

## 10 Common Sentence and Word Problems

x incorrect   ~ ambiguous/weak   ☺ correct

### 1. Pronoun Errors: incorrect agreement, redundant, or ambiguous

Pronouns which do not agree in number with their antecedent (the noun or noun phrase they refer to), are unnecessary, or are unclear.

x As a child grows older, they tend to establish firm or relatively permanent peer-group relationships. [incorrect]\*

☺ As a child grows older, he or she tends to establish firm or relatively permanent peer-group relationships.

x In this film, it shows a story about refugees in the Indian Ocean. [redundant]

☺ This film shows a story about refugees in the Indian Ocean.

~ Once Ben told his dad about the accident, he called a tow truck company. [ambiguous]

☺ Once Ben told his dad about the accident, Ben called a tow truck company.

☺ Ben called a tow truck company after he told his dad about the accident.<sup>1</sup>

\*epicene pronoun: 'they' can be used, informally, as a (gender-neutral) third-person pronoun to refer to a person (a singular antecedent).

### 2. Comma Splice

Two independent clauses joined with a comma yet missing a coordinating conjunction (for/and/nor/but/or/yet/so).

x John has visited Rome many times, Sally has never been to Italy.

☺ John has visited Rome many times, but Sally has never been to Italy.

### 3. Subject/Verb Agreement Errors

Subjects and verbs which do not agree in number (singular or plural).

x A bouquet of yellow roses lend color and fragrance to the room.

☺ A bouquet of yellow roses lends color and fragrance to the room.<sup>2</sup>

x Neither the plates nor the serving bowl go on that shelf.

☺ Neither the plates nor the serving bowl goes on that shelf.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://blog.powerscore.com/sat/act-english-and-sat-writing-tips-ambiguous-pronouns>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.grammarbook.com/grammar/subjectVerbAgree.asp>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## 4. Incorrect & Inconsistent Verb Tense

Incorrect indication of when the action took place (the past, the present or the future) or confusing changes in tense within a sentence.

- x The instructor explains the diagram to students who asked questions during the lecture.<sup>4</sup>
- ☺ The instructor explains the diagram to students who ask questions during the lecture.

## 5. Superfluous/Redundant Words

Additional words which do not enhance meaning in the sentence.

- ~ This is done by means of inserting a catheter, thereby resulting in exposure of the subendothelial layer.
- ☺ This is done by inserting a catheter, thereby exposing the subendothelial layer.

## 6. Jargon & Wordiness

Overly complicated words and phrases where simple language would better convey meaning; language used in a particular context yet not well-understood outside that context.

- ~ The precise mechanism responsible for this antagonism cannot be elucidated.
- ☺ The cause of this antagonism is unknown.

## 7. Long Noun Phrases

A subject composed of a series of words (acting as a single noun and replaceable by a pronoun) which delays the introduction of the verb (the action).

- ~ The English for Academic Purposes Modules run by the highly qualified teachers in the language and learning unit are available to all students of Queen Mary University of London.<sup>5</sup>
- ☺ The English for Academic Purposes Modules, which are run by the highly qualified teachers in the language and learning unit, are available to all students of Queen Mary University of London.

## 8. Expletives

Empty words or phrases, e.g. there is/there are/it is/they are.

- ~ There are two significant factors contributing to heart disease. They are age and diet.
- ☺ Two significant factors contribute to heart disease: age and diet.

## 9. Emotive, Subjective, and Connotative Language

Words or phrases used to evoke an emotional response from the reader (as opposed to a logical response), expressing a personal opinion rather than fact; or adding a positive or negative judgment.

- ~ An innocent bystander was murdered in cold blood in downtown Chicago.<sup>6</sup>
- ☺ A man was killed in downtown Chicago.

## 10. Informal/Incorrect Register

The incorrect degree of formality determined by context.

- x Jackson reckons the boss isn't cut out for the job.
- ☺ According to Jackson, the manager is not competent in the role.

<sup>4</sup> [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general\\_writing/grammar/verb\\_tenses/verb\\_tense\\_consistency.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/grammar/verb_tenses/verb_tense_consistency.html)

<sup>5</sup> <http://aeo.sllf.qmul.ac.uk/Files/NounPhrases/Noun%20Phrases.html>

<sup>6</sup> <https://writingexplained.org/grammar-dictionary/emotive-language>