

JOHNSON COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

THE SENTENCE-Major Sentence level Errors

A sentence is a group of words having a subject and predicate and expressing a complete thought. The sentence is the basis of all written language. Except in a few instances in which you are filling in blanks, you will find that all of the writing done in school is to be done in complete sentences. If you are careful to write in complete sentences in anything you write even outside school, you will find that this habit will do much to develop the habit of writing correctly at all times. For instance, when you email your friends, you should write in complete sentences and correct grammar. Doing so will help you to cultivate the skill of writing well.

A complete sentence must have a subject and verb. The verb must have the present or past tense form, whether alone or starting a verb phrase. The present and past tense forms are called *finite*, as distinguished from the infinitives, present participles, and past participles which are called *verbals*.

Example: John runs down the street. (Runs = present tense finite verb)

John ran down the street. (Ran = past tense finite verb)

John is running down the street (Is running=present tense finite + present participle=present progressive tense)

John was running down the street. (Was running = past tense finite = present participle = past progressive tense)

John has been running down the street. (Has been running = present tense finite+past participle+present participle=present perfect progressive tense)

[See verbs handout for more detailed explanation about verb tense, irregular verbs, and action vs linking verbs.]

It would be wrong to write “John running down the street.” A participle cannot act as the verb alone. It needs an auxiliary verb or finite verb.

Each sentence, besides being complete, must express an idea early. The parts of the sentence should be related sensibly. If they are not, the meaning of the sentence will not be clear.

Example: Ice is when water freezes.

This is a poor sentence because the ideas are not sensibly related. The verb *is* makes a statement about the condition of ice, yet the latter part of the sentence talks about the time of an event and cannot possibly make a sensible or complete statement about the beginning of the sentence, *Ice is*. Here are three acceptable versions of this sentence:

Ice occurs when water freezes.

Ice is frozen water.

When water freezes, ice forms.

You can see that often there are several right ways to construct a sentence. Your task is to decide which one best suits your need.

Because the sentence is the first and fundamental unit of written communication, first you must be sure that you can recognize a sentence. If you can spot a sentence fragment written by someone else, you should be able to spot any sentence fragments that you write. Sentence fragments are corrected by being joined to the sentence with which they belong.

Exercise A

In the following paragraphs underline all the sentence fragments. Then connect them to the complete sentence with which they belong. Punctuate and capitalize properly as you do this.

I

Bambi is the story of a deer. Living in a forest. Which is located in Austria.

This book tells the story of Bambi's growth and development from his birth until he becomes a princely stag. Which had been his ambition. Bambi's life as a fawn is described in much detail.

We follow his adventures in the forest. His acquaintance with other animals. His growing knowledge of other living things. Bambi's early encounters with the Old Stag have a great influence on him. Because of these meetings he has an ideal. To grow up to. After many hardships. including a severe winter and dangers from hunters. he matures and becomes a respected stag. Admired by fawns as he himself had once admired the Old Stag.

II

Tom Sawyer had a lively imagination. He could scheme so that his friends would do his work for him. As he did in the case of whitewashing the fence. He could deceive his Aunt Polly. And convince her that he was innocent of an offense, as he did when he slipped out at night. He could invent games. To delight his friends. Such as the acting out of scenes from Ivanhoe. His vivid imagination and sense of adventure involved him in the most exciting events in the story. Those concerned with Injun Joe.

III

Hans Brinker had many qualities I wish I had. Probably the most important was his sense of responsibility. He helped support his mother, father, and sister. Which I am sure I could not do. At his age. He did not complain about this situation. But was always cheerful. He was kind. Especially to Gretel. Sometimes I am not considerate of my sister, but Hans always took Gretel's feelings into account. He was friendly. With all the other boys. Who soon learned to respect and like him, even though he was very poor. And often he had to give up sharing their fun. Because he had to work. Hans was getlerous with both his money and his time. He was also a generous opponent. As one can see in the account of the skating race. Altogether, I feel that I could improve myself if I could develop some of Hans's character traits.

IV

Since I was a small child, Daniel Boone has been one of my heroes. Now that I have studied history. I feel that I understand better why he should be honored. At first I liked him because he was a clever woodsman. Killing bears and making paths in the wilderness. Following trails left by the Indians. When they kidnapped the girls from the settlement. Now that I have studied the pioneering in Kentucky and Tennessee. I realize that Boone was more than a scout. His courage and skill made it possible for others to settle this new country. He was an inspiration to settlers. Who might otherwise have lacked the courage to push on west. He became a symbol. That stood for the pioneering spirit.

V

By improving my vocabulary, I improved my reading comprehension. I decided to look up all the new words. That I found in all my reading assignments every night. Sometimes, I learned, there were too many. To carry out this plan. When this was the case. I looked up as many as I could. I wrote down the word and the meaning. When I finished my homework. I asked my mother or father to give out the words to me to see whether I could tell what they meant. They did so. Putting the words in sentences for me. I did not always remember all of them, but I was enjoying my reading more. And reading faster. After I had done this for two terms at school. I

found that my marks in social studies and English were higher. Because I understood what I read better and read faster.

EXERCISE B

Another common difficulty in writing good sentences is that of recognizing that two complete thoughts cannot be written as one. Such a mistake is called a run-on sentence if the two ideas are run together with no mark of punctuation. If the two ideas are joined by a comma without a conjunction such as *and*, *but*, *or*, or *nor*, the error is called a comma splice. These two kinds of errors can be corrected by putting a period after the first clause and beginning a new sentence with a capital letter or by using a comma and one of the conjunctions just mentioned. In the following paragraphs find all the comma splices and run-on sentences, and correct them by one of these methods.

I

Building expressways will not necessarily solve our traffic problem. Many people believe that all we need to clear up traffic congestion is more expressways. Obviously such expressways do solve some of the problems they make it possible for more cars to move more rapidly to a downtown area. This is not a solution, it merely means that more cars will go downtown and cause more problems there. Besides this difficulty there is an even more important one where is the land to come from to build all the expressways? To obtain it, land (that might be used for parks) must be sacrificed, people must be turned out of their homes, many new houses must be provided. Probably city and state governments need to consider more carefully in the future the wisdom of building so many expressways.

II

The journalist Lincoln Steffens has written an interesting account of how he trained a colt. He begins with a description of how a friend of the family gave him the colt and told him how to train it. The boy was patient, consistent, and firm the colt responded well to him. Later, when he had mastered the colt and overcome its fear of being ridden, he taught it a number of tricks he learned these from horsetrainers with a circus that came to town. From a friend who had a horse he learned to take advantage of the colt's love of fun both boys adorned their horses with flowers or fancy blankets or bells and found that the horses showed off accordingly. Steffens says that he

feels that this horse was one of the most beautiful horses he had ever seen. He feels that training it taught him many valuable lessons.

III

Spending a summer on our farm taught my spoiled cousin a great deal. The first thing he learned was responsibility he learned this by leaving a gate open. As a result of his carelessness a number of cattle wandered off, my father made him go and find them. After a long, hot search he had learned something about responsibility. He learned that nature does not care whether you get your own way. He was determined to go to town on a certain day. Because it had rained the day before, the hay had got wet everyone had to do his share in the field the trip to town had to be postponed. He learned that hard work can bring satisfaction. His morning task was to work in the garden, he disliked this intensely. At the end of the summer, though, he was extremely proud of the vegetables which won first prize at the county fair. When he went home, his parents wrote us that he was indeed a changed boy they also wrote that they were going to give him more responsibility at home.

IV

Beauty Smith, who owned White Fang for a time, turned the dog into a completely savage beast. White Fang had never been a gentle dog he had never received the kind of treatment that would make him a pet, but Beauty Smith made him a monster. He trained White Fang to fight by abusing and half starving him, he then made bets with owners of other dogs and promoted fights. White Fang always won, this made Beauty Smith even more determined to encourage the dog's savage instincts. He mocked and tormented him this treatment hurt the dog's pride and made him furious. When he was confronted with a new enemy, he would fight even harder. At last he found a dog he could not defeat because he was so weakened. He was nearly killed, Weedon Scott rescued him. Beauty Smith thus lost control of White Fang.

V

Inventors frequently have rather sad lives. They are by nature imaginative, gifted people others tend to misunderstand their vision and their gifts. Because of these talents they can anticipate what man is likely to want or need, but often the invention comes ahead of man's realization that he wants and needs it. Robert Fulton is a good example of this misfortune. He saw that boats would be in even greater demand if they could travel faster he began experimenting with steam as a means of power to run them. The result was the first steamboat it was called the *Claremont*. People who watched its first voyage nicknamed it "Fulton's Folly." Such is the public disappointment and humiliation that often awaits the inventor.

CONSTRUCTING SENTENCES

Two of the most important uses for the sentence in schoolwork are to identify and to define. The construction of these sentences is important. In answer to the question, "Who was Robert Sutter?" you need to do more than write, "discovered gold in California." Identifications must be complete and well constructed. They must contain all the necessary information.

Exercise A

Read each of the following pairs of sentences. Decide which of each pair is better. Circle the letter of that sentence.

I

- a. A peninsula is when a piece of land extends into the water.
- b. A peninsula is a piece of land extending into the water.

II

- a. The use of a canal is a river.
- b. A canal is a man-made waterway, like a river.

III

- a. Coal is stuff in mines, then in furnaces, and is a mineral.
- b. Coal is a mineral mined for fuel.

IV

- a. A lake is an inland body of water.
- b. Inland there are bodies of water, and they are lakes.

V

- a. A colony is a settlement under the direction of the homeland.
- b. A colony is under the direction of the homeland and is a settlement.

VI

- a. Robert E. Lee was the commander-in-chief of the Confederate forces.
- b. Robert E. Lee was a Confederate, and he commanded the army.

VII

- a. Casey Stengel is a famous man who managed the Mets.
- b. Casey Stengel is the famous manager of the Mets.

VIII

- a. Toronto is the capital of Ontario.
- b. Toronto is a city in Ontario, of which it is the capital.