

NO To earn money, china-painting lessons were offered by Emily to wealthy young women. [*China-painting lessons cannot earn money. Were offered by Emily* is in the passive voice.]

YES To earn money, Emily offered china-painting lessons to wealthy young women. [Change to the active voice; *Emily offered* corrects the problem.]

EXERCISE 14-3 Identify and correct any dangling modifiers in these sentences. If a sentence is correct, circle its number. For help, consult 14d.

EXAMPLE To succeed as scientists, obstacles must be overcome by women.

To succeed as scientists, women must overcome obstacles.

1. In the past, few high-status science awards were won by women, a situation that failed to give many outstanding women scientists the recognition they deserve.
2. Attaining the highest achievements and awards has been beyond the grasp of even the most gifted women scientists.
3. Rising from 12 percent in the mid-1980s to 20 percent today, an increasingly greater membership for women in the National Academy of Sciences is expected.
4. Having chosen seventy-two new members in 2003, seventeen were women, a larger number than ever before.
5. By discovering that a surprisingly large number of human genes control the sense of smell, Dr. Linda Buck earned her Academy membership.

CHAPTER 15

Shifting and Mixed Sentences

SHIFTING SENTENCES

15a What is a shifting sentence?

A **shift** within a sentence is an unnecessary, abrupt change in PERSON, NUMBER, SUBJECT, VOICE, TENSE, MOOD, or DIRECT or INDIRECT DISCOURSE. These shifts blur meaning. Sometimes a shift occurs between two or more sentences in a paragraph. If you set out on one track (writing in FIRST PERSON, for example), your readers expect you to stay on that same track (and not

unnecessarily shift to THIRD PERSON, for example). When you go off track, you have written a shifting sentence or paragraph.

15b How can I avoid shifts in person and number?

Who or what performs or receives an action is defined by the term *person*. FIRST PERSON (*I, we*) is the speaker or writer; SECOND PERSON (*you*) is the one being spoken or written *to*; and THIRD PERSON (*he, she, it, they*) is the person or thing being spoken or written *about*.

The essential point is that SHIFTS are incorrect unless the meaning in a particular context makes them necessary.

NO I enjoy reading financial forecasts of the future, but **you** wonder which will turn out to be correct. [The first person *I* shifts to the second person *you*.]

YES I enjoy reading financial forecasts of the future, but **I** wonder which will turn out to be correct.

NUMBER refers to whether words are *singular* (one) or *plural* (more than one) in meaning. Do not start to write in one number and then shift for no reason to the other number.

NO Because **people** are living longer, **an employee** now retires later. [The plural *people* shifts to the singular *employee*.]

YES Because **people** are living longer, **employees** now retire later.

In ACADEMIC WRITING, reserve *you* for addressing the reader directly. Use the third person for general statements.

NO **People** enjoy feeling productive, so when a job is unsatisfying, **you** usually become depressed. [*People* is in the third person, so a shift to the second person *you* is incorrect.]

YES **People** enjoy feeling productive, so when a job is unsatisfying, **they** usually become depressed.

Be careful with words in the singular (usually NOUNS) used in a general sense, such as *employee, student, consumer, neighbor, and someone*. These words are always third-person singular. The only pronouns for these ANTECEDENTS in the third-person singular are *he, she, and it*. Remember that *they* is plural, so the word *they* can't be used with singular nouns.

NO When **an employee** is treated with respect, **they** are more motivated to do a good job. [*Employee* is third-person singular, so the shift to the third-person plural *they* is incorrect.]

YES When **an employee** is treated with respect, **he or she** is more motivated to do a good job.

YES When **employees** are treated with respect, **they** are more motivated to do a good job.

YES **An employee** who is treated with respect is more motivated to do a good job.

YES **Employees** who are treated with respect are more motivated to do a good job.

 **ALERT:** When you use INDEFINITE PRONOUNS (such as *someone*, *everyone*, or *anyone*), you want to use GENDER-NEUTRAL LANGUAGE. For advice, see 10r and 20g. 

EXERCISE 15-1 Eliminate shifts in person and number between, as well as within, sentences. Some sentences may not need revision. For help, consult 15b.

(1) In Agra, India, millions of visitors to the Taj Mahal see a glorious white-marble building that serves as a tribute to undying love, but you also see pollution and serious deterioration of the property. (2) Huge crowds arrive daily to see the gorgeous Taj Mahal, which is perfect in its architectural proportions and is topped with beautiful minarets. (3) But he or she also sees terrible neglect, such as huge beehives hanging from archways, litter on the lawns and in the gardens, and canals choked with trash. (4) The whole place smells of pigeon droppings, decorative panels are faded and destroyed, and many sections are off limits to sightseers. (5) Soon visitors will enter through a new, clean tourist center, complete with a café and computerized ticketing, and you will find a tour of the cleansed, restored monument to eternal love a very pleasant experience.

15c How can I avoid shifts in subject and voice?

A SHIFT in SUBJECT is rarely justified when it is accompanied by a shift in VOICE. The voice of a sentence is either *active* (*People expect changes*) or *passive* (*Changes are expected*). Some subject shifts, however, are justified by the meaning of a passage: for example, *People look forward to the future, but the future holds many secrets*.

NO Most **people expect** major improvements in the future, but some **hardships are also anticipated**. [The subject shifts from *people* to *hardships*, and the voice shifts from active to passive.]

YES Most **people expect** major improvements in the future, but **they also anticipate** some hardships.

YES Most **people expect** major improvements in the future but also **anticipate** some hardships.

15d How can I avoid shifts in tense and mood?

TENSE refers to the time in which the action of a VERB takes place—past, present, or future: *We **will go** to the movies after we **finish** dinner.* An unnecessary tense SHIFT within or between sentences can make the statement confusing or illogical.

NO A campaign to clean up movies in the United States **began** in the 1920s as civic and religious groups **try** to ban sex and violence from the screen. [The tense incorrectly shifts from the past *began* to the present *try*.]

YES A campaign to clean up movies in the United States **began** in the 1920s as civic and religious groups **tried** to ban sex and violence from the screen.

MOOD indicates whether a sentence is a statement or a question (INDICATIVE MOOD), a command or request (IMPERATIVE MOOD), or a conditional or other-than-real statement (SUBJUNCTIVE MOOD). A shift in mood creates an awkward construction and can cause confusion.

NO The Production Code included two guidelines on violence: **Do not show** the details of brutal killings, and movies **should not be** explicit about how to commit crimes. [The verbs shift from the imperative mood *do not show* to the indicative mood *movies should not be*.]

YES The Production Code included two guidelines on violence: **Do not show** the details of brutal killings, and **do not show** explicitly how to commit crimes. [This revision uses the imperative mood for both guidelines.]

YES The Production Code included two guidelines on violence: Movies **were not to show** the details of brutal killings or explicit ways to commit crimes.

15e How can I avoid shifts between indirect and direct discourse?

Indirect discourse is not enclosed in quotation marks because it reports, rather than quotes, something that someone said. In contrast, **direct discourse** is enclosed in quotation marks because it quotes exactly the words that someone said. It's incorrect to write direct discourse and omit the quotation marks. Also, it's incorrect to write sentences that mix indirect and direct discourse. Such SHIFT errors confuse readers who can't tell what was said and what is merely being reported.

NO A critic said that board members were acting as censors and **what you are doing is unconstitutional.** [*Said that sets up indirect discourse, but what you are doing is unconstitutional is direct discourse; it also lacks quotation marks and the changes in language that distinguish spoken words from reported words.*]

YES A critic said that board members were acting as censors and **that what they were doing is unconstitutional.** [This revision uses indirect discourse consistently.]

YES A critic, in stating that board members were acting as censors, added, **“What you are doing is unconstitutional.”** [This revision uses discourse correctly, with quotation marks and other changes in language to distinguish spoken words from reported words.]

Whenever you change your writing from direct discourse to indirect discourse (when you decide to paraphrase rather than quote someone directly, for example), you need to make changes in VERB TENSE and other grammatical features for your writing to make sense. Simply removing the quotation marks is not enough.

NO He asked **did we enjoy the movie?** [This version has the verb form needed for direct discourse, but the pronoun *we* is wrong and quotation punctuation is missing.]

YES He asked **whether we enjoyed the movie.** [This version is entirely indirect discourse, and the verb has changed from *enjoy* to *enjoyed*.]

YES He asked, **“Did you enjoy the movie?”** [This version is direct discourse. It repeats the original speech exactly, with correct quotation punctuation.]

EXERCISE 15-2 Revise these sentences to eliminate incorrect shifts within sentences. Some sentences can be revised in several ways. For help, consult 15b through 15e.

EXAMPLE In 1942, the US government is faced with arresting five million people for not paying their federal income taxes.

In 1942, the US government *was faced* with arresting five million people for not paying their federal income taxes.

1. Congress needed money to pay for US participation in World War II, so a new tax system was proposed.
2. Tax payments were due on March 15, not April 15 as it is today.

3. For the first time, Congress taxed millions of lower-income citizens. Most people do not save enough to pay the amount of taxes due.
4. When a scientific poll showed lawmakers that only one in seven Americans had saved enough money, he became worried.

MIXED SENTENCES

15f What is a mixed sentence?

A mixed sentence has two or more parts, with the first part starting in one direction and the rest of the parts going off in another. This mixing of sentence parts leads to unclear meaning. To avoid this error, as you write each sentence, remember how you started it and make sure that whatever comes next in the sentence relates grammatically and logically to that beginning.

- NO** Because television's first transmissions in the 1920s included news programs quickly became popular with the public. [The opening dependent clause starts off on one track (and is not correctly punctuated), but the independent clause goes off in another direction. What does the writer want to emphasize, the first transmissions or the popularity of news programs?]
- YES** Because television's first transmissions in the 1920s included news, programs became popular with the public. [The revision helps but is partial: the dependent clause talks about the news, but the independent clause goes off in another direction by talking about the popularity of the programs in general.]
- YES** Television's first transmissions in the 1920s included news programs, **which were** popular with the public. [Dropping *because* and adding *which were* solves the problem by keeping the focus on news programs throughout.]

15g How can I correct a mixed sentence due to faulty predication?

Faulty predication, sometimes called *illogical predication*, occurs when a SUBJECT and its PREDICATE don't make sense together.

- NO** The purpose of television was invented to entertain people. [A *purpose* cannot be *invented*.]
- YES** The purpose of television was to entertain people.
- YES** Television was invented to entertain people.

In ACADEMIC WRITING, avoid nonstandard constructions such as *is when* and *is where*. They should be avoided not only because they are nonstandard, but also because they usually lead to faulty predication.

NO A disaster **is when** TV news shows get some of their highest ratings.

YES TV news shows get some of their highest ratings during a disaster.

In academic writing, avoid constructions such as *the reason . . . is because*. By using both *reason* and *because*, the construction is redundant (it says the same thing twice). Instead, use either *the reason . . . is that* or *because* alone.

NO One **reason** that TV news captured national attention in the 1960s **is because** it covered the Vietnam War thoroughly.

YES One **reason** TV news captured national attention in the 1960s **is that** it covered the Vietnam War thoroughly.

YES TV news captured national attention in the 1960s **because** it covered the Vietnam War thoroughly.

15h What are correct elliptical constructions?

An **elliptical construction** deliberately leaves out one or more words in a sentence for CONCISENESS.

Victor has his book and Joan's. [This means *Victor has his book and Joan's book*. The second *book* is left out deliberately.]

For an elliptical construction to be correct, the one or more words you leave out need to be identical to those already appearing in the sentence. For instance, the sample sentence above about Victor and Joan would have an incorrect elliptical construction if the writer's intended meaning were *Victor has his book, and Joan has her own book*.

NO During the 1920s in Chicago, the cornetist Manuel Perez **was leading** one outstanding jazz group, and Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey another. [The words *was leading* cannot take the place of *were leading*, which is required after *Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey*.]

YES During the 1920s in Chicago, the cornetist Manuel Perez **was leading** one outstanding jazz group, and Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey **were leading** another.

YES During the 1920s in Chicago, the cornetist Manuel Perez **led** one outstanding jazz group, and Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey another. [*Led* is correct with both *Manuel Perez* and *Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey*, so *led* can be omitted after *Dorsey*.]

15i What are correct comparisons?

When you write a sentence in which you want to compare two or more things, make sure that no important words are omitted.

NO Individuals driven to achieve make **better** business executives.
[*Better* is a word of comparison (11e), but no comparison is stated.]

YES Individuals driven to achieve make **better** business executives **than do people not interested in personal accomplishments.**

EXERCISE 15-3 Revise this paragraph to create correct elliptical constructions, to complete comparisons, and to insert any missing words. For help, see 15h and 15i.

(1) A giant tsunami is as destructive and even larger than a tidal wave. (2) The word *tsunami* is Japanese for “harbor wave,” for this kind wave appears suddenly in harbor or bay. (3) A tsunami begins with rapid shift in ocean floor caused by an undersea earthquake or volcano. (4) The wave this produces in the open sea is less than three feet high, but it can grow to a height of a hundred feet as it rushes and strikes against the shore. (5) For this reason, tsunamis are much more dangerous to seaside towns than ships on the open sea. (6) In 1960, a tsunami that struck coasts of Chile, Hawaii, and Japan killed total of 590 people. (7) In 2004, a huge tsunami that struck coasts of Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, and other countries killed total 275,000 people.

CHAPTER 16**Conciseness****16a** What is conciseness?

Conciseness requires you to craft sentences that are direct and to the point. Its opposite, **wordiness**, means you are filling sentences with empty words and phrases that increase the word count but contribute nothing to meaning. Wordy writing is padded with deadwood, forcing readers to clear away the branches and overgrowth—an annoying waste of time that implies the writer isn’t skilled. Usually, the best time to work on making your writing more concise is while you’re **REVISING**.