

The Most Common Sentence Structure Problems

A Sentence Fragment is an incomplete sentence. It usually lacks either a subject or a verb, or both, or contains only a dependent clause.

Incorrect: Studying very hard on weekends.
Correct: Studying on weekends is very hard.

Incorrect: Because some students work part-time while taking a full load of courses.
Correct: Because some students work part-time while taking a full load of courses, they have very little free time.

A run-on sentence is a sentence in which two or more independent clauses are written one after another with no punctuation (**fused sentences**) or with incorrect punctuation (**comma splice**).

Incorrect: His family went to Australia then they immigrated to Canada.
Correct: His family went to Australia; then they immigrated to Canada

Incorrect: Learning a new language is similar to learning to swim it takes a lot of practice.
Correct: Learning a new language is similar to learning to swim since it takes a lot of practice.
Correct: Learning a new language is similar to learning to swim; it takes a lot of practice.

Incorrect: The experiment failed, it had been left unobserved for too long.
Correct: The experiment failed; it had been left unobserved for too long.
Correct: The experiment failed because it had been left unobserved for too long.

Incorrect: A newly arrived international student faces many problems, for example, he has to cope with a new culture.
Correct: A newly arrived international student faces many problems; for example, he has to cope with a new culture.

A choppy sentence is a sentence that is too short. Although short sentences can be effective, overuse of them is considered poor style in academic writing.

Incorrect: Wind is an enduring source of power. Water is also an unlimited energy source. Dams produce hydraulic power. They have existed for a long time. Windmills are relatively new.

Correct: Both wind and water are enduring sources of power. Dams have produced hydraulic power for a long time, but windmills are relatively new.

Incorrect: Our results were inconsistent. The program obviously contains an error. A revision of the program is required.

Correct: A revision of the program is required because it produced inconsistent results.

A sprawl sentence is a sentence made up of many clauses with excessive subordination and coordination. A loose sentence also results from weak sentence construction and the inclusion of many phrases and clauses in no particular order.

Incorrect: In the event that we get the contract, we must be ready by June 1 with the necessary personnel and equipment to get the job done, so with this end in mind a staff meeting, which all group managers are expected to attend, is scheduled for February 12.

Correct: An all-staff meeting including all group managers is scheduled for February 12. During this meeting we should discuss the issue of personnel and equipment preparation and schedule a plan for completing the contract by June 1st, if the contract is received.

Incorrect: The lack of rainfall has caused a severe water shortage, so people have to conserve water every day, and they also have to think of new ways to reuse water, but the situation is improving.

Correct: The lack of rainfall has caused a severe water shortage. Although the situation is improving, people have to conserve water every day, and think of new ways to reuse water.

Incorrect: Although the blue whale has been protected for over 30 years and its numbers are increasing, especially in the North Pacific, where whale hunting has been banned, it is still at risk of extinction as its habitat is being polluted by waste from oil tankers and its main food, the plankton, is being killed off by harmful rays from the sun, which can penetrate the earth's atmosphere because there is a huge hole in the ozone layer over Antarctica.

Correct: The blue whale has been protected for over 30 years, especially in the North Pacific. Although its numbers are increasing, it is still at risk of extinction. This risk is primarily caused by waste from oil tankers polluting whale habitat. Moreover, a huge hole in the ozone layer over Antarctica allows harmful rays from the sun to penetrate the earth's atmosphere and kill the plankton, which is whale main food.

Non-parallel structures are parts of a sentence which are listed as a sequence, but do not follow the same grammatical or structural principle. Parallelism in writing means that each item in a list or comparison should follow the same grammatical pattern.

Incorrect: The teacher wanted to know which country we came from and our future goals.

Correct: The teacher wanted to know which country we came from and what our future goals were.

Incorrect: This report is an overview of the processes involved, the problems encountered, and how they were solved.

Correct: This report is an overview of the processes involved, the problems encountered, and the solutions devised.