

Sentence rules, common errors

1. A sentence must begin with a capital letter and end with a full stop, question mark, or exclamation mark. This is the rule of punctuation for a sentence.
2. A sentence consists of words which are grouped together to make sense.
3. The basic building block of a sentence is a main clause. A main clause must contain at least a subject, and a verb.
4. To add another clause, you need a conjunction.
5. Verb in a sentence - use a full stop to end the sentence as soon as it makes sense.
6. Verbs in a sentence - 1 conjunction is needed somewhere in the sentence before the full stop, e.g. "I passed my exams, because I worked hard."

Number of clauses or verbs in sentence	Number of joining words or conjunctions needed	Punctuation
1	0	Full stop as soon as the sentence makes sense
2	1	Comma between clauses (Optional) Full stop at end
3	2	At least one comma separating two of the clauses. Full stop at the end.

3 Verbs -> 2 conjunctions

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Examples

Here are some examples. Verbs are underlined; conjunctions are in *italics*.

Great Britain is a small island, it is in Europe. X

(There are two verbs in this sentence but no conjunction. This is an example of comma splicing. This is incorrect)

Great Britain is a small island. It is in Europe ✓

(Each sentence has only one verb and ends with a full stop. A conjunction is not needed as the sentences are not joined together. This is correct)

Great Britain is a small island *and* it is in Europe. ✓

(There are two verbs in this sentence and one conjunction. This is correct.)

Great Britain, *which* is a small island, is part of the United Kingdom *and* also belongs to Europe.

(The sentence has three verbs, therefore needs two conjunctions, *which* and *and*. This is correct. A comma can also be used to join parts of the sentence, because a conjunction is present.)

Exceptions

NOTE: one exception to the rule for the number of conjunctions needed is when verbs are used in a list, as follows: I like to play football, swim and go walking. (4 verbs, 2 conjunctions)

Common sentence errors

A common sentence error is comma splicing. This is when you have written two main clauses side by side, joining them with a comma without a conjunction.

Jack liked her, she was funny.

To find out whether you have used comma splicing, go through the following steps:

- a) If you have used a comma in your sentence, look at the groups of words to the left and right of the comma.
- b) Do you have a main clause on each side?
- c) If you do, you need a conjunction as well as the comma.
- d) Alternatively, you can miss out the comma and use a full stop.

Jack liked her because she was funny.

Jack liked her. She was funny.

Run-on Sentences

Another common type of error is run-on sentences. This is where you have main clauses running on from one to another without any punctuation or use of conjunctions.

St Michael's school is in Rowley Regis it is a new building.

You can either:

Separate the two sentences with a full stop or semicolon:

St Michael's school is in Rowley Regis. It is a new building.

St Michael's school is in Rowley Regis; it is a new building.

Or:

Use a conjunction to join the two sentences:

St Michael's school is in Rowley Regis and it is a new building.