***Sentence Problems***

1. **Sentence Fragments**

A sentence expresses a complete thought. If you punctuate a part of a sentence as if it were a whole sentence, you create a sentence fragment. Fragments are usually confusing because the reader has to puzzle out the missing information.

FRAGMENT In 1929, the global economy into a worldwide depression. [missing verb]

SENTENCE In 1929, the global economy collapsed into a worldwide depression.

FRAGMENT We observing the bacteria through a powerful microscope. [missing helping verb]

SENTENCE We were observing the bacteria through a powerful microscope.

FRAGMENT Photographed families who were victims of the Great Depression. [missing subject]

SENTENCE Dorothea Lange photographed families who were victims of the Great Depression.

FRAGMENT By closing the park to bicycle riders and skateboarders. [not a complete thought—missing subject and verb]

SENTENCE The city tried to cut down on accidents by closing the park to bicycle riders and skateboarders.

* 1. **Phrase Fragments**

A phrase is a group of words that does not have a subject and a verb. When a phrase is separated from the sentence it belongs with, it becomes a phrase fragment.

FRAGMENT I found my sister in the den. Making origami swans out of blue and green paper. [participial phrase fragment]

SENTENCE I found my sister in the den making origami swans out of blue and green paper.

FRAGMENT My sister is good at figuring out how to do things. With very little instruction. [prepositional phrase fragment]

SENTENCE My sister is good at figuring out how to do things with very little instruction.

FRAGMENT She just sits down and gives herself enough time. To ensure her success. [infinitive phrase fragment]

SENTENCE She just sits down and gives herself enough time to ensure her success.

FRAGMENT Later, my sister made me two beautiful objects. An origami snail and a fish. [appositive phrase fragment]

SENTENCE Later, my sister made me two beautiful objects, an origami snail and a fish.

* 1. **Subordinate Clause Fragments**

A subordinate clause has a subject and a verb but does not express a complete thought. Unlike an independent clause, a subordinate clause cannot stand on its own as a sentence.

FRAGMENT Sea urchins have long, moveable spines. Which they use to push themselves across the

ocean floor. [adjective clause fragment]

SENTENCE Sea urchins have long, moveable spines, which they use to push themselves across the ocean floor.

FRAGMENT Sea urchins can also be eaten in sushi. After they have been harvested from the sea and properly prepared. [adverb clause fragment]

SENTENCE Sea urchins can also be eaten in sushi, after they have been harvested from the sea and properly prepared.

**Correcting Fragments: Three Methods**

1. **Attach the fragment to the sentence in front of it--if the two parts make sense together**.

Fragment: The Soviet MIG appeared suddenly, circled twice, and set down. Braking with parachutes. (Participial Phrase)

Corrected: The Soviet MIG appeared suddenly, circled twice, and set down, braking with parachutes.

1. **Attach the fragment to the sentence that follows it--if the two parts make sense together**.

Fragment: Japan's largest department store. Mitsukoshi even sells $60,000 Rolls-Royces. (Appositive Phrase)

Corrected: Japan's largest department store, Mitsukoshi even sells $60,000 Rolls-Royces.

1. Develop the sentence fragment into a complete sentence that can stand by itself.

Fragment: The train sped on. The bridge ahead swept away by the flood. No one aboard the train knew what awaited them around the curve. (One verb is missing.)

Corrected: The train sped on. The bridge ahead had been swept away by the flood. No one aboard the train knew what awaited them around the curve.

1. **Run-on Sentences**

A run-on sentence is just the opposite of a fragment. It is made up of two complete sentences run together as if they were one sentence. Most run-ons are comma splices—two complete thoughts that have only a comma between them. Other run-ons, called fused sentences, have no punctuation between the two thoughts. The following examples show four ways to correct run-ons.

* 1. **Fused Sentence**

**Definition:** A fused sentence consists of two independent clauses, but both the comma and coordinating conjunction are missing.

Example: She writes the music he plays the guitar.

‘*She writes the music*’ and ‘*he plays the guitar*’ are each independent clauses, containing a subject and a verb and expressing complete thoughts. ‘*He plays the guitar*’ is an independent clause that can stand alone because it expresses a complete thought and is grammatically correct.

* **Strategies for Correcting Fused Sentences:**

1. **Create a compound sentence**. Inserting a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) plus a comma correctly links these independent clauses. This sentence structure is called a compound sentence.

She writes the music**, and** he plays the guitar.

1. **Separate independent clauses with periods and capitalization, creating simple sentences**.

She writes the music. He plays the guitar.

1. **Insert a semi-colon**. Semi-colons should be used sparingly and to connect independent clauses whose meanings are closely related.

She writes the music for Coldplay; he plays the guitar for that band.

1. **Link ideas using a subordinate clause (dependent clause).**

While she writes the music for Coldplay, he plays the guitar for that band.

‘While’ is a subordinating conjunction, which makes ‘while she writes music for Coldplay,’ a dependent clause. That is, the clause depends on the rest of the sentence for the overall meaning to be clear. A dependent clause cannot stand alone. Use a comma to separate a dependent clause that appears before an independent clause.

1. **Comma Splice**

**Definition:** A comma splice consists of two or more independent clauses that follow one another and are incorrectly linked together only with a comma (or commas). The coordinating conjunction is missing.

**Example**: She writes the music, he plays the guitar.

**Strategies for Correcting Comma Splices**:

1. **Insert a coordinating conjunction to create a compound sentence**.

She writes the music for Coldplay**, but** he plays the guitar for that band.

**2. Insert a semi-colon.**

She writes the music for Coldplay; he plays the guitar for that band.

To join two independent clauses with a semi-colon, be sure that their meanings are closely connected.

RUN-ON Naomi longed to make the basketball team, to achieve her goal, she practiced every afternoon.

CORRECT Naomi longed make the basketball team. To achieve her goal, she practiced every afternoon. [two sentences]

RUN-ON She tried several exercises, her skills showed no improvement.

CORRECT She tried several exercises, but her skills showed no improvement. [compound sentence with comma and coordinating conjunction]

RUN-ON Naomi worked hard, she was persistent.

CORRECT Naomi worked hard; she was persistent. [compound sentence with semicolon]

RUN-ON Her hard work paid off later she made the team.

CORRECT Her hard work paid off; later, she made the team. [compound sentence with semicolon plus conjunctive adverb]

1. **Unnecessary Shifts in Sentences**

For clarity, it is usually best to keep the same subject and the same verb form throughout a sentence. Unnecessary shifts in subject, tense, or voice can make a sentence awkward to read.

* 1. **Shifts in Subject**

Note that sometimes, especially in short compound sentences, a shift in subject is necessary to express your intended meaning. In the following sentences, the shift in subject is natural.

NATURAL SHIFT Jessica jumped off the high diving board, but no one saw her.

I’ll paint the background, and you can paint the birds and trees.

Most often, though, a shift in subject is awkward and unnecessary.

In the following examples, notice that each sentence is much clearer when it has the same subject throughout.

AWKWARD The Mullaneys have a new puppy, and the shelter is where they found it.

BETTER The Mullaneys have a new puppy, and they found it at the shelter.

AWKWARD All runners should be at the track by 7:00 so that you can pick up your registration forms.

BETTER All runners should be at the track by 7:00 so that they can pick up their registration forms.

* 1. **Shifts in Verb Tense and Voice**

Unnecessarily changing verb tense or voice in midsentence can also create awkwardness and confusion. Stick to the tense and voice you start with unless you have a good reason for changing.

AWKWARD Aldo talked about going to the North Pole, but then he goes to the Antarctic. [shift from past tense to present tense]

BETTER Aldo talked about going to the North Pole, but then he went to the Antarctic. [past tense used in both clauses]

AWKWARD The cat asks to go out, and then it always wanted to come back in.

BETTER The cat asks to go out, and then it always wants to come back in.

AWKWARD Volunteers made the dangerous journey after dark, but no wolves were encountered. [shift from active voice to passive voice]

BETTER Volunteers made the dangerous journey after dark, but they encountered no wolves.

A shift in voice usually causes a shift in subject, too. Notice that in the awkward sentence in the last pair, the shift from active to passive voice results in a shift from the subject volunteers to the subject wolves.

1. **Dangling & Misplaced Modifiers**

A modifier is a phrase or word meant to describe or explain part of a sentence. When modifiers are used correctly, the meaning of the sentence is clear. When modifiers are used incorrectly the meaning of the sentence can change drastically. Using modifiers correctly will improve the clarity of your work. Watch out for the two modifier mistakes:

* 1. **Dangling Modifiers**

“A dangling modifier is a word or word group that refers to (or modifies) a word or phrase that has not been clearly stated in the sentence” (Harris 118). When a sentence begins with a phrase that is not directly connected to the subject that it refers to, that phrase is “dangling.” The following are examples of incorrect modifiers and how to correct a dangling modifier:

Examples:

Incorrect: Driving past The Bread Box Café, the sun peeked through the clouds.

This sentence implies that the sun was the “doer of the action”, that the sun was driving past The Break Box Café.

Correct: Driving past The Bread Box Café, Suzanne saw the sun peek through the clouds.

Incorrect: Having just met the new roommates, it was certain that this year would come down to survival of the fittest.

In this sentence the subject “it” takes on the action of “having just met the new roommates.”

Correct: Having just met the new roommates, Joey was certain that this year would come down to survival of the fittest.

* 1. **Misplaced Modifiers**

“A misplaced modifier is a word or word group placed so far away from what it refers to (or modifies) that the reader may be confused. Modifiers should be placed as closely as possible to the words they modify in order to keep the meaning clear” (Harris 120). The following are examples of incorrect modifiers and how to correct a misplaced modifier:

Examples:

Incorrect: The Girl Scouts went wild when they were told that they had raised one million dollars by selling cookies at the troop meeting.

The way this sentence is written means that during the troop meeting the Girl Scouts raised one million dollars. However, “at the troop meeting” should actually refer to where “they were told.”

Correct: The Girl Scouts went wild when they were told at the troop meeting that they had raised one million dollars by selling cookies.

Misplaced modifiers can also be just one word. These are some of the frequently misplaced one-word modifiers: almost, even, hardly, just merely, nearly, only (Harris 121). Changing the location of these individual words changes the meaning of the sentence.

Example: The student passed almost all of her classes.

This sentence means that she passed most of her classes, but not all of them.

The student almost passed all of her classes.

This sentence means that she came close to passing all of her classes but didn’t actually pass any of them.