



STUDENT SUCCESS  
CENTER

## Common Grammar Errors and How to Fix Them

### Sentence Fragment

A dependent clause cannot stand alone as a sentence. It must be connected to an independent clause, which is a simple sentence that contains a subject and a verb.

**Example of Error:** I am going with Daniel to the music store to pick out a new guitar. *Since he has a concert tomorrow and wants to have a perfect performance.* ← Because this statement modifies the original thought, it cannot stand alone as a sentence. Think about if you read this statement by itself. You would be left asking, what? The dependent clause adds information to the original sentence, so it has to be connected to it.

**Fixed:** *Since Daniel has a concert tomorrow and wants to have a perfect performance,* I am going with him to the music store to pick out a new guitar.

### No Comma in a Compound Sentence

A compound sentence is a sentence that contains more than one independent clause. Two independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction must have a comma.

**Example of Error:** I went to the pet store *and* I bought a new puppy.

**Fixed:** I went to the pet store, *and* I bought a new puppy.

### No Comma with Non-restrictive (Nonessential) Modifiers:

When a phrase is not essential to the meaning of a sentence, it needs to be separated with a comma.

**Example of Error:** My brother *who is a teacher* likes to play football.

**Fixed:** My brother, *who is a teacher,* likes to play football.

Because my brother being a teacher does not change the point of the sentence, which is that he likes football, it is a non-restrictive modifier and needs to be offset with commas.

### Vague Pronoun Reference

Pronouns should be clearly tied to an antecedent (what the pronoun refers to) and should not appear alone in a sentence. Pronouns too far from the antecedent may be unclear; pronouns should always be used after the antecedent is identified, not before.

**Example of Error:** *She* told me that Jacob would be at the meeting; *Alice* will be there too.

**Fixed:** *Alice* told me that Jacob will be at the meeting; *she* will be there too.

## Inappropriate Use of Passive Voice

Using forms of the “to be” verb (be, being, been, am, is, was, are) to incorrectly place emphasis on the object of the sentence. The subject may be unclear or not identified in the sentence.

**Example of Error:** The ball **was thrown** by the boy.

**Fixed:** The boy **threw** the ball.

## Comma Splice

A comma splice occurs when a comma alone is used to connect two independent thoughts. Commas are not strong enough to connect two sentences without help from a conjunction. Only a semi-colon can do this.

**Example of Error:** My daughter loves cats, she often dresses up in costumes and pretends to be a cheetah.

**Fixed:** My daughter loves cats, **so** she often dresses up in costumes and pretends to be a cheetah.  
OR My daughter loves cats; she often dresses up in costumes and pretends to be a cheetah.

## Inconsistent Verb Tense

It is important to make sure that your verb tense is consistent. You want to avoid switching back and forth from present tense to past tense.

**Example of Error:** My family **went** to the park yesterday. My sister **loves** playing on the swings.

**Fixed:** My family **went** to the park yesterday. My sister **loved** playing on the swings.

## Subject-verb Disagreement

For subject-verb agreement, the verb has to properly represent the noun. This means that you want to pay attention to whether your subject is singular or plural. When a subject and verb are separated, it can be harder to see the disagreement. It is helpful to identify the subject and verb in longer, more complex sentences to make sure that this is done correctly.

**Example of Error:** **All** of the students in my class **is** prepared for the exam. ← Because the verb *is* follows the word *class*, this can cause confusion. However the phrases *of the students* and *in my class* are prepositional phrases that must be ignored to see the subject-verb disagreement. The subject of this sentence is *All* and the verb is *is*. So the sentence without the prepositional phrases would read: *All is prepared for the exam*. To correct it, *is* must be changed to *are* to match the plural subject.

**Fixed:** **All** of the students in my class **are** prepared for the exam.

Search online for lists of prepositions to help you identify them in your sentences. Some common prepositions include: in, by, of, on, as, before, unlike, with, before, from, for, and to.

## Have more questions?

Come work with a tutor at the Student Success Center in the Library, C21. Please contact us with any questions by phone at 281.478.2779 or by email at [dawn.shedd@sjcd.edu](mailto:dawn.shedd@sjcd.edu).