Grammar: Common Errors

Run-on sentences
A run-on sentence is a grammatically incorrect way of combining two or more sentences into one long sentence.

Clues that indicate a run-on sentence

- The sentence seems very long and has no conjunctions (and, or, nor, but, yet or so).

  Example:

  o Incorrect: A run-on sentence is like arriving at a border crossing and refusing to stop the consequences can be serious.
  o Corrected: A run-on sentence is like arriving at a border crossing and refusing to stop. The consequences can be serious.

- There are two independent clauses (a sentence that has a subject, verb and expresses a complete thought) that are combined in one sentence without the use of conjunctions, appropriate punctuation, or subordination.

  Example:

  o Incorrect: The party that I went to last night was fun, however I didn’t know many people.
  o Corrected: The party that I went to last night was fun; however, I didn’t know many people.
    Or
    The party that I went to last night was fun. However, I didn’t know many people.
Sentence fragments
Sentence fragments are incomplete sentences because they are usually missing subjects or verbs, or they do not express a complete thought.

Clues that indicate a sentence fragment
- The idea or thought that the sentence expresses has not been completed.
  Example:
  o Incorrect: I have developed a greater sense of rhythm. Since I started taking music lessons.
  o Corrected: I have developed a greater sense of rhythm since I started taking piano lessons.
- Sentences missing subjects or verbs will make no sense when read aloud.

Subject-verb agreement
Subject-verb agreement is present in a sentence when the subject and the verb agree in **number** (singular or plural) and also in **person** (1\(^{st}\) person, 2\(^{nd}\) or 3\(^{rd}\)). You must make sure that the subject in your sentence agrees with the verb even if the subject is separated from the verb by extra information.

  o Example: The young woman, who owns many cars, *is* my neighbour.  
    (Singular subject – singular verb)

Even if you are using past, present, or future verb tenses you still must be sure that your subject and verb agree in number and person.

  o Example: The man and his son *saw* a movie last night.  
    (Plural subject – plural verb in the past)

Indefinite pronouns as subjects
Indefinite pronouns include the words *everyone, someone, somebody, and something.* These pronouns are always followed by verbs in the singular form. This is because they refer to one person or one thing.

  o Example: Someone *is* ringing the doorbell.
Plural nouns that take a singular verb

There are some plural nouns that take a singular verb. They include the following:

- Names of subjects that end in the letter ‘s’.
  - *Example:* Physics *is* my favourite subject; mathematics *is* not.
- Expressions of time, money, distance and weight
  - *Example* (time): Three hours to complete a baseball game *seems* unnecessarily long to casual fans.
  - *Example* (distance): Ten kilometers *is* a challenging goal for occasional runners.
  - *Example* (money): One hundred and twenty dollars *is* too much to pay for a pair of jeans.

Collective nouns

A collective noun implies more than one. For example, a hockey team normally plays with six players on the ice -- unless there is a penalty. However, those six players are seen as part of one team. When the collective noun is the subject of the sentence, it is followed by a **singular verb**.

- *Example:* My team is on a bit of a winning streak right now.
- *Example:* The jury was unanimous in deciding a verdict of not guilty
- *Example:* The load of bricks is ready to be delivered.

  [In contrast: Bricks *are* a very common building material in Ontario]