



The Writing Center @ JSCC

Revising Issues – Common Errors

Often, the “big picture” errors that writers make are predictable. The most common at Jackson State are discussed in this handout. Remember, this handout covers revision needs, not editing needs. For those, see our “Common Proofreading Errors” handout.

Lack of Content

A sentence fragment occurs when a writer forgets to include either a subject or a tensed verb (or both) in his/her sentence. They can also occur when the writer uses a subordinate clause as if it were an independent clause (sentence).

Fragments are corrected by adding the missing element(s) or by combining the sentence fragment with another, independent clause (sentence).

MISSING VERB FRAGMENT: The problem with the new facility being the poor ventilation.

SOLUTION 1: The problem with the new facility is the new ventilation.

SOLUTION 2: The builders were called to fix their errors, the problem with the new facility being the poor ventilation.

SUBORDINATE CLAUSE FRAGMENT: Because I began studying late at night after work.

SOLUTION 1: Because I began studying late at night after work, I did poorly on my exam.

SOLUTION 2: I began studying late at night after work.

Lack of Focus

Comma splices occur when writers use only a comma to separate two independent clauses. Comma splices are corrected by replacing the misused comma with a period or a semi-colon or by adding a coordinating conjunction to join the sentences.

COMMA SPLICE: Fighting children look as if they are just playing, they are actually learning important social skills.

SOLUTION 1: Fighting children look as if they are just playing. They are actually learning important social skills.

SOLUTION 2: Fighting children look as if they are just playing; they are actually learning important social skills.

SOLUTION 3: Fighting children look as if they are just playing, but they are actually learning important social skills.

Wordiness/Passive Perspective

Run-on, or fused, sentences occurs when a writer joins two independent clauses with no punctuation whatsoever. They are like comma splices without the commas. Run-on/fused sentences are corrected by adding the missing period, semi-colon, or comma + coordinating conjunction.

RUN-ON/FUSED SENTENCE: The candidates are very different they would both enact useful legislation.

SOLUTION 1: The candidates are very different. They would both enact useful legislation.

SOLUTION 2: The candidates are very different; they would both enact useful legislation.

SOLUTION 3: The candidates are very different, but they would both enact useful legislation.

Overpacked Ideas/ Run-on Paragraphs

Commas can be left out in a number of places: after a long introductory phrase; in a compound sentence; and around a non-essential element (as non-restrictive commas). To solve this problem, simply add the comma.

INTRODUCTORY COMMA MISSING: After all of the media attention the movie was a disappointment.

SOLUTION: After all of the media attention, the movie was a disappointment.

COMPOUND-SENTENCE COMMA MISSING: The first student finished the exam after 15 minutes and the last student finished after an hour.

SOLUTION: The first student finished the exam after 15 minutes, and the last student finished after an hour.

(Please note — The only time a comma is used before a coordinating conjunction occurs when the conjunction joins two independent clauses, as in the example above. If either portion of the jointed elements is NOT a complete, independent clause, the comma stays out.)

NON-RESTRICTIVE COMMA MISSING: Mr. Manning who is the secretary of our debate club wrote a letter to the editor.

SOLUTION: Mr. Manning, who is the secretary of our debate club, wrote a letter to the editor.

Poor Logic

When a pronoun does not match in number or case with the noun phrase it refers back to, the writer has made a P/A error.

P/A AGREEMENT ERROR: Each student should bring their book to class on Friday.

SOLUTION 1: Each student should bring his or her book to class on Friday.

SOLUTION 2: All students should bring their books to class on Friday.

Inaccuracy

When a writer shifts between two sets of pronouns, like “they” and “you,” he/she is creating a shift-in-person error. Writers should remain consistent in their uses of pronouns.

SHIFT IN PERSON ERROR: When teenagers start college, you often gain ten pounds.

SOLUTION 1: When teenagers start college, they often gain ten pounds.

Inconsistent Voice

Subject/Verb agreement errors occur when a writer’s subject and verb are not balanced, usually in number. If the subject is singular, the verb must be singular; if the subject is plural, the verb must be plural.

S/V AGREEMENT ERROR: One of the dogs chew the furniture.

SOLUTION 1: One of the dogs chews the furniture.

SOLUTION 2: All of the dogs chew the furniture.

Disorganization

Shifts in verb tense occur when writers use both present and past (or future) tenses in the same paragraph or sentence. Writers should keep tense consistent throughout the essay when possible.

TENSE SHIFT ERROR: After the exam was over, we are allowed to review the answers.

SOLUTION 1: After the exam is over, we are allowed to review the answers.

SOLUTION 2: After the exam was over, we were allowed to review the answers.