

How to

...avoid sentence errors

There are two types of sentence error:

- 1 writing an incomplete sentence, i.e. one that does not contain a subject or a finite verb, or does not express a complete idea
- 2 writing two or more sentences with only a comma between them.

The most common error of sentence structure is joining two or more sentences together with only a comma between them. People seem to do this less often when the subjects of the sentences are different than when they are the same. Fewer people would write:

- The parent ran towards the nursery, the child ate a doughnut.

than

- He ran towards the nursery, he was in a hurry.

A moment's thought will show that the structure of both these 'sentences' is identical and if one is wrong, both are wrong.

- 1 The parent ran towards the nursery.
- 2 The child ate a doughnut.
- 3 He ran towards the nursery.
- 4 He was in a hurry.



These mistakes happen because the writer feels that the sentences are too short and that, as they belong together in meaning, they ought to be joined. This may be true, but using a comma is *not* the way to do it.

Let's look again at the faulty construction:

- He ran towards the nursery, he was in a hurry.

There are four ways of putting this right:

- 1 He ran towards the nursery. He was in a hurry.
- 2 He ran towards the nursery; he was in a hurry.
- 3 He ran towards the nursery because he was in a hurry.
- 4 Being in a hurry, he ran towards the nursery.



Write short, clear sentences

Business English favours the use of clear, short sentences. Writing short sentences demands clear thinking. Long sentences can easily become muddled and hard for the reader to understand.

Make sure that every sentence you write deals with only one topic. This is called the **rule of unity**. Whenever you complete a clear-cut, self-contained statement, no matter how short it is, **use a full stop**.

A sentence should deal with one topic.

People often write long sentences that are not unities. They are long simply because a number of separate statements, which should have had a sentence each, have been bundled together. For example:



I looked out of the window to see what the weather was like and as it was fine I decided to suggest that the doors should be opened as it might encourage the children to play in the sunshine and get some fresh air.

Try this!

Rewrite the passage using short, clear sentences. You can change the wording if you wish.

Long sentences

Even a long sentence (one of 20 words or more) should be a unity. A good long sentence is one whose different parts are so closely related that if a break were made between them it would disturb the flow of thought.

Every sentence should be a unity.

Try this!

Divide the following text into several sentences without altering the wording:

Thank you for your enquiry of 3rd December concerning the provision of child care at our nursery, we believe that we offer the best facilities and level of care in the area, we have a large playroom, facilities for babies and a lovely garden where the children can play, I'm enclosing a leaflet which outlines our charges and also our opening hours.