

Syntax Basics

Syntax: the way in which words are put together to form phrases or clauses (definition adapted from Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

Parallelism (aka. Parallel Structure)

Use consistent grammatical form when offering several consecutive ideas.

Not Parallel *My mom is a prayer warrior, church deacon, and cooks amazing food.*
Parallel *My mom is a prayer warrior, church deacon, and amazing cook.*

Not Parallel *Types of prayer include thanksgiving, praise, and believers confess their sins.*
Parallel *Types of prayer include thanksgiving, praise, and confession.*

Double Negative

To avoid confusion, refrain from using two negatives to make a positive statement.

Double Negative *Jesus was not unwilling to die on the cross for our sake.*
Positive *Jesus was willing to die on the cross for our sake.*

Dangling Modifier

A dangling modifier is an incomplete phrase or clause that has been positioned in a sentence apart from the person or thing it describes. As a result, either (1) it is unclear what the modifier is supposed to modifying, or (2) the dangling modifier appears to be modifying the wrong word!

Dangling Modifier	Problem	Correction
<i>Born in Bethlehem, the shepherds visited Jesus.</i>	The sentence wants to say that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Because “born in Bethlehem” is positioned more closely to “the shepherds,” however, it appears to claim that “the shepherds” were born in Bethlehem!	<i>Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and the shepherds visited him.</i> OR <i>After Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the shepherds visited him.</i>
<i>After being baptized, a dove descended upon Jesus.</i>	The sentence appears to claim that a dove was baptized when Jesus was the one who got baptized.	<i>After Jesus was baptized, a dove descended upon him.</i> OR <i>A dove descended upon Jesus after he was baptized.</i>

Sentence Fragment

A sentence fragment is an incomplete sentence. It typically occurs when a sentence is missing an independent clause. In other words, a phrase or dependent clause is attempting to stand by itself.

Fragment *God's one and only Son.*
Complete Sentence *God's one and only Son gave himself to redeem creation.*

Fragment *After three days.*
Complete Sentence *After three days, Jesus rose from the grave.*

Run-on Sentence

A run-on sentence, also known as a comma splice, occurs when two independent clauses are connected by a comma instead of a period.

Run-On Sentence *Jesus calmed the storm, the disciples worshiped him as the Son of God.*
Correction *Jesus calmed the storm. The disciples worshiped him as the Son of God.*

Note: Writing conventions allow for the use of a semicolon to connect two independent sentences—but only if the two sentences are related.

Incorrect Use of Semicolon *Jesus walked on water; Judas betrayed him.*
Correct use of Semicolon *Jesus walked on water; Peter tried but sank.*

Mixed Construction

Mixed construction occurs when a sentence begins with one type of structure—that is, it seems to head in one grammatical direction—and ends with another.

Mixed Construction *Lay down your life for a friend, the greatest act of love, is what Jesus demonstrated at the cross.*

Correction *Laying down one's life for a friend is the greatest act of love. Jesus demonstrated such a love at the cross.*

OR

At the cross, Jesus demonstrated the greatest act of love: to lay down one's life for a friend.

Mixed Construction *For many who were believers in the early church were persecuted.*

Correction *Many who were believers in the early church were persecuted.*

OR

Many believers in the early church were persecuted.