Commas

1. **Missing Comma after an Introductory Element**
   When you begin a sentence with an introductory word, phrase, or clause, you should place a comma after the introductory element.

   **Introductory word:**
   - However, we cannot check in until three o’clock.
   - Furthermore, we need to check out by 12 noon.

   **Introductory phrase:**
   - After the game, the referees met to discuss their calls and efficiency.
   - Basking in the sun, the otter looked most content.
   - To join the expedition, Dorothy went through three interviews and a physical.

   **Introductory clause:**
   - Although the train was late, Pete worked on a crossword puzzle to pass the time.
   - Since we attended the game, I missed my favorite television show.

2. **Missing Comma in a Compound Sentence**
   When you join two or more main clauses with a coordinating conjunction, a comma must precede the coordinating conjunction. Study the following compound sentences.

   - Jenny drove to school, but she forgot class had been cancelled.
   - A portrait hung on the wall, and a statue stood in the corner.
   - The cat would not stop yowling, so the boy opened the front door to let it out.

3. **Missing Comma(s) with a Nonrestrictive Element**
Whenever you have a nonrestrictive element, such as an appositive or an adjective clause, use commas around the nonrestrictive element if the element is in the middle of a sentence. If the element occurs at the end of the sentence, use a comma before it.

   Study the following examples.

   - The cactus, a six year old Saguaro, is nearly twelve feet tall.
   - Roger led the horse into the barn, which he painted last fall.


4. **Missing Comma in a Series**
The missing comma in a series is almost always the comma before the final element in the series. Look at the following sentence.

   Manuel decided to take his jacket, hat and gloves.

   In the above sentence, the comma that separates the second element in the series, *hat*, from the final element in the series, *gloves* has been omitted.

   Manuel decided to take his jacket, hat and gloves.

   Some fields of study, particularly journalism, do not require you to insert the final comma, but in formal academic writing, the sentence should include the final comma.

   See Chapter 19, specifically the “Usage Note” in the section “Commas and Items in a Series” on page 319.

5. **Unnecessary Comma(s) with a Restrictive Element**
While nonrestrictive elements require commas, you do not use commas around restrictive elements because the elements are essential in order to understand the nouns they are modifying and understand the meaning of the sentence. Study the following sentences.

   - The dog that has the rhinestone collar belongs to my neighbor.
   - The cup next to the kitchen sink needs to be washed.
   - The movie *Argo* won the Oscar for Best Picture in 2013.

   See Chapter 9 pages 134–136 and Chapter 14 page 240.
PRONOUNS

6. Vague Pronoun Reference
A vague (sometimes called faulty) pronoun reference occurs two ways. First, a vague pronoun reference occurs when a pronoun does not have a clear antecedent, the word to which the pronoun refers. Study the following sentence.

Lily was talking to her mom, and she said, “Let’s go have lunch.”

In the above sentence, you cannot be sure if the pronoun she refers to Lily or mom. Did Lily say, “Let’s go have lunch” or did the mom say, “Let’s go have lunch”? You would need to revise the above sentence to read,

Lily was talking to her mom, and Lily said, “Let’s go have lunch.”

Lily was talking to her mom, and her mother said, “Let’s go have lunch.”

Second, a vague pronoun reference occurs when the pronoun refers to a word or idea that is suggested but not directly stated in the sentence. Study the following sentence.

Monique interned with an engineering firm last semester. She is considering majoring in it.

In the above sentence, the pronoun it at the end of the second sentence has no clear antecedent; in fact, no antecedent truly exists. The suggestion is that Monique would like to major in engineering, but the sentence does not provide the reader that possibility.

You would need to revise the sentence to read

Monique interned with an engineering firm last semester. She is considering majoring in engineering.

Vague pronoun references generally occur because while you know to what you are referring, readers do not, and they cannot read your mind. As a writer, you must be aware of your readers and make sure your pronoun references are clear and precise.

7. Unnecessary Shift in Pronoun
An unnecessary shift in pronoun error (also known as a shift in point of view or a shift in perspective or a shift in person) occurs when you change the point of view or perspective in which you are writing. Study the following sentence.

Students may enroll online, but you need to enroll early to get the classes you want.
The subject of the first main clause, *Students*, is a third person plural noun. The subject of the second main clause, *you*, is a second person singular or plural pronoun. The writer has shifted his point of view from third person to second person.

A correctly revised sentence would read

- *Students* may enroll online, but *they* need to enroll early to get the classes *they* want.

Or

- *You* may enroll online, but *you* need to enroll early to get the classes *you* want.

8. **Lack of Agreement between Pronoun and Antecedent**

Pronouns and their antecedents need to agree in number. In other words, if the antecedent is singular, the pronoun renaming the antecedent must be singular. If the antecedent is plural, the pronoun must be plural. Faulty pronoun-antecedent agreement can occur when (1) the antecedent is an indefinite pronoun, (2) when the antecedents are joined by *or* or *nor*, and (3) when the antecedent is a collective noun. Study the following sentences.

- Everyone is urged to bring *their* own equipment.

   The antecedent (*Everyone*) in the above sentence is singular while the pronoun (*their*) that supposedly renames the indefinite pronoun is plural. Hence, the antecedent and its pronoun display faulty pronoun-antecedent agreement.

   Correctly revised, the sentence would read

   - Everyone is urged to bring *his or her* own equipment.
   - People are urged to bring *their* own equipment.

Look at the next sentence in which the antecedents are joined by *or*.

- Either *David or Jim* forgot *their* equipment.

Second, when two or more antecedents are joined by *or* or *nor*, the pronoun must agree in number (singular or plural) with the closest antecedent. The sentence should be revised to read

- Either *David or Jim* forgot *his* equipment.

But what if the sentence read *Either David or the coaches forgot their playbook*? Since the second antecedent, *coaches*, is plural, then the pronoun *their*, since it is also plural, is correct.
Third, when the antecedent is a collective noun, the pronoun can be either singular or plural, depending on context. When the individuals in the group act as a singular unit, the pronoun should be singular. But when the individuals within the group are acting independently, the pronoun is plural. Study the following sentences.

- The family chose its annual vacation destination.
- The high school eliminated its drivers’ education program.
- The faculty disagree on the provisions of the contract and have indicated they will not reach a decision today.
- The team demonstrate their skills to the judges at the competition.

While sentences, such as the last two are not uncommon, writers often identify the collective noun by its members and change the collective noun into a prepositional phrase.

- The members of the department disagree on the provisions of the contract and have indicated they will not reach a decision today.
- The members of the team demonstrate their skills to the judges at the competition.

VERBS

9. Wrong or Missing Verb Ending
A wrong or missing verb ending occurs when a writer adds an incorrect ending, for example, -s or -es or -d or -ed, to a verb or neglects to attach the correct suffix. Study the following examples.

- The girl goed to the gym every afternoon around four o’clock.
- Last week, a cat burglar robs three high-rise apartments.

In the first sentence, the verb should be goes since the action occurs each day. And in the second sentence, since the events occurred in the past, the verb should be robbed.

At times, a wrong or missing verb ending comes from writing or typing too fast and then not proofreading carefully. But you should also study Chapter 7 and Chapter 17 on pages 90–96; 282–291.
10. Unnecessary Shift in Verb Tense
An unnecessary shift in verb tense occurs when you change from one verb tense to another verb tense. Study the following brief paragraph. The verbs are in green.

Richard drives to a local coffee shop each morning. He orders the same type of coffee every day. He wanted to change, but he is afraid to take the risk.

You will notice that drives, orders, and is are all present tense. The verb wanted is past tense. Wanted should be in present tense also: wants.

11. Wrong Tense or Verb Form
Verb tense errors happen when the verb tense does not properly indicate the time an action occurs. Each active verb tense indicates a specific past, present, or future time. To be sure you are conveying to readers a clear understanding of when an event occurred, occurs, or will occur, you need to be familiar with each active verb tense and the time the tense expresses. Study the following example.

Each afternoon at 3 p.m., my neighbor is watering his yard.

The first part of the above sentence, Each afternoon at 3 p.m., conveys a recurring, ongoing action indicative of present tense, but the verb is watering is a present progressive verb, a verb tense that indicates an action is occurring right now. The sentence's verb should be waters, a present tense verb.

Each afternoon at 3 p.m., my neighbor waters his yard.

Verb form errors occur when you use the wrong form of a verb. Verb form errors usually occur with irregular verbs. Look at the following example.

The journalist had wrote for the school newspaper when he was in high school.

In the sentence above, wrote is the incorrect form to be used as part of the past participle. The correct form is written.

The journalist had written for the school newspaper when he was in high school.

See Chapter 7 and “Twelve Active Verb Tenses” in Chapter 17 on pages 282–291.

12. Lack of Subject-Verb Agreement
Faulty subject-verb agreement occurs when the subject and the verb of the sentence to not agree in number. In other words, if the subject of the sentence is singular, the verb must be singular. If the subject of the sentence is plural, the verb must be plural.
For further discussion on subject-verb agreement and the rules governing subject-verb agreement, see Chapter 8.

**SENTENCE STRUCTURE**

13. Comma Splice

A comma splice occurs when you insert a comma without a coordinating conjunction between two main clauses. Study the following example.

> The cold wind cut through Jenna’s light jacket, she shivered uncontrollably.

In the above word group, two distinct main clauses exist: *The cold wind cut through Jenna’s light jacket* and *she shivered uncontrollably.* Since a comma does not indicate a stop, letting readers know they have come to the end of an idea, inserting a comma between main clauses creates confusion for the reader.

You can correct a comma splice five different ways:

1. Insert a period between the main clauses. If you insert a period between the main clauses, you need to remember to capitalize the first word of the second main clause.

> The cold wind cut through Jenna’s light jacket. She shivered uncontrollably.

2. Insert a comma and the appropriate coordinating conjunction between the main clauses.

> The cold wind cut through Jenna’s light jacket, and she shivered uncontrollably.

3. Insert a semicolon between the main clauses.

> The cold wind cut through Jenna’s light jacket; she shivered uncontrollably.

4. Insert a semicolon, an appropriate adverbial conjunction, and a comma between the main clauses.

> The cold wind cut through Jenna’s light jacket; consequently, she shivered uncontrollably.

5. Subordinate one of the main clauses.

> Because the cold wind cut through Jenna’s light jacket, she shivered uncontrollably.
14. Sentence Fragment
A sentence fragment is a word group that is composed as if it were a main clause. The first letter of the first word has been capitalized and the word group ends with a piece of terminal punctuation, for example, a period, a semicolon, a question mark, or an exclamation point.

Fragments may be phrases or subordinate clauses. Study the following examples:

- Over the wooden picket fence near the old barn. (Prepositional phrase)
- To follow his dreams regardless of the journey. (Infinitive phrase)
- Floating perpetually upon the open sea. (Present participial phrase)
- Tossed about in the incessant wind and rain. (Past participial phrase)
- Which he never claimed to be true. (Adjective subordinate clause)
- While she stood waiting patiently under the awning. (Adverb subordinate clause)

To fix a fragment, you must first be able to identify what type of word group makes up the fragment. Is the word group a phrase or a clause? Once you identify the word group, then you have a good idea what is missing. For example, if the fragment is a phrase, in order to make the word group a main clause, you would need to add a subject and a verb. If the word group is a subordinate clause, you will need to drop the subordinating conjunction or add a main clause. Study the following examples.

- An eagle flew over the wooden picket fence near the barn. The subject and verb eagle and flew were added to the prepositional phrase.
- While she stood waiting patiently under the awning, the sun began to set. A main clause is added.
15. Fused Sentence (also known as a run-on sentence)
A fused or run-on sentence is two main clauses that have no punctuation separating them. Study the following example.

Jenny went to the fair she wanted to see the agricultural exhibits.

In the above word group, two distinct main clauses exist: Jenny went to the fair and she wanted to see the agricultural exhibits. As you have learned, because main clauses are a complete idea, you must punctuate them so that readers know when the clause is completed. When you omit punctuation from between main clauses, they create a fused or run-on sentence. You correct a fused or run-on sentence the same way you correct a comma splice.

1. Insert a period between the main clauses. If you insert a period between the main clauses, you need to remember to capitalize the first word of the second main clause.

   Jenny went to the fair. She wanted to see the agricultural exhibits.

2. Insert a comma and the appropriate coordinating conjunction between the main clauses.

   Jenny went to the fair, for she wanted to see the agricultural exhibits.

   Jenny wanted to see the agricultural exhibits, so she went to the fair.

3. Insert a semicolon between the main clauses.

   Jenny went to the fair; she wanted to see the agricultural exhibits.

4. Insert a semicolon, an appropriate adverbial conjunction, and a comma between the main clauses.

   Jenny wanted to see the agricultural exhibits; therefore, she went to the fair.

5. Subordinate one of the main clauses.

   Jenny went to the fair because she wanted to see the agricultural exhibits.

16. Misplaced or Dangling Modifier
A misplaced modifier is a phrase or clause that is modifying the incorrect noun or pronoun. Look at the following sentence.

   The old woman walked down the street covered in a shawl.
While the above sentence may seem grammatically correct, the participial phrase *covered in a shawl* modifies the noun *street*. A street cannot be covered in a shawl. It is much more logical that the *woman* is covered in a shawl. To revise the sentence so that it is grammatically correct, merely move the misplaced modifier to modify the *old woman*.

- Covered in a shawl, the old woman walked down the street.
- The old woman covered in a shawl walked down the street.

A misplaced modifier describes the wrong noun or pronoun in a sentence. However, another type of error is a dangling modifier. With this type of error, no noun or pronoun exists in the sentence for the modifier to logically describe. Study the following sentence.

- Riding down the street, my jeans got caught in the bike chain.

Again, the sentence may seem grammatically correct, but the modifier *Riding down the street* has no actor. *Jeans* cannot ride a bike. The bike chain cannot ride a bike. No actor exists in the sentence to perform the action of *Riding down the street*.

Unlike a misplaced modifier that merely needs to be moved to modify the correct noun or pronoun, a sentence that includes a dangling modifier must be rewritten to include a subject that can perform the action of the modifier.

- While I was riding down the street, my jeans got caught in the bike chain.

Misplaced and dangling modifiers are often difficult to identify because they sound correct, but you must read your sentences carefully to see what they are truly saying.