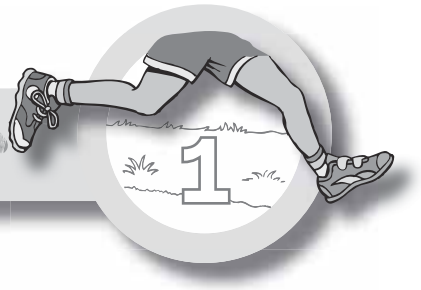
Sentence Types



The Simple Sentence

When we write, a complete thought is called a sentence. A sentence must contain a complete **subject** (person, place, or thing) and a ***verb*** (what the subject is doing) in order to make sense. A simple sentence must also begin with a capital letter and end with a period, question mark, or exclamation mark. Another name for a simple sentence is an independent clause.

The **baby** ***cried.***
This is a sentence because it tells us what someone (subject – the baby) does (verb – cried).

Birds ***fly.***
This is a sentence because it tells us what something (subject – birds) does (verb – fly).

My **computer.**
This is not a sentence because it has a subject (my computer) but no verb.

Crashed.
This is a verb, which tells us what happened (crashed), but there is no subject.

My **computer** ***crashed.***
This is a sentence because it tells us what something (subject – my computer) does (verb – crashed).

Remember, a sentence can end with a period, question mark, or exclamation mark.

Grace ran.
Did Grace run?
Grace ran faster than Nicole!

An exclamation mark expresses strong emotion or emphasis.

Compound Subjects and Verbs

A simple sentence can have two subjects – **Kate** and **I.**

A sentence can also have a subject performing two actions (verbs) –
We ***sang*** and ***danced***.

A sentence can have a verb phrase – I ***will go*** to the bank after work.

A sentence could have both two subjects and two verbs –
Kate and **I** ***sang*** and ***danced.***

Compound Sentences—Joining Two Ideas Together

A simple sentence contains a **subject**, complete ***verb***, capital at the beginning, and punctuation at the end. It must make sense on its own. It is also called an independent clause.

A compound sentence follows the same rules as a simple sentence, except it basically contains **TWO simple sentences** with a **LINK** in the middle. There are three ways to link simple sentences together to form a compound sentence.

Coordinate Conjunctions

Join two simple sentences together with a comma and coordinate conjunction. The coordinate conjunction shows the relationship between two sentences of equal importance.

There are seven coordinating conjunctions**: and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet.**

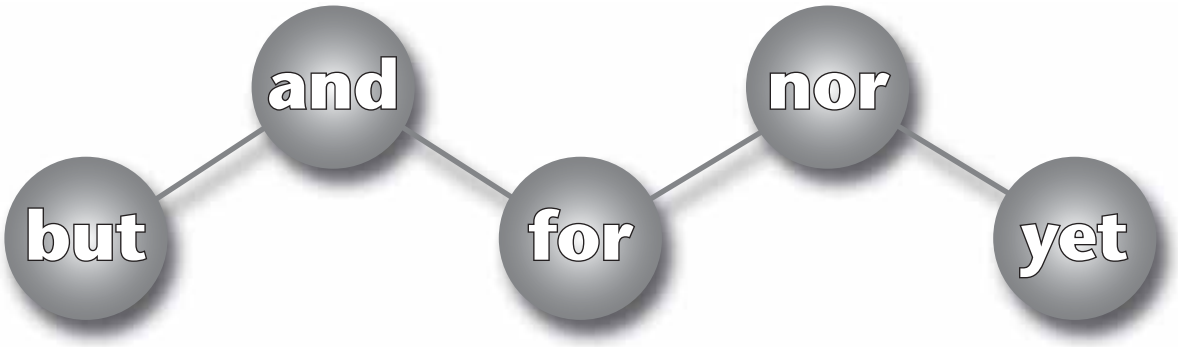
I love hockey, **but** I hate cold hockey rinks.

I hate cold hockey rinks, **yet** I love hockey.

I love cold hockey rinks, **so** I signed up for hockey.

I don't like hockey, **nor** do I like cold hockey rinks.

Notice how each coordinate conjunction helps to change the meaning of the sentence.



You can omit the comma if the subject in the second clause is dropped.

I went home after school and watched TV.

Semicolon

A **semicolon (;)** can join two simple sentences closely related in meaning. It is like a weak period; it indicates a strong connection between the two sentences.

Each side of the semicolon must be able to stand alone as an independent sentence (also called an independent clause).

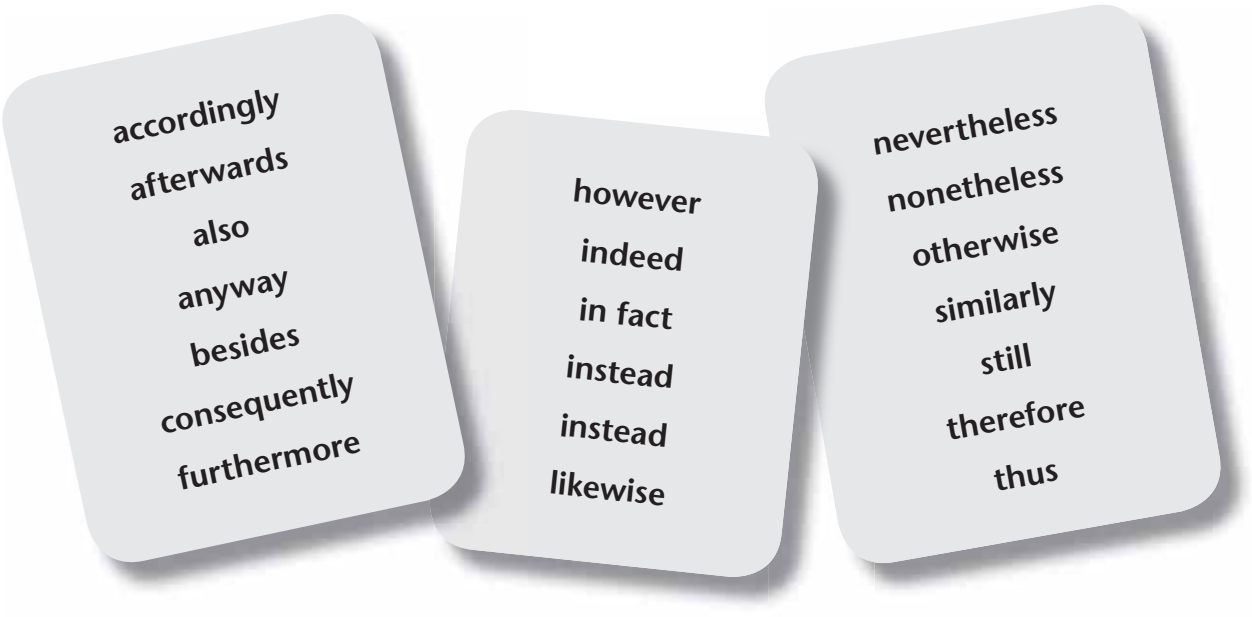
I love hockey**;** I hate cold hockey rinks.

I love hockey**; c**old rinks I can do without.

The letter after the semicolon should not be capitalized.

Conjunctive Adverb

You can also use conjunctive adverbs to link together two simple sentences with a semicolon. Conjunctive adverbs, like coordinate conjunctions previously described, are words that show the relationship between two simple sentences of equal importance. Examples of conjunctive adverbs are listed below:



I love hockey**; however,** I hate cold hockey rinks.

I hate cold hockey rinks**; nonetheless,** I love hockey.

I dislike cold hockey rinks**; therefore,** I never play hockey.

When using conjunctive adverbs to link simple sentences, put a semicolon before and a comma after the adverb. Remember, both sides of the joining word are complete sentences and must make sense on their own.

Complex Sentence

A complex sentence contains two simple sentences (clauses), but one is more important than the other. Again, as in some compound sentences, the two sentences are connected with a joining word. The linking word (subordinate conjunction) makes the clause following it less important than the other clause. The linking word also makes the clause following it **dependent** upon the rest of the sentence to make sense.

Don't forget your homework **when** you go to school.

OR

When you go to school, don't forget your homework.

The main message here is **don't forget your homework.** This is the independent or main clause. The dependent, or less important clause, is **when you go to school.** Notice that **when you go to school** contains a subject and complete verb but does not make sense on its own. It is dependent upon the rest of the sentence to make sense.

The linking word can go at the beginning of the sentence or in the middle. If the linking word is at the beginning of the sentence, you need a comma after the first clause.

Because I completed all my homework, I am going out with my friends tonight.

OR

I am going out with my friends tonight **because** I completed all my homework.

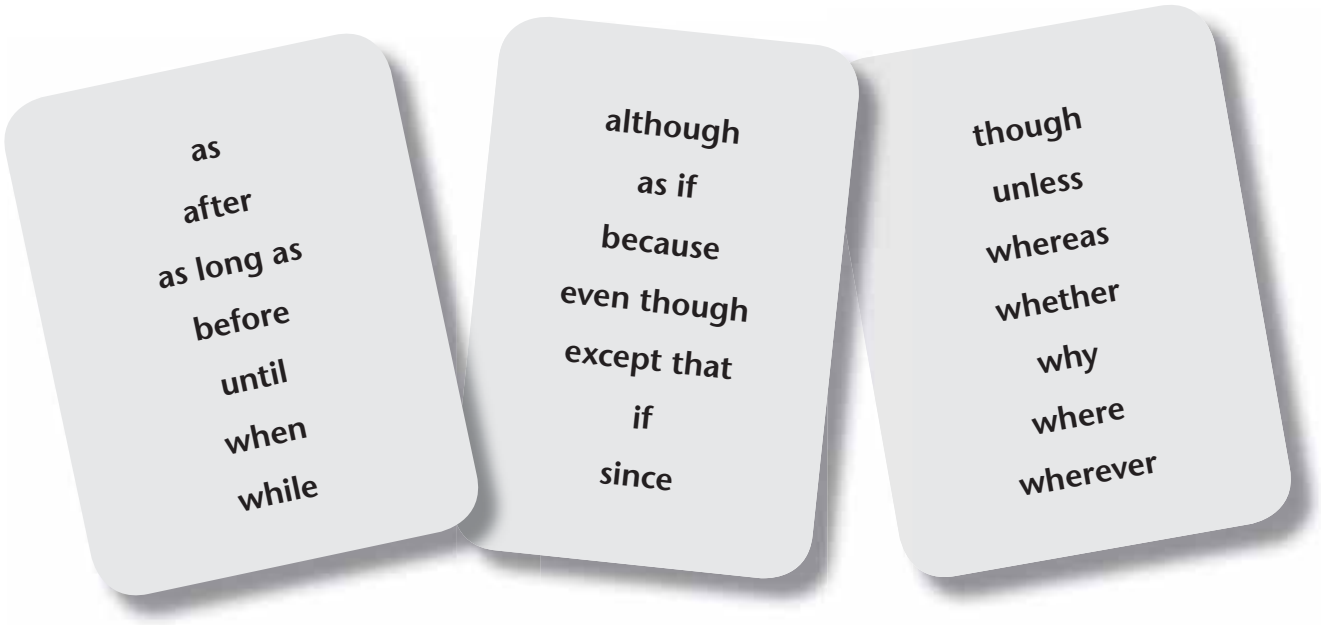
The main message is **I am going out with my friends tonight.**

This makes sense on its own. The half containing the linking word **because** is less important and does not make sense on its own.

The following list of words can be used at the beginning of:

- a dependent clause
- a clause that lacks a subject
- a clause that lacks a verb
- a complete idea that cannot stand on its own.

These words will make what follows less important:



Examples:

Because gas heat is expensive, I will use electric.

If gas heat is expensive, I will use electric.

Whenever gas heat is expensive, I will use electric.

As long as gas heat is expensive, I will use electric.

Notice that by simply changing the subordinate conjunction, you actually change the meaning of the sentence.

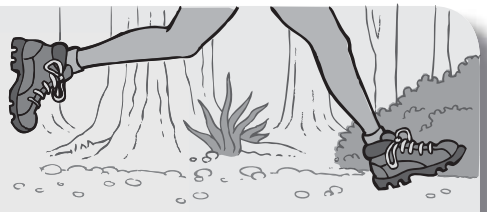
Relative Pronoun

Relative pronouns ***(who, whom, whose, which, that***) act as the subject in the less important clause.

I like to go to movies ***that*** make me laugh.

So, a complex sentence contains two clauses linked by a joining word that makes the clause following it less important.

A Quick Review



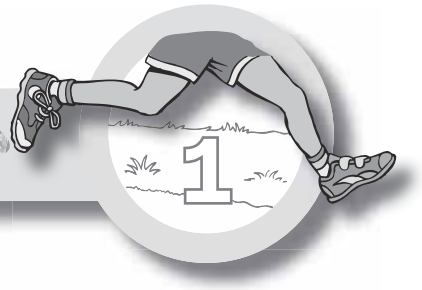
Simple Sentence
Today, **I *study*** grammar.

Compound Sentence
Today, **I *study*** grammar, **and** tomorrow, **I *will*** write better.

Compound Sentence
Today, **I *study*** grammar**; therefore,** tomorrow, **I *will*** be a better writer.

Complex Sentence
If *I* study grammar today, **I *will be*** a better writer tomorrow.

Sentence Fragment



Sentence fragments are incomplete sentences.
There are three basic types: missing verb, missing subject, and dependent clause.

Missing Verb (or part of verb)

sentence fragment: Two hundred spectators.

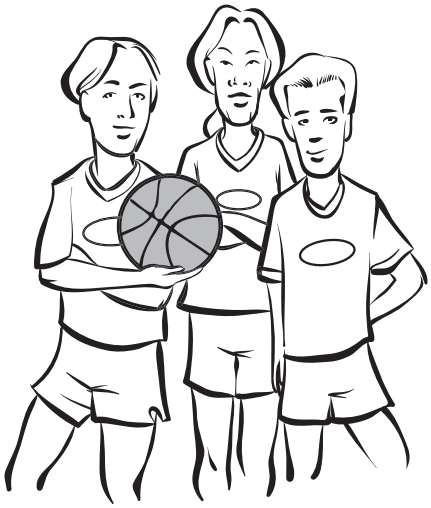
error: This statement does not have a verb indicating what these people are doing. Add a verb to make the statement a complet sentence.

corrected sentence: Two hundred spectators **attended the game.**

sentence fragment: Two hundred spectators attend**ing** the game.

error: An "ing" form of a verb requires a helper verb to make sense on its own.

corrected sentence: Two hundred spectators **are attending** the game.



Missing Subject

sentence fragment: Flew over the fence at great speed.

error: This statement does not have a **subject** indicating who or what did this flying. Add a subject to make the statement a complete sentence.

corrected sentence: The **ball** flew over the fence at great speed.

Dependent Clause

Dependent Clause (contains a subject and a verb, but doesn't make sense on its own)

sentence fragment: While I waited for the bus.

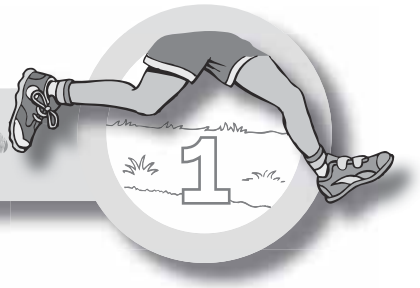
error: This statement has both a subject and a verb, but it cannot stand alone. It is a dependent clause that needs an independent clause to make it complete. Add an independent clause with a subject and verb to make the statement a complete sentence. When you add an independent clause to the dependent clause, you are constructing a complex sentence.

corrected sentence: **While I waited for the bus**, a friend came by and picked me up.

OR

A friend came by and picked me up **while I waited for the bus.**

Run–on Sentence



Run-on sentences and comma splices are closely related punctuation errors that are corrected in similar ways.

A run-on sentence occurs when two or more independent clauses are joined without proper punctuation or joining words.

Run-on: The music was loud my neighbour complained.

Here are three different ways to correct this run-on sentence.

Correction 1: **Separate the run-on into two sentences.**
The music was loud. My neighbour complained.

Correction 2: **Join the independent clauses (simple sentences) with a semicolon.**
The music was loud**;** my neighbour complained.

Correction 3: **Connect the independent clauses with a comma and coordinate conjunction.**
The music was loud**, so** my neighbour complained.

A comma splice occurs when two or more independent clauses are joined together with only a comma.

Comma Splice: The music wasn't even that loud, my neighbour complained.

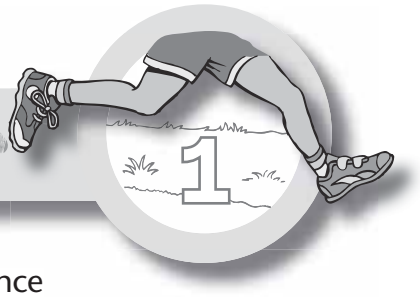
Correction 1: **Connect run-on sentence with a semicolon and a conjunctive adverb.**

The music wasn't even that loud**; however,** my neighbour complained.

Correction 2: **Add a subordinate conjunction to make one half of the sentence less important (form a complex sentence).**

Even **though** the music wasn't that loud, my neighbour complained.

Parallel Structure



When writing a sentence, the structure of items in the sentence should be grammatically consistent. All items in a series should be in parallel form using the same pattern of words including nouns, verbs, phrases, and clauses. This makes the sentence clear and easy to follow.

With Verbs:

Incorrect: All business students should learn **word processing, accounting,** and **how to program computers.**

Correct: All business students should learn **word processing, accounting,** and **computer programming.**

Incorrect: Jennifer **ate, drank,** and **was dancing**.

Correct: Jennifer **ate, drank,** and **danced**.

With Adjectives:

Incorrect: Joe thought Sherry was **beautiful, smart,** and **had a good heart**.

Correct: Joe thought Sherry was **beautiful, smart,** and **compassionate**.

With *ing* Forms:

Incorrect: It's important to be good at **reading**, **writing**, and **be a good listener**.

Correct: It's important to be good at **reading**, **writing**, and **listening**.

With Infinitive Forms:

Incorrect: I love **to snowboard**, **go skiing**, and **to hike**.

Correct: I love **to snowboard**, **to ski**, and **to hike**.

or

I love to **snowboard**, **ski**, and **hike**.

With Coordinate Conjunctions:

Incorrect: I love **to canoe, to fish**, and **music.**

Explanation: The first two items in the list are actions (canoeing and fishing). The last (music) is not. How can we change the last one into an action?

Correct: I love **to canoe**, **to fish**, and **to listen** to music.

With Correlative Conjunctions:

Use parallel structure when you connect phrases or clauses with a correlative conjunction (not only … but also, either … or, neither … nor, etc.).

Incorrect: My friend not only **is** good at math, but also **science.**

Explanation: There is a verb in the structure of the first clause, but the verb is missing in the second clause.

Correct: My friend not only **is** good at math, but **also she excels** in science.

Incorrect: You can hang your coat either **in** the closet or **the coat rack.**

Explanation: The preposition **"in"** is used in the first clause, but no preposition is used in the second clause.

Correct: You can hang your coat either **in** the closet or **on** the coat rack.

With Quantifiers:

Incorrect: The library had **many** books, **ten** computer terminals, and **videos.**

Explanation: The first two items on the list have quantifiers with them that tell the reader how many. The last item (videos) does not.

Correct: The library had **many** books, **ten** computer terminals, and a **few** videos.

With Phrases Or Clauses:

Phrases or clauses must also be presented in a parallel form.

Incorrect: When Paul woke up in the morning, he **fed** his cat, **had** a shower, and **his breakfast was toast with peanut butter.**

Explanation: This sentence contains three actions that Paul performed: feeding his cat, having a shower, and eating breakfast. The first two actions begin with a verb, but the last begins with a noun (breakfast).

Correct: When Paul woke up in the morning, he **fed** his cat, **had** a shower, and **ate** toast with peanut butter for breakfast.

Incorrect: The teacher expected that assignments **would be** handed in on time, that the material **would be** covered, and **there are** no spelling mistakes.

Correct: The teacher expected that assignments **would be** handed in on time, that the material **would be** covered, and that there **would be** no spelling mistakes.

With Clauses Or Phrases Of Comparison:

Phrases or clauses of comparison, with words such as **like** or **as**, must also be parallel.

Incorrect: I would rather **watch** TV than ***cards***.

Explanation: The first part of the comparison has a verb in the phrase and the second part of the comparison doesn't.

Correct: I would rather **watch** TV than **play** cards.

Misplaced Modifier

A modifier is a word used to describe a person, place, or thing. It should be placed near the word it is describing; otherwise, its meaning may get muddled.

Misplaced modifier occurs when a modifier is placed too far away from the word it is describing, and as a result, creates a confusing sentence.

To fix a misplaced modifier, move the modifier nearer to the work or phrase it modifies.

Let's look at some examples.

Incorrect: Suddenly, we came upon **a tiny church wandering** through the old part of town.

Explanation: The tiny church is not wandering; we are.

Correct: Wandering through the old part of town, we suddenly came upon a tiny church.

Incorrect: Wanted: a piano for a piano teacher **with mahogany legs**.

Explanation: The piano teacher doesn't have mahogany legs, but the piano does. "Mahogany legs" should be placed close to piano in the sentence.

Correct: Wanted: a piano with mahogany legs for a piano teacher.

Here are a few more examples:

Incorrect: The young girl played with the guinea pig **in a long coat.**

Correct: The young girl in a long coat played with the guinea pig.

Incorrect: I heard that there was a strike **on the evening news.**

Correct: I heard on the evening news that there was a strike.

Incorrect: The child was playing on the slide **with glasses.**

Correct: The child with glasses was playing on the slide.

Squinting Modifiers

Squinting modifiers are like misplaced modifiers, except the modifier is placed between words so there is confusion as to which word the modifier refers.

Words like **almost, nearly, only, both**, and **well** can easily squint or modify two or more words in a sentence.

Look at the following two sentences. See how moving one word can change the meaning of the sentence.

In the battle, the commander lost **nearly** a thousand men.
(maybe 950 or 960?)

In the battle, the commander **nearly** lost a thousand men.
(no one actually died, but a thousand men almost died.)

Look at the squinting modifiers and the confusion they create.

Incorrect: I **almost** did all my homework.

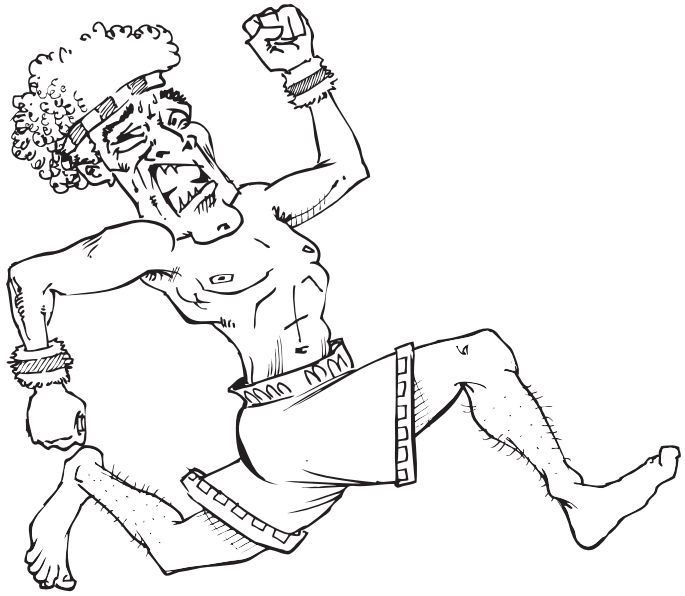
Explanation: This could mean that I didn't do any of it, but almost got started, or that I have come close to completing my homework.

Incorrect: He **nearly** worked eight hours.

Explanation: This could mean he didn't work at all, but almost got an eight-hour shift, or that he worked a length of time that was just short of eight hours.

Incorrect: His doctor told him **frequently** to exercise.

Explanation: This could mean his doctor frequently told him to exercise or his doctor told him to exercise frequently.



Dangling Modifier

A **dangling modifier** is much like a misplaced modifier, except the modifier lacks a word or group of words to modify. Thus, the modifier is said to be "dangling."

Dangling modifiers are typically found near the beginning of sentences that begin with **verb+ing**, **verb+ed**, or **to+verb**.

To fix a dangling modifier, you must insert a word or group of words to be modified. Sometimes fixing a dangling modifier includes rewriting the sentence.

Incorrect: **While eating a cookie**, the phone rang.

Explanation: The correct sentence specifies who was eating a cookie—"he was." The first sentence suggests that the phone was eating the cookie.

Correct: While he was eating a cookie, the phone rang.

Incorrect: **Driving through Kamloops yesterday,** tumbleweed blew across the street.

Explanation: The first sentence implies that the tumbleweed is driving. The correct sentence clarifies that "I" was driving.

Correct: Driving through Kamloops yesterday, I saw tumbleweed blow across the street.

Incorrect: **Concerned about the state of unemployment in the province**, a special task force was set up.

Explanation: The first sentence lacks clarity around who set up the task force. The correct sentence clarifies this, the premier did.

Correct: Concerned about the state of unemployment in the province, the premier set up as special task force.

Elliptical phrase problems occur when the subject and verb are only implied rather than stated.

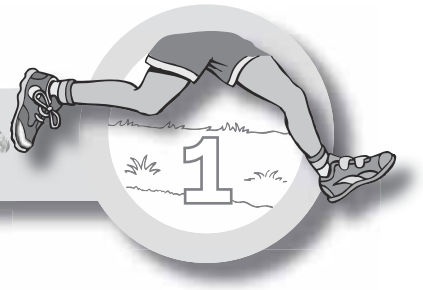
Incorrect: **When three years old**, Jessica's aunt took her on an airplane trip. Was Jessica or her aunt three years old?

Correct: When Jessica was three years old, Jessica's aunt took her on an airplane trip.

Incorrect: **When a little boy**, my grandfather took me to the circus.

Correct: When a little boy, I was taken by my grandfather to the circus.

Subject–Verb Agreement



Every sentence has both a subject and a verb. A subject and verb should agree with one another in number and person.

Agreement in Number

A single subject should have a singular verb.

Sammy *likes* to bark at squirrels.
(Sammy and likes agree because they are both singular.)

Plural Subject

The **birds *like*** to taunt the cat.
(Birds and like agree because they are both plural.)

Compound Subjects Connected by *And*

A compound subject connected by **and** takes a plural verb.

Suraya and Ben *spend* a lot of time at the movies.
Laughter and jokes often ***go*** hand-in-hand.

Compound Subjects Connected by *Or*

A compound subject connected by **or** must agree with the subject nearest to it.

Coffee beans or a tea bag *is* needed.
(A singular verb is needed because tea bag is singular.)

A **tea bag or coffee beans *are*** needed to make a beverage for our guest.
(A plural verb is needed because beans is plural.)

Watch for Prepositional Phrases

Prepositional phrases can sometimes make subject-verb agreement difficult. Look carefully for the subject of the sentence and ensure the verb agrees before the preposition "of." The subject is always the word before the preposition "of."

The **colour** of the balloons ***is*** pink.
(Colour, the subject, is singular so the verb is singular – notice balloons is not the subject)

The **number** of students in the class is surprising!
(Number, the subject, is singular so the verb is singular – notice students is not the subject)

Watch for *Here* and *There*

Sometimes the subject does not come at the beginning of the sentence, as in the case of **here** and **there** and with **questions**. Check the sentences carefully for subject and verb agreement.

There ***is*** a **thunderstorm** coming.
(Thunderstorm, the subject, is singular so the verb is singular.)

There ***are*** many interesting **stories** in this book.
(Stories, the subject, is plural, so the verb is plural.)

Where ***are*** the **apples** I picked yesterday?
(Apples, the subject, is plural, so the verb is plural.)

Here ***comes*** the **punchline**.
(Punchline is singular, so the verb is singular.)

Here ***come*** the **actors**.
(Actors is plural, so the verb is plural.)

Agreement in Person

Sentences may be written in first (I, we), second (you), or third (he, she, it, they) person.

Verbs often change form, depending on whether the subject is first, second, or third person.

For example:

I *am* eager to get going soon.
You *are* eager to get going soon.
She *is* eager to get going soon.

When constructing a sentence, be sure your verb form agrees with the correct form of person.

Also, watch for shifts in person when writing sentences or paragraphs.

Incorrect: When **you** go to the store, **I** am always careful to keep my wallet tucked in my pocket.

Explanation: In the incorrect sentence the writer uses "you" in a general sentence and then continues in the first person. This shift in person is incorrect. The writer should use either "I" or "you" throughout.

Correct: When **I** go to the store, **I** am always careful to keep my wallet tucked in my pocket.

Indefinite Pronouns

The indefinite pronouns **some, none, anyone, everyone**, and **no one** take a singular verb.

> **Everyone *is*** present for today's meeting.
> **No one *is*** available for tomorrow's meeting.

The pronouns **some** and **all** may take a singular or plural verb depending upon what the pronoun is referring to.

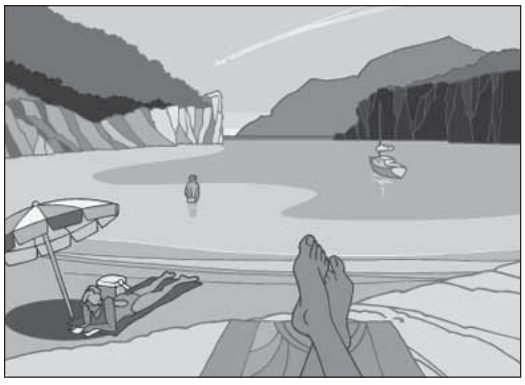
> **Some** of the **puppies** in the litter ***are*** black.
> **Some** of the **food** in the fridge ***is*** for tomorrow's picnic.

Collective Nouns

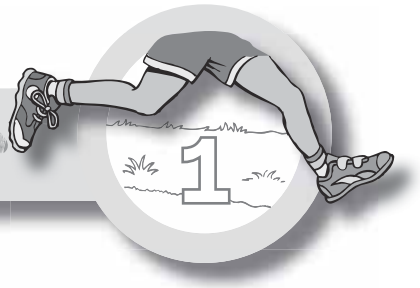
Collective nouns are nouns that represent a group or a collective but are generally considered singular.

Common collective nouns include **family, committee, crowd, jury, group, furniture,** and **garbage.**

> The **committee *was*** planning to make a decision next week.
> The **family *is*** planning a vacation for next year.



Pronoun Agreement



A pronoun is a word that can replace or stand in for a noun. When using a pronoun, be sure it agrees with its antecedent (the noun to which it refers) in number and gender.

Agreement in Number

A pronoun must agree with its **antecedent** in number. Use a singular ***pronoun*** with a singular antecedent and a plural pronoun with a plural antecedent.

> The dog saw the **squirrel** and then chased ***it*** up the tree.
> **Samantha** and **Kelsey** are sure ***they*** can make the Sunday morning game.

Agreement in Gender

A pronoun must also agree with its antecedent in gender. If the antecedent is feminine, use the pronoun she, her, or hers. If the antecedent is masculine, use he, him, or his. If the antecedent is plural, use they, them, their, or theirs.

> **Roshan** decided that ***he*** wouldn't go to the auction tonight.
>
> **Katie** wanted to make sure ***she*** could get the time off before booking her holiday.
>
> **Nicole** and **Nathalie** recalled the time ***they*** went houseboating in the interior.

Words like **everyone** and **no one** can cause problems with agreement in gender because they take a singular pronoun.

In an effort to avoid gender bias, many people use ***they*** or ***them*** as the pronoun reference. Although this usage is becoming more common, aim to avoid them in formal writing.

Informal writing: Everyone should do as ***they*** are told.

Formal writing: Everyone should do as ***he*** or ***she*** is told.

Faulty Pronoun Reference

A pronoun's reference to an antecedent must be clear. If the antecedent is vague or missing, the meaning of the pronoun and the sentence will not be clear.

Unclear: Mr. Seminuk greeted students as they arrived to class. Emma and Joel were loud and disruptive as they entered the room. **He** was not pleased. Does **he** refer to Mr. Seminuk or to Joel?

Clear: Mr. Seminuk greeted students as they arrived to class. Emma and Joel were loud and disruptive as they entered the room. Mr. Seminuk was not pleased.

Unclear: Taunting and bullying are destructive to you and your friends. You must avoid **them**. Avoid taunting and bullying or avoid your friends?

Clear: Taunting and bullying are destructive to you and your friends. You must avoid these behaviours.