

# COMMON GRAMMAR ERRORS

Understanding the five most common grammatical errors can help you improve your writing. When you know which errors to look for and how to correct them, it's easier to act as your own editor.

## Error #1: Run-on Sentence or Comma Splice

A **run-on sentence** is a sentence that joins two independent clauses without punctuation or the appropriate conjunction. A **comma splice** is similar to a run-on sentence, but it uses a comma to join two clauses that have no appropriate conjunction.

Fixing a run-on sentence or a comma splice can be accomplished in one of five different ways:

1. For a compound sentence → separate the independent clauses into two sentences.
2. For a compound sentence → replace the comma with a semi-colon (;).
3. For a compound sentence → replace the comma with a coordinating conjunction (FANBOYS)—for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so.
4. For a complex sentence → replace the comma with a subordinating conjunction—after, although, before, unless, as, because, even though, if, since, until, when, while. If you begin the sentence with the subordinating conjunction you need to put comma after the dependent clause. If you begin the sentence with an independent clause, you do not use a comma to lead in to the dependent clause.
5. For a complex sentence → replace the comma with a semi-colon and transitional word—however, moreover, on the other hand, nevertheless, instead, also, therefore, consequently, otherwise, as a result. A comma should follow the transition word.

### For compound sentences:

Independent Clause 1  
Independent Clause 2  
Coordinating Conjunction

### For complex sentences:

Dependent Clause  
Independent Clause  
Transition Word

### Examples:

Run-on Sentence Error: It is sunny out she needs to put on some sunscreen.

Comma Splice Error: It is sunny out, she needs to put on some sunscreen.

### Corrections:

Correction 1 (two simple sentences): It is sunny out. She needs to put on some sunscreen.

Correction 2 (compound): It is sunny out; she needs to put on some sunscreen.

Correction 3 (compound): It is sunny out, so she needs to put on some sunscreen.

Correction 4 (complex): 1. Because it is sunny out, she needs to put on some sunscreen. 2. She needs to put on some sunscreen because it's hot out.

Correction 5 (complex): It is sunny out; therefore, she needs to put on some sunscreen.

## Error #2: Pronoun Errors

**Pronoun** (I, you, we, they, he, she, it, his, her, their, my, mine etc.) errors occur when pronouns do not agree in number with the **nouns** to which they refer. If the noun is singular, the pronoun must be singular. If the noun is plural, the pronoun must be plural. Everybody is a singular noun in the following sentence.

### Examples:

Incorrect: Everybody must bring their own lunch.

Correct: **Everybody** must bring **his or her** own lunch.

Many people believe that pronoun errors are the result of writers trying to avoid the implication of sexist language. Although this is an admirable goal, correct grammar is still important.

### **Error #3: Mistakes in Apostrophe Usage**

Apostrophes are used to show possession. However, you do not use an apostrophe after a possessive pronoun such as my, mine, our, ours, his, hers, its, their, or theirs.

#### **Examples:**

Incorrect: My **mothers** cabin is next to his' cabin.

Correct: My **mother's** cabin is next to his cabin.

In the case of it's, the apostrophe is used to indicate a contraction for "it is."

#### **Examples:**

Incorrect: **Its** a cold day in October.

Correct: **It's** a cold day in October.

### **Error #4: Lack of Subject/Verb Agreement**

When writing in the present tense, a sentence must have **subjects** and **verbs** that agree in number. If the subject is singular, the verb must be singular. If the subject is plural, the verb must be plural as well. How can you find the subject? Ask yourself who or what is doing the action (or the verb) in the sentence. Who or what is the subject? **Subjects** are orange and **verbs** are green in the following examples.

#### **Examples:**

Incorrect: The **recipes** **is** good for beginning chefs.

Correct: The **recipes** **are** good for beginning chefs.

Incorrect: **She** **walk** to school everyday.

Correct: **She** **walks** to school everyday.

### **Error #5: Misplaced Modifiers**

To communicate your ideas clearly, you must place a modifier directly next to the word it modifies. The modifier should clearly refer to a specific word in the sentence. Once you have identified the modifier, you need to identify the person, place or thing (noun) that it is modifying. **Modifiers (in green)** usually have to accompany the **noun (orange)** they are modifying or go as close to it as possible. This example and explanation will help.

#### **Examples:**

At a downtown dealership, Kara bought a truck from a salesman with a comb over.

Should we locate blue next to dealership? A blue downtown dealership? A blue Kara? A blue salesman? Of course not! Logic tells you that blue can describe only one word, truck, so we must place the modifier next to that word:

Correct: At a downtown dealership, Kara bought a **blue truck** from a salesman with a comb over.

*(By Lucy Flowers M.A., English and adapted from yourdictionary.com)*