Preventing Sentence Errors

Every sentence contains one or more clauses (a clause is a group of words that contains a subject and a verb); preventing sentence errors requires understanding of clauses.

There are two types of clauses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Clause</th>
<th>Dependent Clause</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An <strong>independent clause</strong> can stand alone as a complete idea (thus it is a sentence)</td>
<td>A <strong>dependent clause</strong> cannot stand alone as a complete idea (thus it is not a sentence)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Example:** Heights make me dizzy.

**Example:** Although heights make me dizzy.

**Dependent clauses are often introduced by subordinating conjunctions,** such as after before until although if unless when since while because as or **relative pronouns,** such as who which that whom

There are **3 types** of sentence errors: sentence fragments, fused sentences, and comma splices.

1. **A sentence fragment** lacks a subject or a verb or fails to express a complete thought. A sentence fragment occurs when a portion of a sentence (a dependent clause or a phrase) is punctuated as a complete sentence.

   **Examples:** Finishing the most difficult part of the exam.
   If I had known then what I know now.

   **A sentence fragment may be corrected in two ways:**

   - Provide the missing element (subject or verb):
     **Example:** I finished the most difficult part of the exam.

   - Connect the dependent clause with an independent clause to make a complete sentence:
     **Example:** Finishing the most difficult part of the exam, I went on to easier sections.
     If I had known then what I know now, I would have made a different decision.

2. **A fused sentence** incorrectly runs together two independent clauses without using a conjunction or punctuation. One sentence is fused into another.

   **Example:** John wrote a very powerful essay it made me want to change how I think about college.

   **A fused sentence may be corrected using various strategies:**

Revised 3/1/2014
• Separate the two independent clauses with a period, creating two separate sentences:
  Example: John wrote a very powerful essay. It made me want to change the way I think about college.

• Connect the independent clauses with a coordinating conjunction (and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet):
  Example: I took the test, and I got the highest grade.

• Use a subordinating conjunction (after, before, until, although, if, unless, when, since, while, because, as) to make one clause dependent:
  Example: When I took the test, I got the highest grade.

• Separate the two independent clauses with a semicolon:
  Example: John wrote a very powerful essay; it made me want to change the way I think about college.

• Separate the two independent clauses with a semicolon and a conjunctive adverb (consequently, in fact, indeed, then, furthermore, however, moreover, nevertheless, therefore):
  Example: John wrote a very powerful essay; in fact, it made me want to change the way I think about college.

3. A comma splice incorrectly joins two independent clauses with a comma. The writer has tried to splice two sentences into one by placing a comma between them.
   Example: I worked hard in class, I learned a lot.

   A comma splice may be corrected using these strategies (similar to those listed under fused sentences above):

   • Replace the comma with a period, creating two separate sentences:
     Example: I worked hard in class. I learned a lot.

   • Follow the comma with a coordinating conjunction (and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet):
     Example: I worked hard in class, and I learned a lot.

   • Use a subordinating conjunction (after, before, until, although, if, unless, when, since, while, because, as) to make one clause dependent:
     Example: Because I worked hard in class, I learned a lot.

   • Replace a comma with a semicolon:
     Example: Reaching a goal is satisfying; I’m proud of my work.

   • Replace a comma with a semicolon and a conjunctive adverb (consequently, in fact, indeed, then, furthermore, however, moreover, nevertheless, therefore):
     Example: Reaching a goal is satisfying; consequently, I’m proud of my work.