

WMC Grammar Guide for Writing in Standard American English (SAE)

Components of a Sentence: **Subject + Verb + complete idea = Sentence**

Incomplete Sentences (AKA lacking one of the components above)

Incomplete sentence 1: “Laughing in the park.”

(Why? There is no **subject**. Who is laughing?)

More complete example:

“**We were** laughing in the park.” (“We” is the **subject** in the sentence.)

Incomplete sentence 2: “When I was little.”

(Why? There is no **complete idea**. This is a dependent clause.)

More complete example:

“When I was little, **I went to Disneyland.**” (“I went to Disneyland” adds a **complete idea**.)

Run on Sentences & Comma Splices (AKA two sentences smashed together)

Run on examples:

“I broke up with my gym we were not working out.”

“Game of Thrones might be the best show ever I watch it every Sunday night.”

(Why? These are two complete **sentences smashed together**.)

Comma splice examples:

“I had a feeling she liked me, her toes were touching mine.”

“I’m not running away from hard work, I’m too lazy to run.”

(Why? These are two complete **sentences separated by a comma**.)

So what do we do? Add ANY of the following for SAE:

Semi-colon → “I broke up with my gym; we were not working out.”

Period → “Games of Thrones might be the best show ever. I watch it every Sunday night.”

Comma + FANBOYS (For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So) → “I had a feeling she liked me **and** her toes were touching mine.”

Subordinating Conjunction → “I’m not running away from hard work **because** I’m too lazy to run.”

Misplaced Modifiers (AKA the description is next to a word it isn't meant to describe)

Sometimes sentences are unclear because the description (**modifier**) is next to the wrong word. You know what the writer *means*, but it doesn't sound right.

Example 1: "Oozing slowly across the floor, Marvin watched the salad dressing."

(Why? Right now, the highlighted phrase is describing the noun closest to it, meaning Marvin.

*To fix it, simply move the **modifier** next to the word it is meant to describe.)*

SAE: "Marvin watched the salad dressing oozing slowly across the floor."

Example 2: "I smelled the oysters coming down the stairs for dinner."

(Why? Who is coming down the stairs for dinner? Right now, the oysters are!)

SAE: "As I was coming down the stairs for dinner, I smelled the oysters."

SAE: "I smelled the oysters as I was coming down the stairs for dinner."

Dangling Modifiers (AKA missing the subject it's describing)

These are similar in that the sentence is describing something that it doesn't mean to, because the subject word that it should be describing is missing.

Example 1: "Running by the cemetery, an open coffin frightened me."

Why? Right now, the highlighted phrase is describing the open coffin. However, coffins don't run; therefore, the subject (whoever is running) is missing. Many dangling modifiers can be fixed by adding "As I was."

SAE: "As I was running by the cemetery, an open coffin frightened me."

Example 2: "After drinking too much, the toilet kept moving."

(Why? Right now, the toilet drank too much. What's really going on here?)

SAE: "Because I drank too much, the toilet kept moving."

Parallelism (AKA making sure all parts of your sentence match)

Parallelism helps make sentences smooth. For example, if you're using -ing verbs, stick with -ing. Or, whatever tense you're using, stick with it throughout the sentence.

Example 1: "There are two ways to get a promotion: working hard or make friends in high places."

SAE: "There are two ways to get a promotion: working hard or making friends in high places."

Example 2: "The man walked down the street, stopped at a shop window, and was fixing his tie."

SAE: "The man walked down the street, stopped at a shop window, and fixed his tie."

Subject & Verb Agreement

What's going on in each of these comics? The subject and verb do not match. *Be cute outside your papers, and smart in them.*



We was → We were

I seen → I saw

Be ready → Are ready

We hates → We hate

Additional Resources:

"Twelve Common Errors" (<https://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/CommonErrors.html>)

Check list of reminders while editing the paper and suggestions for working through the errors.

Courtesy of the Writing Center at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

The Grammar Slammer (<http://englishplus.com/grammar/contents.htm>)

This site provides a no-frills, yet extensive list of grammatical definitions and terms.

Grammar Bytes (<http://www.chompchomp.com/menu.htm>)

This site offers a unique and refreshing look at grammatical concerns with helpful illustrations along with clear and concise explanations.

Grammar Girl (<http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com/>)

This website features a search function. For each grammatical topic (e.g. comma splice) there is a short write-up on suggested ways to fix an error, as well as an explanation on what makes the issue ungrammatical.

"That" vs. "Which" (<http://www.dailywritingtips.com/that-vs-which>)

This write-up will go over the right time to write “that” and the right time to write “which.” At the bottom of this page there is also a link to some practice exercises!

Oxford English Dictionary (<http://www.oed.com/>)

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) is more than a dictionary--it provides you with etymological (or history) of the word's usage.