

L3 English Language Proficiency Workshop

Making Grammar Feedback Work for You 2

**Learning and Teaching Unit
SP5, 2012**



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Overview

This session will address the following:

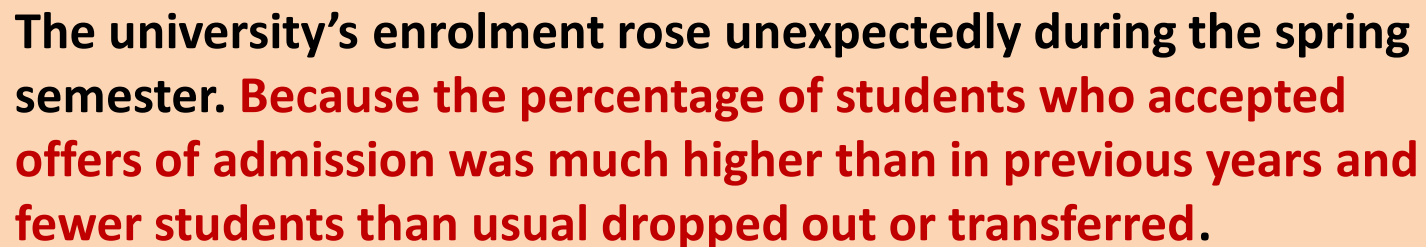
- Fragments
- Run-on sentences
- Subject-verb agreement
- Indefinite pronouns as subjects
- Collective nouns as subjects

Common Grammar Errors: Fragments

Avoid fragments in your writing:

- Fragments are incomplete sentences.

Example



The university's enrolment rose unexpectedly during the spring semester. **Because the percentage of students who accepted offers of admission was much higher than in previous years and fewer students than usual dropped out or transferred.**

- Sentences that begin with 'because' must have a main clause later.
- In this instance 'because' refers to the previous sentence.

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How to Correct Fragment Errors

Basic strategies for turning fragments into sentences:

1) Incorporate the fragment into an adjoining sentence.

e.g. The students were hooked on Facebook. ~~Posting~~ comments day and night.

The students were hooked on Facebook, posting comments day and night.

2) Add the missing element.

e.g. When aiming for the highest grades, ~~and~~ also ~~thinking~~ about the amount of hard work.

When aiming for the highest grades, students should also think about the amount of hard work.

Recognising Fragments

If you can spot fragments, you can fix them.

Ask these questions when you are checking for sentence fragments:

- Does the sentence have a subject?

e.g. The researcher found that his hypothesis was rejected. **And then carried out more experiments.**

- Does the sentence have a complete verb?

e.g. Robert keeps changing courses. **He trying to figure out what he really wants to do after university.**

- If the sentence begins with a subordinate clause, is there a main clause?

e.g. **Which is one reason why students should attend lectures.**

Run-on Sentences

Run-ons jam together two or more sentences, failing to separate them with appropriate punctuation.

Fix run-on sentences By:

- 1) identifying the problem;
- 2) determining where the run-on sentence needs to be divided; and
- 3) choosing the punctuation that best indicates the relationship between the main clauses.

e.g. The research study indicated that play encourages critical thinking it is important for children to have time to play, encourages the development of their cognition.

The research study indicated that play encourages critical thinking. It is important for children to have time to play as it encourages the development of their cognition.

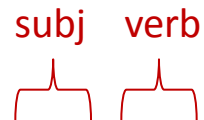
Fixing Run-on Sentences

1) Identify the problem:

- when you read your writing aloud, run-on sentences will often trip you up.
- if you find two main clauses with no punctuation separating them, you have a run-on sentence.
- You can also search for subject and verb pairs to check for run-ons



e.g. **Online lectures are not bound** to specific locations or old ways of



running lectures **they are** more flexible in allowing students to

telecommute and to determine the hours they study.

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Fixing Run-on Sentences

2) Determine where the run-on sentence needs to be divided:

e.g. Online lectures are not bound to specific locations or old ways of

running lectures | they are more flexible in allowing students to

telecommute and to determine the hours they study.

Fixing Run-on Sentences

3) Determine the relationship between the main clauses:

- Understand the effect or point you are trying to make.
- Use punctuation strategies:
 - Insert a full stop.

e.g. Online lectures are not bound to specific locations or old ways of running lectures. They are more flexible in allowing students to telecommute and to determine the hours they study.

- Insert a semicolon (and possibly a transitional word specifying the relationship between the two main clauses).

e.g. Online lectures are not bound to specific locations or old ways of running lectures; therefore, they are more flexible in allowing students to telecommute and to determine the hours they study.



Fixing Run-on Sentences

- Insert a comma and a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet).
- e.g. Online lectures are not bound to specific locations or old ways of running lectures, so they are more flexible in allowing students to telecommute and to determine the hours they study.

Activity 1

Read the text below and rewrite the sentences so that they are grammatically sound.

Younger learners do better than older learners in learning a second language (L2). Why? Because of the critical period hypothesis (CPH) which is a fixed span of years during which language learning can take place naturally and effortlessly, and after which it is not possible to be completely successful. Penfield & Roberts (1959) stated that the best time to learn a language is before the age of 10 because this time equated with the period taken for lateralization of the language function to the left side of the brain to be completed. Since then other research has challenged the lateralisation theory. Krashen, Long, and Scarella (1997 in Romaine 1995) studied age and second language learning.

Activity 1: Sample Answer

Younger learners do better than older learners in learning a second language (L2) because of the critical period hypothesis (CPH). CPH is a fixed span of years during which language learning can take place naturally and effortlessly. It is perceived that language learners will not be completely successful after this period. Penfield & Roberts (1959) stated that the best time to learn a language is before the age of 10. This is the period when the process of lateralization of the language function to the left side of the brain is completed. Other researchers have challenged the lateralisation theory. Krashen, Long, and Scarella (1997 in Romaine 1995) studied age and second language learning.

Subject-Verb Agreement

Agreement in the Present Tense:

- The subject takes the base form of the verb in all but the third person singular.
- Third person singular subjects are the exception to this rule.
 - When the subject is the third person singular (The student, Prof. John keeves, he...) you need to ad 's' or 'es' to the base form of the verb.
- Subjects joined by 'and':
 - When two subjects are joined by 'and', treat them as a compound (plural) subject.
e.g. The lecturer and tutor **are** heading towards the lecture theatre.
 - Some compound subjects work together as a single noun and are treated as singular. These subjects take the singular form of the verb.
e.g. Rock and roll **remains** the favourite music of the twenty-first century

Subject-Verb Agreement

- When two nouns are linked by ‘and’ are modified by **every** or **each**, these two nouns are likewise **treated as one singular subject**.

e.g. Each student and tutor **comes** to the weekly seminars.

Every assignment and test result **comes** to the attention of the Program Director.

- An exception to this rule arises when the word ‘**each**’ follows a compound subject.

e.g. The course and the program **each** **have** their own **codes**.

Usage varies depending on the number of the direct object.

Subject-Verb Agreement

- Subjects joined by **or**, **either...or**, or **neither...nor**:
 - When the subject is joined by **or**, **either...or**, or **neither...nor**, make sure the **verb agrees with the subject closest to the verb**.

e.g. Is it ^{singular} the assignment or the ^{plural} quizzes that ^{plural} are due?

Is it ^{plural} the quizzes or the ^{singular} assignment that ^{singular} is due?


Neither the ^{plural} students nor the ^{singular} lecturer ^{singular} knows the exam dates.

Either a ^{singular} tutor or some ^{plural} students ^{plural} have taken the reports.


Subjects Separated from Verbs

- The most common agreement errors occur when words come between the subject and verb.
- To use the correct verb form, identify the subject and the verb.
- Ignore any phrases that come between them.

e.g. **Research findings** on early childhood education **reports** that play promotes cognitive development. ()

Research findings on early childhood education **report** that play promotes cognitive development. ()

The social work student, undertaking one of his placements, **require** a lot of mentoring. ()

The social work student, undertaking one of his placements, **requires** a lot of mentoring. ()

Activity 2









Read the feedback that your lecturer has provided you on Handout 1. Rewrite the text so that it is grammatically correct.

Indefinite Pronouns as Subjects

- The choice of a singular or plural pronoun is determined by the antecedent (the noun that the pronoun refers to).
- Indefinite pronouns such as some, few, all, someone, everyone and each, often do not refer to identifiable subjects.
 - They do not have antecedents.
- Most indefinite pronouns are singular and agree with the singular forms of verbs.
- Some like ‘**both**’ and ‘**many**’ are always plural and agree with the plural forms of verbs.
- Other indefinite pronouns are variable and can agree with either singular or plural verb forms, depending on the context of the sentence.

Indefinite Pronouns as Subjects

- When a pronoun is singular, its verb must be singular.
- 'Each' is always treated as a singular pronoun in academic writing.
e.g. Each **are** an outstanding student. ()
Each **is** an outstanding student. ()
- But when 'each' is modified by a phrase that includes a plural noun, the choice of a singular verb form becomes less obvious:
e.g. Each of the girls **are** fit. ()
Each of the girls **is** fit. ()

Each of our dogs **get** a present. ()
Each of our dogs **gets** a present. ()

Collective Nouns as Subjects

- Collective nouns refer to groups (audience, class, committee, crowd, family, government, group, jury, public, team).
- When numbers of a group are considered as a unit, use singular verbs and singular pronouns.
e.g. The **crowd is** unusually quiet at the moment, but **it** will get noisy soon.
- When members of a group are considered as individuals, use plural verbs and plural pronouns.
e.g. The **faculty have** their differing opinions on how to address the problems caused by reduced government support.



Collective Nouns as Subjects

- Some collective nouns can be singular in one context and plural in another.
- Writers must decide which verb form to use based on sentence context.

e.g. The **number** of researchers who study the problem **is** increasing.
A **number** of researchers **are** studying the problem.

Reference



Faigley, L 2011, *The little penguin handbook*, Frenchs Forest, NSW, Pearson Australia.