What makes a good sentence?
Learning Outcomes

• By the end of this workshop, you should be able to:
  • Identify what makes a complete sentence
  • Identify how to improve your sentence structure
  • Identify common mistakes and how to rectify them
This workshop is:

• practical
• not discipline-specific
What is a sentence?

• The expression of a complete idea
• It makes sense on its own
• It can combine with others, but only with the correct bonds (punctuation)
• It is made up of (grammatical) components
What does a sentence contain?

• Needs subject/verb pair *eg Jane snored*
  • Subject = someone or something who is being or doing. *(Jane)*
  • Verb = what they are doing *(snored)*
  • Subject and verb need to match *(not Jane snore)*
  • Length of sentence not important

• Starts with capital letter

• Ends with a full stop
  • in other styles of writing, question marks and exclamation marks – but you’re not likely to need these in academic writing.
Fragments

• Fragments are incomplete things.
• Sentence fragments
  • where there isn’t a proper subject or verb
  • the ‘sentence’ sounds as though something is
Fragment Example

• Lost motivation to work at some point.
  • *incomplete* – *who has lost motivation?*

• Everyone loses their motivation to work at some point.
  • *complete* – *everyone is the subject*
Exercise 1

• Is this a complete sentence?
• Yes or No
Answers

✗ Thinking positively about solutions. *(who is thinking?)*

✗ Plagiarism, using other people’s writing without referencing. *(needs is)*

✓ Plagiarism is cheating.

✗ Simultaneously supported by national and international legislation *(what is supported?)*
Run-on sentences

• Run-on sentences = two sentences separated by a comma.
  • The comma isn’t strong enough to keep them apart.

• How can you tell if it’s a run on sentence?
  • Separate the two parts – do they still make complete sense?
  • If so, they’re two sentences and need a full stop between them.
Run-on sentence example

• An essay should present an argument, all the content makes sense because of the argument.
  • *two sentences*

• An argument is the case that is being made in an essay.
  • *single sentence*
Exercise 2

• Is this a single sentence?

• Yes or No
Answers

☒ An essay should present an argument, consequently its content will make sense.

☑ An essay should argue a case, so that its content makes sense.

☒ Generally, arguments should build up through the essay, their conclusions should appear to lead on from thoughts already expressed.

☑ If an essay presents an argument, its content will make sense.
Sentences with style: keep it clear

• Not too long
  • No more than two ideas in one sentence

• Read it aloud – can you breathe?

• Keep subject and verb close together so don’t have to remember something from the start of the sentence
Sentences with style: keep it clear

• Example:
  • Qualitative research which is analysed using words rather than numbers and has a smaller sample size than quantitative research, because it considers both feelings and experiences, aims to develop an in-depth understanding of complex issues and relationships.
Possible improved example

Qualitative research which is analysed using words rather than numbers and has a smaller sample size than quantitative research, because it considers both feelings and experiences, aims to develop an in-depth understanding of complex issues and relationships.

• Possible improvement:
  • *Qualitative research aims to develop an in-depth understanding of complex issues and relationships*
  • (then rest in separate sentences)
Sentences with style: keep it fresh

• Vary structure
• Vary length – not lots of short sentences
• Reduce repetition

• Example – how could this be improved?:
  1. It is very important to consider the words that have been selected, as they can provide a huge variety of extensive opportunities for original and interesting expressions.
Possible improved example

• Example:
  It is very important to consider the words that have been selected, as they can provide a huge variety of extensive opportunities for original and interesting expressions.

• Possible improvement:
  *Word selection is important, as it provides opportunities for interesting expressions.*
Another example

• How could the following be improved?:

• A new argument will attract a lecturer’s attention. It will lead to higher grades. A new argument will avoid common examples. It is necessary to know what examples are common in order to write a new argument.
Possible improved example

• Example:
  A new argument will attract a lecturer’s attention. It will lead to higher grades. A new argument will avoid common examples. It is necessary to know what examples are common in order to write a new argument.

• Possible improvement:
  A new argument will attract a lecturer’s attention, leading to higher grades. Once common answers have been identified, they can be avoided in order to create a more original response.
Workshops available

• Academic writing
• Apostrophes and how to use them
• How to proofread
Questions?