QUICK GRAMMAR GUIDE

FRAGMENTS

a) The Rule. A sentence contains a subject and a verb and expresses a complete thought.

b) The Mistake. A fragment is a group of words which is set off as a sentence but does not have a subject, verb, and/or complete thought.

Example of a fragment: Took the bus.

This fragment has a verb (“took”) but is missing a subject.

Example of dependent clause fragment: When she left.

Although this fragment has a subject (“she”) and a verb (“left”), it does not express a complete thought: a subordinating conjunction (“when”) appears at the start of the word group and makes it a dependent clause.

Note: Subordinating conjunctions connect two clauses by making one clause dependent (subordinate) to the other. Examples of subordinating conjunctions include the following: when, since, because, while, although, before, after, if, unless.

Note: A clause is a group of words that has a subject and a verb. Clauses can be independent or dependent: an independent clause can stand alone as a sentence; a dependent clause cannot stand alone as a sentence.

c) The Fix. Add the missing subject or verb to the fragment; or revise the fragment to create a complete thought by removing the subordinating conjunction or adding an independent clause or otherwise revising the fragment.

Revised: Kaui took the bus.

The missing subject (“Kaui”) is added to create an independent clause.

Revised: She left.

The subordinating conjunction (“when”) is removed.

Revised: When she left, he ate dinner. OR He ate dinner when she left.

An independent clause is added after or before the fragment.

COMMA SPLICES AND RUN-ON and FUSED SENTENCES

a) The Rule. Independent clauses should be separated by a period; a semicolon; a colon; or a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) preceded by a comma.

b) The Mistake. Two independent clauses are joined only with a comma (this mistake is called a “comma splice”) or without any punctuation (this mistake is called a “run-on sentence” or a “fused sentence”).

Example of a comma splice: I saw Jorell at the market, he bought mangoes.

Example of a run-on or fused sentence: It was high tide the waves were huge.

c) The Fix. Separate the independent clauses with a period, a semicolon, a colon, or a coordinating conjunction preceded by a comma. Alternatively, add a subordinating conjunction to one of the independent clauses to make it a dependent clause.

Revised: I saw Jorell at the market. He bought mangoes.

It was high tide, the waves were huge.

A period is added to separate the two independent clauses.

OR I saw Jorell at the market; he bought mangoes.

A semicolon is added between the two independent clauses.

OR I saw Jorell at the market, and he bought mangoes.

It was high tide; the waves were huge.

A colon is added between the two independent clauses.

OR I saw Jorell at the market after he bought mangoes.

When it was high tide, so the waves were huge.

A coordinating conjunction preceded by a comma is added.

OR I saw Jorell at the market after he bought mangoes.

When it was high tide, the waves were huge.

A subordinating conjunction is added to one of the independent clauses to make it a dependent clause.
MODIFIERS -- A modifier is a word or group of words that describes or gives more information about another word or group of words.

a) **The Rule.** A modifier should clearly refer to the word or words that it describes.

b) **The Mistake.** A reader cannot tell what the modifier is describing because (i) the modifier is misplaced in the sentence so it unintentionally describes the wrong word or words (this mistake is called a “misplaced modifier”) or (ii) the modifier does not logically describe any word in the sentence (this mistake is called a “dangling modifier”).

Example of misplaced modifier: The helicopter followed the elephant hovering directly overhead.

The modifier (“hovering directly overhead”) is misplaced and appears to modify “elephant” (rather than “helicopter”).

Example of dangling modifier: Looking bewildered, the motorcycle braked to a halt in the middle of the intersection.

The modifier (“looking bewildered”) does not logically describe any word in the sentence.

c) **The Fix.** Move the misplaced modifier so that it is next to or “touches” the word or words it is meant to describe. To fix a dangling modifier, revise the sentence to add what the modifier is meant to describe.

Revised: Hovering directly overhead, the helicopter followed the elephant.

Revised: Looking bewildered, the motorcycle _driver_ braked to a halt in the middle of the intersection.

The sentence is revised to add what the modifier is describing.

**PRONOUNS** -- A pronoun is a word that refers to and/or takes the place of a noun (called the “antecedent”). Examples of pronouns include the following: he, him, his, she, her, it, its, they, them, their.

a) **Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement Rule.** A pronoun and its antecedent should agree in number and gender.

i) **The Mistake.** A pronoun and its antecedent do not agree in number and/or gender.

**Example:** A good student does _their_ homework.

The plural pronoun (“_their_”) does not agree with the singular antecedent (“student”).

**Example using a collective noun:** The _club_ adjourned _their_ meeting.

The plural pronoun (“_their_”) does not agree with the singular antecedent (“_club_”).

**Note:** Collective nouns (such as club, establishment, and committee) are nouns which name a group or collection of individuals. Generally, collective nouns are singular, but they can be plural if they describe members of a group who are not operating as one unit (for example, “The jury were fighting among themselves to reach a verdict.”).

ii) **The Fix.** Revise either the pronoun or the antecedent, so both agree in number and gender.

**Revised:** A good _student_ does _his_ or _her_ homework.

**Revised:** The _club_ adjourned _its_ meeting.

b) **Pronoun Reference Rule:** A pronoun should clearly refer to a specific antecedent.

i) **The Mistake.** A reader cannot identify the antecedent referenced and/or replaced by the pronoun either because there are two or more possible antecedents (“ambiguous reference”) or there is no antecedent (“implied or vague reference”).

**Example of ambiguous reference:** Darcie told Coralyn that _she_ should go first.

The pronoun (“_she_”) could refer to either Darcie or Coralyn.

**Example of implied or vague reference:** After writing the essay, Hester reviewed _them_ to check for clear topic sentences.

There is no antecedent for the pronoun (“_them_”) to reference or replace.

ii) **The Fix.** Replace the pronoun with the antecedent, or otherwise revise the sentence to eliminate the ambiguity.

**Revised:** Darcie told Coralyn that Coralyn should go first.

The antecedent is _used in place of the pronoun._

**Revised:** After writing the essay, Hester reviewed the paragraphs to check for clear topic sentences.

The _missing antecedent is added to the sentence to replace the pronoun._
VERBS -- A verb describes an action or a state of being.

1) **Subject-Verb Agreement Rule.** A subject and verb should agree in number.
   a) **The Mistake.** The subject and verb do not agree in number.
      *Example:* The supporting details in this paragraph is not clear.
      *The plural subject ("details") does not agree with the singular verb ("is").*
      *Example:* Each of the teachers want students to succeed in school.
      *The singular subject ("each") does not agree with the plural verb ("want").*
   b) **The Fix.** Either the subject or verb should be revised, so both agree in number.
      *Revised:* The supporting details in this paragraph are not clear.
      *The verb is revised to agree with the plural subject.*
      *Revised:* Each of the teachers wants students to succeed in school.
      *The verb is revised to agree with the singular subject.*
      *OR* All of the teachers want students to succeed in school.
      *The subject is revised to agree with the plural verb.*
      *Revised:* My mom and my aunties go to the gym.
      *The subject is revised to agree with the plural verb.*
      *OR* My mom, as well as my aunties, goes to the gym.
      *The verb is revised to agree with the singular subject.*

2) **Verb Tense**
   a) **The Rule.** Verb tenses should be consistent unless there is a logical reason for a shift in tense.
   b) **The Mistake.** The verb tenses shift for no apparent reason.
      *Example:* The dog ran to me and wagged his tail. He licks my hand.
      *The verbs in the first sentence are in the past tense, but the verb in the next sentence shifts to the present tense without an apparent reason.*
   c) **The Fix.** A verb that shifts from the tense established by other verbs should be revised to be consistent with the other verbs.
      *Revised:* The dog ran to me and wagged his tail. He licked my hand.
      *The verb in the second sentence is revised to be in the past tense, consistent with verbs in the first sentence.*

PARALLELISM

a) **The Rule.** Items in a series should be in parallel form.
   b) **The Mistake.** Items in a series are not in parallel form.
      *Example:* Pearlridge is great for shopping, dining, and to socialize.
      *The first two items in the list are gerunds, but the last item is an infinitive phrase and not in parallel form with the first two items.*
   c) **The Fix.** Items are revised to be in parallel form.
      *Revised:* Pearlridge is great for shopping, dining, and socializing.
      *The last item is revised to be parallel with the first two items.*
PUNCTUATION

COMMAS
Commas are used to separate various sentence elements and to indicate logical pauses.

1) To separate two independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so)
   Example: It was sunny, so I walked to campus.
2) To separate an introductory dependent clause from an independent clause
   Example: After I got home, I texted my brother.
3) To separate an introductory element from an independent clause
   Example: Instead of a pop quiz, our teacher passed out cookies.
4) To separate three or more items in a series
5) To set off nonrestrictive/nonessential modifiers
   Example: My iPad, which is only two weeks old, is in my car.
6) To set off parenthetical expressions
   Example: You could, of course, meet us at Walmart after class.

SEMICOLONS
Semicolons are used to connect related coordinate elements.

1) To separate two related independent clauses not joined by a coordinating conjunction
   Example: The wind blew; the leaves fell.
2) To separate two independent clauses joined by a transitional word or phrase
   Example: My English class was scheduled to meet in LA102; however, it was moved to ED102 after the first day of class.
3) To separate listed items that already contain commas
   Example: I applied to many colleges, including San Francisco State College, San Francisco, California; Long Beach State College, Long Beach, California; and the University of California Berkeley, Berkeley, California.

COLONS
Colons are used after independent clauses to introduce explanations or additional information.

1) To introduce an explanatory statement or list after an independent clause
   Example: The classroom was empty: the class was on a field trip. I bought three things from the bookstore: books, paper, and candy.
2) To introduce a question or direct quotation after an independent clause
   Example: The introduction focused on the book's central question: why should we study grammar?

APOSTROPHES
Apostrophes are used to indicate possession and to form contractions.

1) To indicate possession
   Example: The dog's bark interrupted the students' concentration.
2) To form contractions
   Example: You’re taking your laptop in its case because it’s needed at the meeting they’re having over there in the hotel tonight.

DASHES
Dashes are used to mark and emphasize sharp breaks or interruptions in a sentence.

1) To indicate and set off an interruption or an abrupt break in a sentence’s flow
   Example: We ate my aunty's home-made haupia—so ono!—at the baby luau.
2) To set off and emphasize nonrestrictive/nonessential modifiers
   Example: One of my favorite childhood memories is playing with my dog—a big poi dog with white paws.
3) To set off and emphasize parenthetical expressions
   Example: The physics exam was—in his opinion, anyway—fairly easy.