



## Proofreading

Proofreading is the final stage of the writing process. All writers are prone to error, so setting time aside late in the process to check for sentence-level errors, grammar errors, and mechanical errors is a good strategy. This handout reviews how to diagnose and repair some common mistakes.

### A. Sentence Fragments and Independent Clauses

The **fragment** is a group of words lacking either a subject or a verb (or sometimes both) that masquerades as a regular sentence.

1. **the -ing fragment** (-ing verbs cannot stand alone as main verbs):

- (x) *The girl running down the street.*
- (✓) *The girl is running down the street.*
- (✓) *Dakota is the girl running down the street.*

2. **the who/which fragment** (*who* and *which* cannot stand alone as subjects in declarative sentences):

- (x) *I saw the man. Who reminded me of my uncle.*
- (✓) *I saw the man who reminded me of my uncle.*

3. **the because fragment** (*because* causes the second clause to be dependent, and thus not a sentence):

- (x) *I went home. Because I felt sick.*
- (✓) *I went home because I felt sick.*

The fragment above also can be repaired by removing the word *because*:

- (✓) *I went home. I felt sick.*

Several other options exist. Replace the period with a **semicolon**:

- (✓) *I went home; I felt sick.*

Replace the period with a **comma and a coordinating conjunction**:

- (✓) *I went home, for I felt sick.*

**Subordinate** one of the clauses:

- (✓) *Since I felt sick, I went home.*

Replace the period with a **semicolon, conjunctive adverb, and a comma**:

- (✓) *I felt sick; consequently, I went home.*

### B. Subject-Verb Agreement

If a subject is singular, then the verb form must be singular. If the subject is plural, then verb form must be plural. The rules are termed **agreement**. It is a peculiarity of English that we add an *s* to a verb with a third person singular subject.

**Singular forms**

I grow  
You grow  
The girl grows  
The flower in the yard grows  
Anxiety grows

**Plural forms**

We grow  
You grow  
The girls grow  
The lilies in the garden grow  
Anxieties grow

## Special agreement situations

1. **The correlatives:** in *either/or* and *neither/nor* constructions, the verb takes the number of the subject nearer to it.  
*Either John or the children are coming to the party.*  
*Either the children or John is making the cookies.*
2. **Elements** (like prepositional phrases) that come between the subject and the verb do not change the number of either.  
*The fact that he lost the five races upsets no one.*  
*A collection of rare oil paintings is part of the exhibit.*  
*The chairman, along with the delegation members, sits at the head table.*
3. **Use a singular verb with an indefinite pronoun** (e.g., *each, anybody, everybody, someone*):  
*Each of the campers takes a survival skills test.*  
*Everybody eats a little too much fatty food.*
4. **The use of *there*** to begin a sentence reverses the order from **subject-verb** to **verb-subject**.  
*There are five new laws under review.*  
*There is a reason the governor would not consider tax increases.*

### C. Pronouns

A **pronoun** is a word that substitutes for a noun, or sometimes another pronoun. There are many types of pronouns: **personal** (*he, she, it, we, you, they*), **relative** (*who, which*), **indefinite** (*everyone, anybody*).

1. Many personal and relative pronouns come in pairs, like *she/her, he/him, and who/whom*. Which member of the pair to use depends on how the pronoun functions in the sentence.  
*She, he, and who* are used as **subjects** of verbs and as complements (predicate nominative):  
*She ran the race.*  
*The man watching the race is he.*  
*No one knows who will win the race next week.*  
*Her, him, and whom* are used as **objects**, especially of verbs and prepositions:  
*The marshal awarded her the trophy.*  
*Give the second-place trophy to him.*  
*We're not sure whom the marshal disqualified.*  
The selection of *who* vs. *whom* will not present difficulties if you
  1. work with only the dependent clause in which *who/whom* appears;
  2. rearrange the words in this clause into standard subject-verb word order; and
  3. substitute *he* and *him* for *who* or *whom* to determine the correct choice.Applied to "We're not sure whom the marshal disqualified" yields the following:
  1. Isolate dependent clause "who/whom the marshal disqualified";
  2. rearrange words "The marshal disqualified who/whom"; and
  3. substitute *he/him*: "The marshal disqualified he" is obviously wrong;
  4. the correct choice is "The marshal disqualified *him*"; so...
  5. the object form is the correct selection: "whom the marshal disqualified."

### D. Modifiers

1. **Misplaced modifiers.** A misplaced modifier is a group of words that is in the wrong place in a sentence. Modifiers should be near the words or phrases they modify. Correcting a misplaced modifier involves identifying and moving it.  
(x) *Tony bought a car from an old lady without an engine.*
  - a. Identify the misplaced modifier: *without an engine*.
  - b. As written, the sentence means that the old lady had no engine!

- c. Move the misplaced modifier alongside the word (or phrase) that it modifies. The writer means to say that the car lacked an engine:

(✓) *Tony bought a car without an engine from an old lady.*

2. Dangling modifiers. A dangling modifier is a group of words that does not explicitly modify anything else in the sentence; thus, it “dangles.” Very often, the dangling modifier comes at the beginning of the sentence, in this pattern:

-ing or -ed word + comma + subject

(x) *Studying for hours, the GRE challenges even the brightest students.*

The -ing word should modify the word or phrase right after the comma; here, it does not, since the exam does not study. Unlike the misplaced modifier, the dangling modifier cannot simply be relocated: “GRE exam, studying for hours, challenges even the brightest test-takers” is no improvement. The sentence needs some rehabilitation.

(✓) *Even after studying for hours, John, a very bright student, found the GRE challenging.*

(✓) *The GRE challenges even the brightest students, many of whom prepare for hours.*

## 1. CAPITALIZATION

1. Please, **Mother**, hand me the application form. My **mother** is Princeton graduate.
2. My hardest class this summer is **Calculus 1013**. My **calculus** test was difficult.
3. I speak **English** and **French** in my **history** and **sociology** courses.
4. Let's go to **Mexico** in the **spring**.

## 2. APOSTROPHES

1. **Who's** in karate class with Alan? **Whose** history paper was found in the cafeteria?
2. **It's** time to write our first drafts. The Web site is having problems with its security system.
3. **One's** critical documents should be backed up on other media. **Ours** are.
4. The **university's** academic honesty rules should be the same as my **professors'** rules.

## 3. VERB CHOICES

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. I <b>sit</b> here. (no action)                | I <b>set</b> the book down. (action)             |
| 2. I <b>lie</b> here. (no action, present tense) | I <b>lay</b> the book down. (action, past tense) |
| 3. The temperature <b>rises</b> . (no object)    | He <b>raises</b> chickens. (object)              |
| 4. I would <b>have</b> gone. (correct)           | I would <b>of</b> gone. (incorrect)              |
| 5. Speakers and writers <b>imply</b> .           | Listeners and readers <b>infer</b> .             |

## 4. WORD CHOICES

1. The argument is **between** two students. The argument is **among** four sorority sisters.
2. The **principal** (main) thing to remember is that the **principal** of the school upholds the **principles** (rules).
3. I have **less** time than ever. There seem to be **fewer** hours available for sleep.
4. Rain **affects** (verb) the soil. The **effect** (noun) is usually muddiness.
5. The writer **cited** (quoted) the **site** (place) as a beautiful **sight** (vision).
6. “He played real good” in informal speech becomes “He played really well” in writing.
7. “Joe is as stingy as they” [are stingy], not “Joe is as stingy as them.” “Sue is smarter than I” [am smart], not “Sue is smarter than me.