



PERT Review Guide

Writing and Sentence Skills



VALENCIA COLLEGE

About this Resource

Who it's for

This guide is for students preparing to take the PERT assessment, students preparing to retake the PERT, or for students who would like to brush up on their sentence and writing skills.

What it is

The information in this book is meant to provide a *review* of major sentence and grammar skills needed to pass the PERT Writing Assessment as well as those skills needed to be a strong college-level writer.

It is not a comprehensive course in academic or college-level writing. If you have no previous experience with the subject matter, it is unlikely that this guide will provide enough information for you to be adequately prepared. If that is the case, it may be more beneficial to take a developmental writing course, instead.

In this Guide:

General PERT Information



Sentence Skill Tips & Practice



Review Questions with Key



Area for Notes or Questions

VALENCIA COLLEGE

Materials composed, compiled, edited and formatted by Valencia
College Learning Support staff and English faculty at Osceola Campus

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Table of Contents

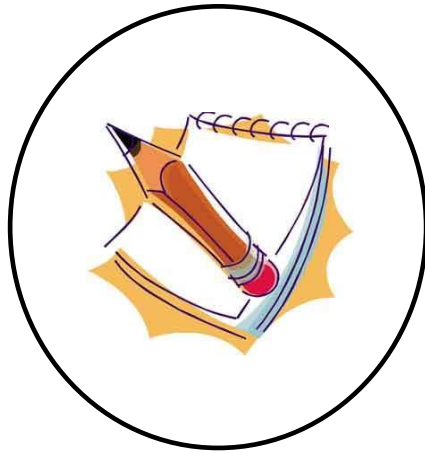
Parallelism.....	1
Verb Tense	3
Eliminating Wordiness	9
Subject/verb Agreement	13
Coordination	17
• Comma splices	
• Semicolons	
• Fused/run-on sentences	
Subordination	23
• Fragments	
Dangling/misplaced Modifiers	27
Clear Pronoun Reference	31
Logical Comparisons	35
Review Questions	39
Answer Key	45
Notes(for potential review session).....	46
Appendix	49

Resources: <http://valenciacollege.edu/assessments/pert/taking-the-exam.cfm>

Things to consider about the PERT...

- The PERT assessment is meant to determine whether you are ready for college level classes. Ultimately, your score on the test will place you into either college-prep or college-level courses. Consequently, the more seriously you take the test, the more likely you are to prepare appropriately..
- Although students want to start college-level classes immediately, it is often more advisable to take those classes that are accurately leveled to the student. Some students decide to take courses for which they are not prepared, and they often end up struggling through the semester, feeling lost and discouraged, withdrawing from the course, or maybe even failing.
- In the end, it would be better to take the proper developmental or prep class and be well-prepared for the college-level class rather than to fail and retake it. Even though taking a prep course would require an extra cost upfront, it could more than pay for itself down the road in time, emotional health, and even further tuition costs.
- It will not help in the long run to crash study new material right before the PERT so that you can test into a higher-level class. Short-term minimal knowledge of what will ultimately be the primary discourse for the class may leave you feeling lost and struggling to keep up with the material.
- It is easy to focus on the PERT as a “pass or fail” test, but it is important to remember that the test is not designed to measure your intelligence. It is an assessment of your academic competencies and whether they are refined enough to help you succeed in a college environment.

Skill Areas



Parallelism

Overview

You should use parallelism whenever you have two or more items in a list or series. Parallelism is when you use the same grammatical structure (all adjectives, all nouns, all verbs, etc.) for each item in your list or series.

- First, ask what is being listed.
- Second, ask what grammatical structure is set up.
- Finally, ask whether the structure for each item ‘matches’.
If it doesn’t, the sentence lacks parallelism.

Example 1 John wanted to be happy, popular, and have a lot of money.

- What is being listed?
What John wants to be.
- What is the primary grammatical structure?
Adjectives
- Do all items listed “match”? *No. The last is a verb phrase.*

Choose an *adjective* that describes someone who has “a lot of money”.

John wanted to be *happy, popular, and rich.*

✓ Now, the sentence has parallel structure.

Example 2 Maria needed to talk to her teacher, rent a bus, and was buying supplies.

- What is being listed? *What Maria needed to do*
- What is the primary grammatical structure? *Present tense infinitive phrases.*
- Do all items listed “match”? *No. The last is a past progressive verb.*

Choose a *present tense verb* to replace “was buying”

Maria needed to *talk* to her teacher, *rent* a bus, and *buy* supplies.

✓ Now, the sentence has parallel structure.

Writing Skill 1 - Parallelism

Example 3 Joe looked under the bed, above the door, and searched in the closet.

- What is being listed? *The places Joe looked*
- What is the primary grammatical structure? *Location and noun*
- Do all items listed “match”? *No. The third is a verb phrase.*

Choose a location and noun to replace “searched in the closet”

Joe looked *under the bed, above the door, and in the closet.*

✓ Now, the sentence has parallel structure

Quick Test

Which part of the sentence is not parallel?

1. Della A) **found** an old family recipe, B) **purchased** the special ingredients, and C) **was planning** to surprise her friends with a savory dish.
2. A) **Swimming**, B) **water skiing**, and C) **to play golf** are activities that provide good exercise.
3. A) **Outstanding reference books**, B) **art exhibits that are rewarding** and C) **interesting videos** are available for all students in the Valencia Learning Resources Center.

Answers

1. C: was planning should be “planned”
2. C: to play golf should be “playing golf”
3. B: art exhibits that are rewarding should be “rewarding art exhibits”

Verb Tense

Overview

Defined: Verb tense is the form of a verb used to indicate a point in time.

Verbs tell time by changing their form. This is more commonly known as verb tense. Verb tenses help us understand exactly when actions occur. Some sentences require a combination of tenses to make an idea clear. In such situations, if you do not use the correct combination of tenses, you send your readers on a bumpy journey through the past, present, and/or future.

-
- The proper (or improper) use of verb tense can make all the difference in placing readers where you want them to be in time.
 - Each verb tense serves a particular purpose in telling time along a chronological series of events.
 - It is important to know which tense to use for the correct point in time.

- 1) Sam **had** never seen a more beautiful painting.
(before that moment, but he has since)
- 2) Sam **has** never seen a more beautiful painting.
(since that moment, and still hasn't yet)
- 3) Sam **will** never see a more beautiful painting.
(predicts that he won't, ever again)

Each choice carries a different meaning for the reader:

- Ask where, in time, the reader is led to be.
- What has already happened, what is happening, or what will have happened at the very point you place the reader?

Writing Skill 2 – Verb Tense

For compound sentences, ask at what moment each event occurred or will occur, which will help you decide what the right verb form should be.

- 1) Javier **will play** video games after leaving work.
(he is still at work and plans to play after he has already left)

- 2) Javier **plays** video games after leaving work.
(he plays not just once, but as part of a present routine)

- 3) Javier **played** video games after leaving work.
(he played once, at one point in the past)

- 4) Javier **would play** video games after leaving work.
(he played not just once, but as part of a past routine, and doesn't anymore)

Also remember that **had** has two forms: past tense in time and past tense in possession.

It had rained (past tense in time)

I had a date (past tense possession)

Some rare cases require both forms to communicate something specific:

I **had had** a date. (He once did, but the date was cancelled. He no longer has the date)

I **had** a date (The date occurred and is now over)

To decide verb tense within a sentence that describes more than one action, ask when each action took place and at what point the reader should be. This will be a sentence with a main clause and a subordinate clause.

Your clues are words like:

- after
- before
- by the time
- until
- if
- unless



Tom was afraid of snakes **until** he saved one from a trap.

These help place the action in the correct place on the timeline.

Writing Skill 2 – Verb Tense

Often the difficult part is to decide which action to emphasize and which to put in the background. Your choice of verb tense will depend on your choice of when each thing occurred and/or when each thing will (or might) occur.

Examples

Maurice never **eats** hamburgers because he **respects** cows.
(two simultaneous actions)

Maurice **will have** healthy arteries if he **continues** to avoid beef.
(predicts the results of a continuing current action)

Diane **knows** that her beagle **chewed** the big hole in the sofa.
(present tense knowledge of a past tense event)

Diane **knew** that her beagle **had** destroyed the sofa.
(past tense knowledge of a past tense event)

Diane **will be** even more upset because the dog also **shredded** a good shirt.
(predicts the discovery of a past tense event)

Juan **plans** to buy a new car because any day his Ford Pinto **will be** ready for the scrap yard.
(present tense action as a result of an event predicted to happen in the future)

Juan **sold** the old Ford he **had had** for so long.
(past tense event that occurred before another, completed event)

**notice the use of “had had” for both past tense in time and past tense possession*

When to use had:

Special cases seek to put one completed event further in the past than another, more recent past tense event. Ask how many steps into the past your first clause has travelled. If there are no steps into the past, simple past tense should be used in the second clause. If there is one step into the past, you'll need the word 'had' which creates the past perfect tense.

Writing Skill 2 – Verb Tense

These first clauses take no steps into the past:

Marie **can't** remember who **took** the book from her desk. (present)

Marie **won't** remember who **took** the book from her desk. (future)

Luke **will take** the book he **asked** to borrow. (future)

These cases express present (or predicted) actions that occur (or will occur) after a past action.

These first clauses take *one step* into the past:

Marie **couldn't** remember who **had** taken the book from her desk.

Luke **took** the book he **had** asked to borrow.

These cases express one past action that occurred after another past action.

Quick Test

In the sentences that follow, choose the correct form of the verb.

1. The spider will have eaten all the bugs by the time the night (was over, is over).
2. Jason knew that he (lost, has lost, had lost) his wallet when he found his back pocket empty.
3. Tenesha looks tired when she (works, worked) late.
4. Jasmine will need an apology ready when she (steps, stepped, had stepped) on his glasses.
5. Omar was certain that he (buys, bought, had bought) mushrooms just the other day.

Answers

1. is over (predicts the future result of a present situation)
2. had lost (expresses a past tense discovery of a past tense event)
3. works (expresses a present tense ongoing routine)
4. steps (predicts two future events that will happen in a particular sequence)
5. had bought (expresses past tense knowledge of a past tense event)

Eliminating Wordiness

Overview

Defined: Wordiness is using more words than are necessary to convey a message.

It's often tempting to use a lot of words to fill up space or make yourself sound more sophisticated. The truth is that extra words often have the opposite effect. It is sometimes easier to think of more words to use than it is to take out the ones you don't need. Though you might think that more and fancier words make your writing interesting, they create a drag that leaves the reader tired and the meaning hard to find.

Taking out wordy phrases from your writing makes it **concise-clear and without unnecessary content**. Three main causes of wordy writing are:

1. long phrases
2. redundant phrases
3. utility words

1. A **long phrase** is a group of words that carry the same meaning as a single word or carry no real meaning at all. Some common long phrases are: To tell the truth, come to find out, for all intents and purposes, due to the fact, in this day and age...More often, a single word is more effective than a long phrase.

Wordy

Concise

due to the fact that at this point in time in this day and age in the event that at frequent times	because now today when/ if often
--	--

Writing Skill 3 - Wordiness

Wordy: Due to the fact that Nora hadn't seen the movie, she didn't know the plot.

Concise: Because Nora hadn't seen the movie, she didn't know the plot.

Wordy: In the event that the restaurant closes down, the patrons won't be too happy.

Concise: If the restaurant closes down, the patrons won't be too happy.

<u>Redundant Phrases</u>	<u>Utility Words</u>
Red in color	absolutely
Round in shape	truly
Future plans	definitely
Free gift	basically
Unexpected surprise	really
Often times	totally
Large in size	completely
Past memories	very
End result	literally
Added bonus	truthfully
Final outcome	actually

2. What also makes a sentence wordy is a **redundant phrase**—a *phrase that repeats meaning*. The phrases in the table only need the words in bold to convey meaning.

3. The use of **utility words** or “deadwood” words is one of the most common ways to bloat a sentence with unnecessary content. Utility words are rarely necessary.

Take a look at these sentences. The unnecessary words have been eliminated.

<p>She was really scared. I was definitely angry. We really and truly wanted to go. I absolutely agree with you. She was pleased with the final outcome. He has every single collectible. For all intents and purposes, the car was packed. Nancy and Jim are in the process of buying a new home.</p>
--

✓ What remains is a concise sentence!

Quick Test

1. Choose the sentence that is worded most effectively:

- A: Rand wanted to be completely sure that he was absolutely prepared.
- B: Marie was tired, due to the fact that she was working really late.
- C: Shaun drove tirelessly throughout the night.
- D: Keith was definitely ready to proceed, pleased with the end result.

2. Choose the least concise sentence:

- A: We bought the car that was red and shiny.
- B: His past memories were affecting his future plans.
- C: She was eager to visit a new place.
- D: They tried to postpone the party until after the break.

Answers

- 1. C: The sentence has no unnecessary words or phrases.
- 2. B: "Past memories" and "future plans" are redundant phrases.

Subject/Verb Agreement

Overview

To understand the basic rules for subject/verb agreement, it is important to identify whether the subject of your sentence is **singular** or **plural**. Present tense verbs must agree with their subjects. A singular subject requires a singular verb, and a plural subject requires a plural verb.

- The singular verb (except you and I) takes an s or es. A plural verb does not.
- Plural subjects come in two common forms: A plural noun such as “boys” or “children” OR more than one noun as the subject(s) of the sentence

Example 1

The **dog** in my neighborhood barks all night long. (only one thing)

Dogs in my neighborhood bark all night long. (more than one thing)

My dog and my **neighbor’s dog** bark all night long. (more than one thing)

Example 2

A **huge credit card balance** stresses people out. (only one thing)

A **huge credit card balance** and a **small paycheck** stress people out. (more than one thing)

Huge credit card balances stress people out. (more than one thing)

Two common situations make subject-verb agreement tricky.
The first involves **prepositions**.

- Some prepositions (words that show location or proximity) are equal in meaning to *and*, so they give *the impression* that you have a plural subject.

Writing Skill 4 – Subject/Verb Agreement

- Use caution with prepositional phrases beginning with these words:

in addition to	including	along with
accompanied by	as well as	together with

These help describe the subject or what is related to it, but they don't add another subject. Any of these phrases fixes the subject as singular, and will require a singular verb form.

Example 1

The barking dog and my neighbor's screeching children keep me awake.

(Both nouns share equal importance as one compound subject)

The barking dog, *as well as* my neighbor's screeching children, keeps me awake.

(The first noun is the main subject, the prepositional phrase is descriptive)

Example 2

A huge credit card balance and a small paycheck stress people out.

(Both nouns share equal importance as one compound subject)

A huge credit card balance, *together with* a small paycheck, stresses people out.

(The first noun is the main subject, the prepositional phrase is descriptive)

The second tricky case of subject-verb agreement occurs with **indefinite pronouns**.

Some of these indefinite pronouns are:

<u>Singular:</u>	each, neither, either, one, every
<u>Plural:</u>	both
	(all, some, none - may depend on the noun, or <i>of</i> phrase)
	Ex: All of the cake <i>is</i> gone. All of the cookies <i>are</i> gone

When a sentence uses one of these pronouns as the subject, a prepositional phrase beginning with *of* typically follows. The prepositional phrase creates *the illusion* of a plural or singular subject.

Writing Skill 4 – Subject/Verb Agreement

Example 1

Neither of these gorillas likes ripe bananas.

Each of these apples contains a day's worth of vitamin C.

These phrases seek to single out one from the rest, making the subject singular.

Example 2

Both of these gorillas like ripe bananas.

All of these apples contain a day's worth of vitamin C.

These words seek to include more than one, making the subject plural.

Remember your pronouns:

Even if you've mastered the more complicated subject/verb agreement combinations, don't forget the simpler ones: **pronouns**. Remember to use the correct pronoun when addressing plural and singular subjects.

If you begin with a singular noun, be sure the pronoun is also singular.
If you begin with a plural noun, be sure the pronoun is also plural.

INCORRECT:

You should be able to identify **an opportunity** when you see **them**.

(Here, the singular noun is mismatched with a plural pronoun)

CORRECT:

1. You should be able to identify **an opportunity** when you see **it**. (singular)

2. You should be able to identify **opportunities** when you see **them**. (plural)

Writing Skill 4 – Subject/Verb Agreement

Quick Test

In the sentences that follow, choose the correct form of the verb.

1. Every evening, a mother raccoon, along with her three cubs, (tips, tip) over the garbage cans and (strews, strew) trash all over the backyard.
2. During a typical Florida summer, both the blazing sun and the heavy traffic (makes, make) driving without an air conditioner a dreadful experience.
3. Every one of Sarah's brothers (has, have) a big truck, (wears, wear) a cowboy hat and boots, and (lives, live) in Texas, but they all (prefers, prefer) classical music over country.
4. A pair of nutcrackers as well as a small mallet (makes, make) eating crab legs messy, but less frustrating.
5. Computers are only as good as (their, its) updates.

Answers

1. tips, strews (“the mother raccoon” is the main subject)
2. make (the use of “both” and more than one subject)
3. has, wears, lives, prefer (begins as singular but changes to plural using “all”)
4. makes (“pair” is a singular noun!)
5. their (“computers” is a plural noun)

Coordination

Overview

Defined: Coordination connects two closely-related independent clauses that are equally important. When writers use coordination, they don't want to emphasize one idea over the other. Each idea has equal importance.

Proper coordination involves the use of:

1. Coordinating conjunctions (fanboys)
All preceded by a comma!
2. Semicolons
3. Conjunctive adverbs

Improper coordination often leads to:

- Comma splices
- Fused sentences
- Errors in punctuation

Read these two simple sentences:

The wind got stronger. The small boats rocked in the waves.

In this series of simple sentences, the effect on the reader is that two different but equally important events are happening. The sentences, however, are choppy and read like a children's book. They need a word that not only joins the ideas but also conveys a particular relationship. Each **coordinating conjunction** serves a different purpose, so it is important to know what you want your sentences to say when choosing one.

FANBOYS

For	to indicate cause or motive
And	to include a similar idea or expression
Nor	neither
But	to indicate contrast or contradiction
Or	either
Yet	despite
So	to indicate cause/effect

When the writer ties the two sentences together with coordination, the reader then realizes that multiple events are happening simultaneously:

The wind got stronger, **and** the small boats rocked in the waves.
(brings two similar events together with equal importance)

THE SEMICOLON



Another effective way to use coordination is to use a **semicolon**.
A semicolon is used to connect/coordinate two independent clauses;
it is not to be used as a comma.

The function of a semicolon is to acknowledge that each clause is independent, but also to signal the reader that the two independent clauses are closely-related.

When to use a semicolon

Read these two sentences:

Some students worked night jobs.
These students were regularly late to morning classes.

There is clearly a cause/effect relationship between these two ideas, but the writer doesn't make a connection. Each sentence is independent, and can therefore share a semicolon to create a relationship:

Some students worked night jobs; they were regularly late to morning classes.
(brings the two ideas together to indicate a close relationship)

You can also use a **conjunctive adverb** between two independent clauses when using a semicolon. These are words or phrases that act as conjunctions but indicate the relationship more clearly:

Some students worked night jobs;
as a result, these students were regularly late to morning classes.

CONJUNCTIVE ADVERBS

Also	Certainly	On the other hand
In addition	Finally	Otherwise
As a result	For example	Similarly
However	Instead	Furthermore
Moreover	Therefore	Likewise
Consequently	Nevertheless	Thus

- Use a semicolon between independent clauses joined by conjunctive adverbs.
- Your choice of conjunctive adverb will depend on the type of relationship you want to indicate.

Examples

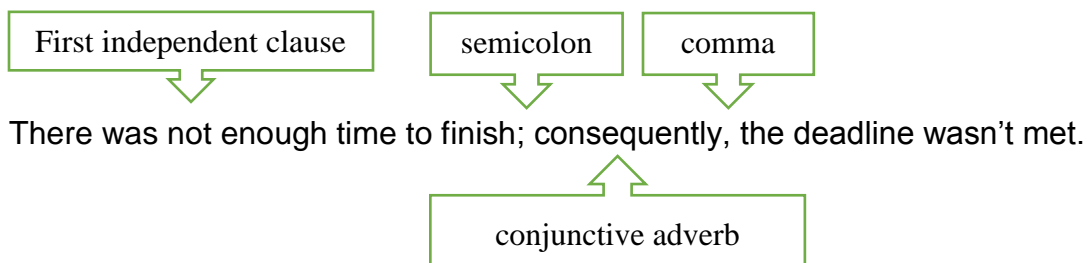
The theme park raised ticket costs significantly; **as a result**, the lines are shorter for rides.

It was a long wait to get into the concert; **furthermore**, the band was delayed after we got inside.



Remember to keep your conjunctive adverb in lower-case.
Though these phrases can begin a sentence, these are not at the beginning.

Notice the strict pattern for using a semicolon and conjunctive adverb:



While commas help by separating ideas, one way NOT to put two independent clauses together is with a comma, alone. This is called a **comma splice**. A comma is too weak a connection to join two complete ideas.

Writing Skill 5 - Coordination

Examples of comma splices:

1. Jackson ate too much chocolate, he was sick to his stomach.
2. She was afraid to get her hair cut, she was happy when she saw the results.

Revised with fanboys:

1. Jackson ate too much chocolate, **and** he was sick to his stomach.
2. She was afraid to get her hair cut, **but** she was happy when she saw the results.

Revised with semicolons:

1. Jackson ate too much chocolate; he was sick to his stomach.
2. She was afraid to get her hair cut; she was happy when she saw the results.

Revised with semicolons and conjunctive adverbs:

1. Jackson ate too much chocolate; as a result, he was sick to his stomach.
2. She was afraid to get her hair cut; however, she was happy when she saw the results.

The second way NOT to put two complete sentences together is with no punctuation at all. This is called a **fused** or **run-on sentence**.

Examples of fused sentences:

1. Jayden wanted to go sailing he asked some friends they agreed to go the next day.
2. Noor saw the storm coming he wanted to finish washing the car he worked faster.

Revised with coordinating conjunctions:

1. Jayden wanted to go sailing, **so** he asked some friends, **and** they agreed to go the next day.
2. Noor saw the storm coming, **but** he wanted to finish washing the car, **so** he worked faster.

Remember the pattern of punctuation for each formula:

- commas go before fanboys.
- Semicolons go before conjunctive adverbs (in between related independent clauses).
- Commas go after conjunctive adverbs

Quick Test

Choose the best coordination for these sentences:

1. The store was closed. John wasn't able to buy cheese.

- A: closed, so
- B: closed, and
- C: closed, yet
- D: closed, nor

2. He was upset that he lost his keys; _____, he was happy that he didn't have to drive.

- A: in addition
- B: on the other hand
- C: likewise
- D: therefore

3. He was late. He was also rude.

- A: late in addition; he was also rude.
- B: late; In addition, he was also rude.
- C: late; in addition, he was also rude.
- D: late, in addition, he was also rude.

Answers

1. A: indicates cause and effect
2. B: indicates a contrasting idea (upset/happy)
3. C: executes the proper pattern (semicolon + conjunctive adverb + comma)

Subordination

Overview

Defined: Subordination connects two closely related clauses by emphasizing the importance of one over the other. Subordinating words and phrases take the emphasis away to give attention to the idea in the independent clause. A writer uses these to serve as the “opening act” for a more important piece of information.

Proper subordination involves the use of:

1. Subordinating conjunctions
2. Dependent clauses
3. Correct use of relative pronouns

Improper subordination leads to:

1. Fragments

Read these two simple sentences:

The boats should be secured. The waves will carry them out to sea.

In this series of simple sentences, the effect on the reader is that two different ideas seem to exist independently from one another. The writer, however, wants to create a cause and effect message. The way to do that is to use effective subordination. Decide which clause should be dependent upon the more important, independent clause. Each **subordinating conjunction** serves a different purpose, so it is important to know what you want your subordinate sentence to say when choosing one.

SUBORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS

Although	Unless	Though
As	Since	While
Even though	If	After
When	Whereas	Because

When the writer ties the two clauses together with subordination, the reader then realizes that one idea or event is the background for a more important one:

Dependent clause

Independent clause

Unless the boats are secured, the waves will carry them out to sea.
(emphasizes that one idea will be the cause of a primary event)

Writing Skill 6 - Subordination

DEPENDENT CLAUSES

Dependent clauses are incomplete thoughts or statements. When using subordination, you use a dependent clause along with an independent one. Dependent clauses usually include a subordinator.

Proper subordination will use one of two formulas:

1. (Subordinator) dependent clause, independent clause. *Comma must be used*
2. Independent clause (subordinator) dependent clause. *No comma needed*

Examples

Because he only had one class, Dependent clause (not as important)	he didn't spend much time studying. independent clause (the important part)
--	--

As he approached the museum, Dependent clause (not as important)	he realized it was closed. independent clause (the important part)
--	---

He never made the basketball team Independent clause (the important part)	because he didn't try out. dependent clause (not as important)
--	--

RELATIVE PRONOUNS

Relative pronouns are used to connect a clause or phrase to a noun. They are words like who, whom, whoever, which, and that. When used correctly, these pronouns effectively subordinate part of a sentence. Most of the time, relative pronouns offer description of the noun, but are part of a dependent clause.

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. He blamed it on James, who didn't finish the work on time.2. He printed the essay, which was not ready before the deadline. |
|---|

When used incorrectly, the reader is confused and a sentence fragment is created.

Independent clause	Fragment
1. He blamed it on James.	<i>Who didn't finish the work on time.</i>
2. He printed the essay.	<i>Which was not ready before the deadline.</i>

Writing Skill 6 - Subordination

FRAGMENTS

Fragments are pieces of a sentence that cannot stand alone as a complete thought. Fragments occur when a dependent clause has no independent clause.

Example

Fragment:

After the coach congratulated the team.

(This is a dependent clause without an independent clause)

Revised:

After the coach congratulated the team, he took them out for pizza.

(The first part is the dependent clause. "he took them out for pizza" is the independent clause.)

When a pronoun is used in place of the subject in an independent clause, it becomes an incomplete thought, another kind of fragment. It's not easy to tell when the fragment is crowded in by other sentences. One way to identify it is to look at the sentence all by itself and ask if it makes the subject known.

Example

Fragments:

1. Tyrese gave a dollar to the girl. **Who looked at him gratefully.**
2. She bought the video game. **Which was expensive.**

("Who" and "which" are separated from the nouns they refer to and are not part of the clause)

Revised:

1. Tyrese gave a dollar to the girl **who** looked at him gratefully.
2. She bought the video game **which** was expensive.

(these relative pronouns are connected to the nouns they refer to and are part of the clause)

Writing Skill 6 - Subordination

Quick Test

1. Which of the following phrases uses incorrect subordination and is a fragment?

- A: Unless he gets a passing grade.
- B: If he does his homework, he'll pass.
- C: Because he missed class, he might fail.
- D: After the class, he went to the beach.

2. Which of the following phrases IS NOT a fragment?

- A: Because the teacher was late.
- B: Who was eating the cake.
- C: When class was over, we ate lunch.
- D: Even though it was raining.

Answers

- 1. A: Use of a subordinate word without an independent clause
- 2. C: This is the only sentence that includes an independent clause.

Dangling/Misplaced Modifiers

Overview

Defined: A **dangling or misplaced modifier** occurs when a modifier seems to describe one word when it really refers to something completely different, or doesn't refer to anything at all.

- Modifiers give more information about other words.
- You should place modifiers next to their target—the word they describe.
- Not only can this error confuse the reader, but it can also lead to some strange sentences!

Simply placing the word on the wrong side of the subject can change the meaning of a sentence completely. Take these two:

1. I almost lost 5000 dollars betting on horses.
(*means she almost lost a lump sum of 5000 dollars, but didn't*)
2. I lost almost 5000 dollars betting on horses.
(*means that she did lose a lot of money, approaching a total of 5000 dollars.*)

Often a modifier error involves a **gerund** (an *ing* word acting as a noun). When the subject that is acting (performing the *ing* clause) is not clearly connected to the verb, that's where confusion wrecks the meaning of the sentence.

Examples

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Painting recognizable objects at first, art critics were offended when Picasso began experimenting with abstract ones.2. Diving under the water, I saw the dolphins through the glass |
|---|

The reader assumes whatever noun comes immediately after the introductory phrase is the subject attached to it. But, in this case, the wrong subject is connected to the wrong modifier. The first sentence tells us that the art critics were painting recognizable objects, but the writer means that Picasso was, instead. The second sentence tells us that the narrator was the one diving under the water, but she means the dolphins were, instead.

Writing Skill 7 – Dangling/Misplaced modifiers

Here are the sentences, revised:

1. **Painting** recognizable objects at first, **Picasso** offended art critics when he began experimenting with abstract ones.
2. Through the glass, I saw the **dolphins diving** under the water.

There are several ways to revise a sentence with these errors:

- For dangling modifiers, give them a subject to connect to.
- For misplaced modifiers, place them nearer the word they should modify.
- Often, a simple reordering of the sentence is enough.

Look at these sentences and their revisions:

Dangling: It was reported that the bank was robbed by the Charlestown police.

The police robbed the bank?

Corrected: The Charlestown police reported that the bank was robbed.

Dangling: Staring out through the trees, the storm was blowing the leaves everywhere.

Storms can't stare

Corrected: As I was starting out through the trees, the storm was blowing the leaves everywhere.

Misplaced: When ripe, Todd picks oranges in his father's grove.

When Todd is ripe?

Corrected: Todd picks oranges in his father's grove when they are ripe.

Quick Test

1. Choose the sentence with a dangling or misplaced modifier:

- A: Driving across the country, I learned a lot about people.
- B: Please push the emergency button, not the off button, which is on the left.
- C: Knowing there was something better out there, she quit her job.
- D: Running for hours a day, Kevin was finally ready for the marathon.

2. Choose the sentence that uses a clear and correct modifier:

- A: My dad says the dogs were chasing people in cars.
- B: I watched my sister swim through the window.
- C: He ate the macaroni at the table that my sister made.
- D: Deciding to cut her own hair, my sister picked up the scissors.

Answers

- 1. B: we don't know which button is on the left.
- 2. D: all the other sentences can be seen more than one way:
 - A: *were the people or the dogs in cars?*
 - B: *was the window under water?*
 - C: *did his sister make the table or the macaroni?*

Clear Pronoun Reference

Overview

Defined: Pronouns usually replace the noun or nouns when they are referred to in a later part of the sentence. This avoids unnecessary repetition, “filling in” for the word wherever else it appears.

- This avoids sentences like, “I bought **the shoes**, brought **the shoes** home, and looked to see if **the shoes** matched my new outfit.”
 - Instead, we use pronouns to make the sentence cleaner: “I bought the shoes, brought **them** home, and looked to see if **they** matched my new outfit.”
-

Problems arise when the pronoun is not clearly connected to the noun or nouns it is “filling in” for. To create clear pronoun reference, make sure that each pronoun refers to a single logical antecedent (the word or words the pronoun replaces).

Examples

Unclear: The mechanic repaired the car's engine and water hose and cleaned it.

“it” can either be the engine or the water hose

Clear: The mechanic repaired and cleaned the car's engine, and he also replaced the water hose.

Unclear: If your dog destroys your pillow, it is easy to stuff and sew to look like new.

“it” could mean the pillow or the dog!

Clear: If your dog destroys your pillow, the pillow is easy to stuff and sew to look like new.

Unclear: Mike, Dave, and Ricardo love his pet python.

whose python is it?

Clear: Mike, Dave, and Ricardo love Dave's pet python

Writing Skill 8 - Clear Pronoun Reference

Another thing to avoid when it comes to pronouns is changing perspective.

- Be sure your pronoun matches the noun you begin your sentence with.
- Avoid changing perspective between you, I, they, we, etc...
- Although we may speak this way casually, this form is not correct for college writing.

Examples of mismatched pronouns:

1. **I** would hate to be an astronaut because **you** wouldn't want to live without gravity.
2. It is important for **people** to understand that **you** can't always be nice 100% of the time.
3. **A student** often has so much homework that **you** miss out on fun things with your friends.

These change perspective from you to I and from 3rd person to 2nd person.

Revised with matching pronouns:

1. **I** would hate to be an astronaut because **I** wouldn't want to live without gravity.
2. It is important for **people** to understand that **they** can't always be nice 100% of the time.
3. **A student** often has so much homework that **he** misses out on fun things with **his** friends.

Quick Test

1. Choose the sentence that uses clear pronoun reference:

- A: If your car makes a noise due to a broken part, replace it.
- B: Leo and Tim love their new house.
- C: Leo and Tim love his new house.
- D: The teacher was entertaining, and the students loved him.

Writing Skill 8 - Clear Pronoun Reference

2. Choose the correct pronoun for the blank:

I don't want to wait too late to register because _____ don't want the class to fill up.

- A: you
- B: we
- C: they
- D: I

3. Choose the sentence that DOES NOT use clear pronoun reference:

- A: After buying the groceries, she put them in the car.
- B: Shana's eyes were dry after playing video games, so she treated them with drops.
- C: His computer needed to be updated, as it was more than three years old.
- D: Rummaging through the garage, Raj found her old baseball mitt.

Answers

- 1. B: "their" includes both Leo and Tim, and is a clear reference
- 2. D: "I" matches the perspective introduced
- 3. B: she might treat either her eyes or the video games - not a clear reference

Complete and Logical Comparisons

Overview

Comparisons are often made using words like more than, better than, worse than, less or more than, such, so, etc... Complications occur when what is being compared is not clear. When we speak, we often make **incomplete or illogical comparisons** because we depend on our listeners to catch our implied meaning. Phrases like “I love you more” and “I love you so” might make sense when we speak informally. In writing, however, your statements of comparison must be complete and clear.

Take this sentence for example:

Many men appreciate hot sports cars more than their wives.

What does this sentence really mean?

- Are we saying that men appreciate sports cars more than they appreciate their wives?
- Or are we saying that men appreciate sports cars more than their wives do?

Depending on the situation, both interpretations of the sentence could be correct. For this reason, the sentence makes an incomplete and thus illogical comparison, one that we need to clarify.

Either of these two sentences, depending on what we really mean, does a better job:

Many men appreciate a hot sports car more than they do their wives.

Many men appreciate a hot sports car more than their wives do.

Writing Skill 9 – Logical Comparisons

Some common situations make complete and logical comparisons tricky:

1. The first situation occurs when you use comparison words without anything to compare to OR the comparison can be either of two subjects. These are **incomplete comparisons**.

Comparison Words: better, worse, more, less, fewer, so, such

When you use these words, be sure to include a “than” clause, and give a second subject to compare. If you don’t, the comparison is incomplete:

Incomplete: People who eat a healthy breakfast weigh less.

less than whom? less than what?

Revised: People who eat a healthy breakfast weigh less **than people who don’t**.

2. When you use comparison words without attaching them correctly to the intended subject, you have created another kind of problem. These are **illogical comparisons** and often don’t make sense, or make your statement confusing.

Illogical: Parents value a healthy lunch more than their children.

a healthy lunch is more valuable than children are?

Revised: Parents value a healthy lunch more than their children do.

3. Another common situation occurs with pronouns like me/I, she/her, he/him, we/us, and they/them. When you use these words in a comparison, be sure that you are using the one that completes the thought logically.

Illogical: My best friend Jenny likes pizza more than me.

She likes pizza more than she likes me?

Revised: My best friend Jenny likes pizza more than I do.

4. The last tricky situation occurs when you use words like **so** or **such**. When we speak, we often use these words without finishing the comparison: “I was so angry!” or “We had such a good time!” We view these words as having the same meaning as very, really, or extremely. However, they don’t have the same function in writing. You must include a “that” clause to make the comparison complete.

Writing Skill 9 – Logical Comparisons

Incomplete/unclear:

1. Sam was having **such** a hard time in his algebra class.
2. Simone is **so** good at math.

- Using “so” or “such” indicates an extreme, but we have to describe the effect of that extreme.
- If there is no effect of the extreme, we need words like “very” or “quite” to complete the statement.

Take a look at these revisions:

No effect/comparison:

Sam was having a **very** hard time in his algebra class.
Simone is **quite** good at math.

Effect or comparison:

Sam was having **such** a hard time in his algebra class **that he got a tutor**.
Simone is **so** good at math **that she has agreed to tutor Sam**.

Quick Test

1. Choose the sentence that makes a complete and logical comparison:

- A: Lakesha enjoys going to the movies more than her boyfriend Marc.
- B: After sitting through four back-to-back classes, Jackie was so hungry.
- C: In biology class, Tricia and Carlos like dissecting frogs more than Steve.
- D: Steve was so bored that he drew all over his notebook.

2. Choose the best revision for the illogical comparison: No one likes pizza more than Shaun.

- A: No one likes pizza more than they like Shaun.
- B: No one likes pizza more than Shaun does.
- C: No one likes pizza more than they do Shaun.
- D: No one likes pizza more than that of Shaun.

Writing Skill 9 – Logical Comparisons

3. Choose the sentence that DOES NOT make a complete and logical comparison:

- A: After drinking too much coffee, Syed got such a bad headache.
- B: He bakes chicken pot pie better than his wife does.
- C: Nhut was so tired from the long trip that she fell asleep on the bus.
- D: Nelson hates mushrooms worse than James does.

Answers

- 1. D: uses a “that” clause to make the comparison complete
- 2. B: creates the most logical comparison
- 3. A: use of such without a “that” clause

Practice Test Section

- Take your time and answer the questions below.
- Check and mark your incorrect answers with the key at the end of this test.
- These questions are intended to provide a sampling of the types of questions you may encounter while taking the PERT. Please be aware that a high score based on these questions does not guarantee a passing score on the PERT itself, nor does it suggest that you do not need more studying to prepare.

Feel free to visit the Learning Center and sign in with a Writing Consultant to discuss the skills you have trouble understanding.

1) Identify the sentence that is worded most effectively:

- A. To be sure, I truly believe that grammar is definitely important.
- B. Grammar is certainly important in every single aspect of communication.
- C. The importance of grammar is often overlooked.
- D. I don't really feel that grammar gets the attention it really and truly deserves.

2) Which sentence has proper parallel structure?

- A. While writing, we were mindful of good grammar, a respectful tone, and aware of our reader.
- B. While writing, we paid close attention to proper grammar, appropriate tone, and reader expectations.
- C. While writing, we used good grammar, a respectful tone, and watchful of our audience.
- D. While writing, we were mindful of grammar, tone, and paid attention to our audience.

3) Which sentence DOES NOT have parallel structure?

- A. Charlie looked under the bed, in the closet and on top of the table.
- B. The water parks close early, charge too much, and get too crowded.
- C. Charlie looked under the bed, in the closet, and checked on top of the table.
- D. The concert hall was messy, stuffy and loud.

4) Which of the following is a sentence fragment?

- A. She had already gotten the mail.
- B. While she checked the mailbox.
- C. The mailbox was empty.
- D. Sometimes the mail was late.

5) Choose the correct use of a subordinating conjunction:

- A. Unlike the rest of my family.
- B. Because she was already there.
- C. Even though the store was closed.
- D. Although he had money, he didn't spend it.

6) Identify the fused sentence:

- A. I went to the store and bought milk.
- B. He took the job, but he wasn't happy about it.
- C. It was sunny outside we went to the park.
- D. We took a drive out to the lake.

7) Identify the sentence with a comma splice:

- A. The party was over, it was time to go home.
- B. When the party ended, it was time to go home.
- C. Even though the party ended, we didn't go home.
- D. I wanted the party to continue, but it was over.

8) Identify the correct use of verb tense:

Sam _____ _____ seen a more beautiful painting before that day.

- A. had never
- B. has never
- C. will never

9) Choose the sentence that is worded most effectively:

- A. Social media can be very dangerous, especially in this day and age.
- B. Social media can often times be very dangerous.
- C. Social media can be dangerous, especially now.
- D. Social media can absolutely be dangerous right now.

10) Choose the sentence that uses a semicolon correctly:

- A. Sarcasm has its upside; because it teaches careful word choice.
- B. Sarcasm has its upside; It teaches careful word choice.
- C. Sarcasm has its upside; it teaches careful word choice.
- D. Sarcasm has its upside, it; teaches careful word choice.

11) Choose the proper subject/verb agreement for this sentence:

A huge credit card balance and a small paycheck _____ people out.

- A. stress
- B. stresses

12) Which sentence DOES NOT include a dangling or misplaced modifier?

- A. Running across the street, the ice cream fell from the cone.
- B. Working late into the night, the research paper was due at 8 a.m. the next morning.
- C. The girl who had been chosen sang a solo at the concert.
- D. Rand read the professor's paper who was interested in archeology.

13) Which sentence makes a clear pronoun reference?

- A. Keith found a quilt in the attic that his grandmother made.
- B. If your cat will not eat its food, give it to the Pit Bull next door.
- C. Don wanted a favorite appetizer from a restaurant that he was dreaming about.
- D. Shaun worked late on the assignment because its due date was the next day.

14) Which sentence makes a complete comparison?

- A. Victor likes video games more than me.
- B. Victor likes video games more than I do.
- C. Jeremy hates sushi as much as his brother.
- D. Stephanie values a good cup of coffee more than me.

15) Which sentence DOES NOT make a complete comparison?

- A. I was so scared that I jumped up on the chair.
- B. He had such a hard time at his job that he took some time off.
- C. After she posted the blog, she had so many visitors.
- D. He had such a bad headache that medicine wouldn't help.

16) Choose the sentence that uses the correct verb tense.

- A. Dave won't be able to eat lunch unless he finishes the project before noon.
- B. Dave isn't able to eat lunch unless he finished the project before noon.
- C. Dave wasn't able to eat lunch unless he has finished the project before noon.
- D. Dave won't be able to eat lunch unless he finished the project before noon.

17) Choose the proper subject/verb agreement for this sentence:

My mom, as well as my sister and brother, _____ going to the mall.

- A. hate
- B. hates

18) Choose the correct verb tense for the sentence:

I wish we _____ more warning before the tornado hit yesterday.

- A. have
- B. had
- C. had had
- D. would have

19) Choose the sentence that uses a semicolon correctly:

- A. It was too expensive to go to the beach; as a result, we stayed home.
- B. It was too expensive to go to the beach; and we stayed home.
- C. It was too expensive to go to the beach; so we stayed home.
- D. It was too expensive to go to the beach; As a result, we stayed home.

20) Which sentence uses correct subject/verb agreement?

- A. Either laptop uses the same cable.
- B. Both laptops use the same cable.
- C. Each laptop use the same cable.
- D. A and B

21) Which sentence includes a dangling/misplaced modifier?

- A. Driving in the country, her car broke down miles from town.
- B. While swimming, she noticed how tired she was.
- C. As he was walking, Stanton noticed change on the ground.
- D. Hoping for a raise, Liz walked into the chairman's office.

22) Which sentence makes a complete comparison?

- A. Abbie cooks chicken better than her mother.
- B. James hates shopping more than his girlfriend.
- C. I like living in Florida more than my brother does.
- D. Wendy eats pumpkin pie more often than her sister.

23) Which sentence IS NOT a clear pronoun reference?

- A. The girl ate the sandwich that her mother made.
- B. Brian helped the girl who was waiting at the station.
- C. The girl saw the dentist who needed a tooth removed.
- D. She saw the advisor who had scheduled the appointment.

24) Choose the correct subject/verb agreement:

- A. Sandria and her three friends loves to eat Mexican food.
- B. Sandria, along with her three friends, love to eat Mexican food.
- C. Sandria and her three friends love to eat Mexican food.
- D. B and C

25) Choose the sentence with the correct conjunction:

- A. The store was closed, so I wasn't able to buy milk.
- B. The store was closed, but I wasn't able to milk.
- C. The store was closed, or I wasn't able to buy milk.
- D. The store was closed, yet I wasn't able to buy milk.

26) Which phrase contains a fragment?

- A. Because of late charges, he can't rent any more games.
- B. He won't be on time. Unless he leaves early.
- C. Even though there was plenty of pizza, he ordered more.
- D. He chose to go to France whereas she chose to go to England.

27) Identify the fused sentence:

- A. Juan was happy at his new job where he liked the work.
- B. They closed the skate park she had to go somewhere else.
- C. The bottle was empty, so she refilled it.
- D. There wasn't any pizza left after everyone had three slices.

28) Which uses effective subordination?

- A. Although, she might not have needed the coffee.
- B. When they were done with school. They celebrated.
- C. As the teacher was talking. He started to nod off.
- D. Since she didn't pass the class, she has to take it again.

29) Identify the comma splice:

- A. When she left this morning, she forgot her phone.
- B. I had too many nachos, I feel sick.
- C. After working on the essay, I was tired.
- D. Though it has its drawbacks, technology is useful.

30) Identify the sentence that is worded most effectively:

- A. Every single student has completely different individual values.
- B. Every student has totally different things they value in life.
- C. Each individual student has completely different and various values.
- D. Each student has different values.

End

Answer Key

1.	C wordiness
2.	B parallelism
3.	C parallelism
4.	B subordination
5.	D subordination
6.	C coordination
7.	A coordination
8.	A verb tense
9.	C wordiness
10.	C coordination
11.	A sub/verb agreement
12.	C misplaced/dangling modifiers
13.	D clear pronoun reference
14.	B complete comparisons
15.	C complete comparisons
16.	A verb tense
17.	B sub/verb agreement
18.	C verb tense
19.	A coordination
20.	D sub/verb agreement
21.	A misplaced/dangling modifiers
22.	C complete comparisons
23.	C clear pronoun reference
24.	C sub/verb agreement
25.	A coordination
26.	B subordination
27.	B coordination
28.	D subordination
29.	B coordination
30.	D wordiness

Notes & Questions

This section should be utilized **if you are considering a review tutoring session** before retaking the PERT. As you study and review the skill areas, please write down specific questions about a skill or skills that you are struggling to understand or master. Also, make sure to bring this page, along with your booklet, to the tutoring session.

Example:

Skill Area subordination

Question(s):

I'm still unsure about what a fragment is.

Skill Area _____

Question(s):

Skill Area _____

Question(s):

Skill Area _____

Question(s):

Skill Area _____

Question(s):

Appendix



List of Grammar Terms

Adjective: Adjectives describe nouns and pronouns.

Clause: A clause is a group of words containing at least one subject and at least one verb.

Comma Splice: A comma splice is similar to a fused sentence. It is an error that occurs when two or more independent clauses are connected with only a comma which is not strong enough to connect two independent clauses all by itself.

Complete Verb: a word or group of words that relate action or state of being, and their forms relate time order.

Conjunction: A conjunction joins two parts of a sentence.

Coordinating Conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so): “FANBOYS” is a useful acronym to help you remember these words. Coordinating conjunctions connect two or more equal or parallel parts of sentences.

Dangling Modifier: A dangling modifier is a sentence error that occurs when a modifying phrase does not have an object to modify. Example: Driving to the store, my car ran out of gas. The phrase “driving to the store” is an adjective phrase, but there is no noun for it to modify, so it is left dangling. This means that we don’t know who or what was driving.

Dependent Clause: A dependent clause contains a subject and a verb and also begins with a subordinator (as, if, unless, since, before). Subordinate clauses can never express a complete idea and must be connected to an independent clause to form a complete sentence.

Fused Sentence (aka Run-on or RO): A fused sentence is an error that occurs when two or more independent clauses are joined without a coordinating conjunction and without punctuation. The independent clauses therefore “run together.”

Indefinite pronoun: Indefinite pronouns include words like “everyone”, “nobody”, “anything”, and “everything”. These words are always considered singular.

Independent Clause: An independent clause contains a subject and a verb and does not begin with a subordinating word; thus, an independent clause can stand alone as a sentence.

Misplaced Modifier: A misplaced modifier is a sentence error that occurs when a modifying word, phrase, or clause is in the wrong place. Example: The dog bit the boy who has rabies. This misplaced modifier means that the boy has rabies. The misplaced modifier is “who”. Example: She almost saved \$100. The word “almost” is modifying “saved” in this sentence. This means she didn’t “save” anything. If I almost save your life, you are dead. The correct placement is, “She saved almost \$100.”

Modifier: This is a word that is committed to another in order to give structure to its meaning.

Noun: A noun is a word that names a person, place, thing, or idea

Parallel Structure: Parallel structure means matching grammatical structure for all items on a list or in a series within a sentence:

Not parallel:	I like shopping, dancing, and to play guitar .
Parallel:	I like shopping, dancing, and playing guitar.

Phrase: A phrase is group of two or more words that form an idea, and are typically attached to a clause.

Pronoun: A pronoun is a word that takes the place of a noun. Remember, there are thousands of nouns in the English language but only a few pronouns to replace all those nouns; hence, we must be very careful when using pronouns, always making sure our reader knows exactly which nouns we are replacing.

Relative pronoun: A relative pronoun is a word that subordinates a clause turning it into an adjective which modifies either a noun or a pronoun in the independent clause.

John is an athlete who likes to run. (describes John)
We watched the egg, which was stubborn to hatch. (describes the egg)
Relative pronouns can be either a subject or an object in a subordinate clause, but they can never be the subject of an independent clause. (Which was stubborn to hatch.)

Sentence: one or more clauses, at least one of which is an independent clause.

Sentence Fragment: A sentence fragment is a group of words that has no independent clause even though it is punctuated as if it were a complete sentence.

Subject: A subject is a noun, pronoun, or word functioning like a noun that is in a direct relationship with a verb in a sentence. A subject is the word or words that are “doing” or “being” in the sentence. Example: John and Mary walk to the lake every evening. In this sentence, “John” and “Mary” are subjects because they are in direct relationship with the verb “walk.” They are the “doers.”

Subordinator: A subordinator is either a subordinating conjunction or a relative pronoun. Subordinators indicate the relationship between the dependent clause and the independent clause.

Subordinating Conjunction: A subordinating conjunction is a word that connects two clauses, subordinating one of them (making it less important) and making it dependent on an independent (more important) clause to be complete.

Transitional words and phrases: Transitional words and phrases are words that create a relationship between ideas. These words create relationships in many ways including connecting two independent clauses, introducing an independent clause, or interrupting the second independent clause. These words can also provide a transition/relationship between paragraphs. They signal the reader that a transition into a new idea, point or example is coming.

Verb: a verb is a word used to describe an action, state of being, or event. A verb forms the predicate of a sentence.

List of Verb Tenses

Simple Tenses

Simple Present: (happens now) I am a teacher.

Simple Past: (happened then) I was a teacher.

Simple Future: (will happen) I will be a teacher.

Perfect (Complete) Tenses

Present Perfect: (began in the past and carries forward to the present moment)

I have been nice to her. She has been nice to me. We have worked hard.

Past Perfect: (began in the past and was completed in the past)

I had been a teacher for five years when the school burned down.

Future Perfect: (began in the past and will be completed in the future)

I will have been teaching for five years at the end of this semester.

Progressive (continuous) Tenses

Present Progressive: (is happening at the present point)

I am being honest. The dog is walking.

Past Progressive: (was happening at a point in the past)

I was being honest. The dog was walking.

Future Progressive: (will be happening in the future)

I will be leaving. I will be walking.

Complete Progressive Tenses

Present Perfect Progressive: (a process began in the past and has not ended)

She has been seeing a counselor. The dog has been playing.

Past Perfect Progressive: (a process began in the past and has ended)

I had been crying for an hour. The dog had been walking alone.

Future Perfect Progressive: (a process is predicted to have already begun at a point in the future)

The dog will have been eating; we will have been smiling; they will have been crying; we will have been breaking; we will have been running; I will have been walking.

