

# Common Writing Mistakes

## 1. Sentence Fragments/Incomplete Sentences

WRONG: Scared stiff by the intense wind and storm.

RIGHT: She was scared stiff by the intense wind and storm

How can you tell if you have a sentence fragment?

Turn your sentence into a question. If the question does not make sense, then you may have a sentence fragment.

*Example using the above sentence:*

Was scared stiff by the intense wind and storm? DOES NOT MAKE SENSE

Was she scared stiff by the intense wind and storm? COMPLETE SENTENCE

## 2. Changing Verb Tense

WRONG: She said she is also an avid reader; we will have lots to talk about.

RIGHT: She said she is also an avid reader; we would have lots to talk about.

WRONG: Because we all had the same teacher, we are able to spend recess and lunchtime together.

RIGHT: Because we all had the same teacher, we were able to spend recess and lunchtime together.

## 3. Subject Verb Agreement

WRONG: The tray of ice cubes have fallen on the kitchen floor.

RIGHT: The tray of ice cubes has fallen on the kitchen floor.

The subject is tray (singular) so must use “has” instead of “have.”

You can test sentences like this by taking out the prepositional phrases.

*Example:* The tray have/has fallen on the kitchen floor.

Clearly, the answer would be “has.”

#### 4. Inadequate Sentence Structure

WRONG: For our annual picnic, Tom and Jill brought hamburgers we brought potato salad.

RIGHT: For our annual picnic, Tom and Jill brought hamburgers. We brought potato salad.

RIGHT: For our annual picnic, Tom and Jill brought hamburgers; we brought potato salad.

#### 5. Lack of Punctuation

- Use comma between two or more adjectives that modify the same noun.

*Example:* The man in the torn, tattered jacket moved quickly through the crowded, unlit street.

- Use a comma to set apart unnecessary clauses.

*Example:* The handsome man over there, the only one wearing a red shirt, has black hair and brown eyes.

- Use a comma after an opening prepositional phrase.

*Example:* Upon hearing the news of her father's death, Jill started crying.

- Use a semicolon to join two complete sentences into one.

*Example:* The bank teller determined the bill was a counterfeit; there was no serial number on it.

- Use a colon when listing items.

*Example:* The following items are not permitted on this aircraft: razors, knives, and guns.

## 6. Lack of Parallelism

- When naming items they should be listed in the same way.

WRONG: This afternoon I washed, waxed and then I was vacuuming the car.

RIGHT: This afternoon I washed, waxed, and vacuumed the car.

- When using more than one clause, one should keep the same voice and use the same type of introduction in each.

WRONG: I was worried that Bill would drive too fast, that the road would be too slippery, and that the car would be stopped by the police. (In this sentence the phrase “would be stopped” is in the passive voice rather than active voice)

RIGHT: I was worried that Bill would drive too fast, that the road would be too slippery, and that police would stop the car.

- Sentences should be written in parallel form.

WRONG: I was nervous and frightened, but I hid my emotions. My sister showed the world that she felt confident and carefree.

RIGHT: I was nervous and frightened, but I hid my emotions. My sister was confident and carefree, but showed the world how she felt.  
(These two sentences follow exactly the same form.)

## 7. Paper lacks Introduction, Body, and Conclusion

- Make sure paper has these three parts
- Introduction should introduce your topic and specify the main points you will be explaining in your paper.
- The body explains your main points.
- The conclusion brings closure to the paper. It reiterates the main points. It DOES NOT introduce any new ideas.