client.
 The lawyers on the case for many months finally won an appeal for their client.
 The lawyers studying the case for many months finally won an appeal for their client.

10. Typewritten assignments are easy to read, so they are easy for teachers to mark.
 Typewritten assignments are easy for teachers to read and mark.
 Typewritten assignments, which are easy to read, are easy for teachers to mark.
 Typewritten assignments are easy for teachers to mark because they are easy to read.
11. We have a free catalogue which features our full line-up.
 We have a free catalogue featuring our full line-up.
 We have a free catalogue with our full line-up.
 Our full line-up is featured in our free catalogue.
12. According to a report of the Royal Commission, unequal wages benefited white workers.
 A report of the Royal Commission showed that unequal wages benefited white workers.
13. The price is low but it is good quality for people who don't want to spend too much money.
 The price is low but it is good quality for people not wanting to spend too much money.
 The price is low but it is good quality for people without much money.
14. In the 1800's, prejudice was one reason that Chinese people had only low paying jobs in Canada.
 In the 1800's, prejudice was one reason for Chinese people to have only low paying jobs in Canada.
 In the 1800's, prejudice was one reason for Chinese people having low paying jobs in Canada.
15. In East Asia and the Pacific, the rate of HIV infection is growing rapidly.
 It is East Asia and the Pacific where the rate of HIV infection is growing rapidly.
 East Asia and the Pacific have rapidly growing rates of HIV infection.