

Avoiding Three Common Errors

Writers commonly make these three errors:

1. Comma splices
2. Lack of subject/verb agreement
3. Lack of parallel construction.

1. Comma Splices

Independent clauses are complete sentences that stand alone and end with a period. Two independent clauses should not be “spliced” together with a comma. Instead, independent clauses should be joined by a coordinating conjunction (**and, but, or, for, yet, so**), a semicolon, or a dash.

Examples.

a. Incorrect

Please let me know if you have a conflict that prevents you from attending, I want to make sure everyone has a chance to participate.

Correct

Please let me know if you have a conflict that prevents you from attending. I want to make sure everyone has a chance to participate.

b. Incorrect

I know this is an extremely busy time of the year for all of us, however it is important that you take a few minutes to fill out the questionnaire.

Correct

I know this is an extremely busy time of the year for all of us. However, it is important that you take a few minutes to fill out the questionnaire.

OR

I know this is an extremely busy time of the year for all of us; however, it is important that you take a few minutes to fill out the questionnaire.

c. Incorrect

The alternate plan does not meet our needs, therefore, it should be rejected.

Correct

The alternate plan does not meet our needs. Therefore, it should be rejected.

OR

The alternate plan does not meet our needs; therefore, it should be rejected.

2. Subject/Verb Agreement

Verbs must agree in number with their subjects. A plural subject takes a plural verb. A singular subject takes a singular verb. Even when words come between them, subject and verb must agree.

Examples.

a. Incorrect

Verbs has to agree with their subjects.

Correct

Verbs have to agree with their subjects.

b. Incorrect

The complexity of the problems make this a difficult issue.

Correct

The complexity of the problems makes this a difficult issue.

c. Incorrect

Current average costs for tuition and books for one course is approximately \$1,275 per quarter.

Correct

Current average costs for tuition and books for one course are approximately \$1,275 per quarter.

d. Incorrect

Outreach services and legal education is being provided to the elderly on the Red Lake Indian reservation.

Correct

Outreach services and legal education are being provided to the elderly on the Red Lake Indian reservation.

3. Parallel Construction

Coordinate ideas should be expressed in parallel form. The principle here is that expressions similar in content and function should be expressed similarly. The same principle applies to phrases or sentences presented in a series.

Examples.

a. Incorrect

She is capable, experienced, and often works until late at night.

Correct

She is capable, experienced, and hard-working.

b. Incorrect

The possibilities for holiday processing depend on an institution's delivery method, extract time, and whether or not it is open or closed.

Correct

The possibilities for holiday processing depend on an institution's delivery method, extract time, and hours of operation.

c. Incorrect

The distance to our office and not being able to reserve the library rooms make these spaces less than satisfactory.

Correct

The distance to our office and the inaccessibility of the library rooms make these spaces less than satisfactory.