

A Glance at Grammar

This handout gives a brief overview of some key grammar concepts *at a glance*. For further details or elaboration on any of these concepts, please visit our specific grammar guides located on our GSU Writing Studio website.

A complete sentence is an independent clause

Independent clauses contain both a subject and a verb
I went to the store because my mother told me to.

Subordinate clause is a dependent clause

Subordinate or dependent clauses also contain both a subject and a verb but do not express a complete idea. Alone, a dependent clause is a fragment.
Because my mother told me too.

An incomplete sentence is a fragment

Fragments are either missing a subject or a verb and do not express a complete idea.
The girls walking down the street.

A run-on sentence is a grammatical error due to no punctuation between independent clauses.

My favorite author is Warsan Shire she is incredibly talented.

A comma splice is when a comma separates two independent clauses. Comma splices are considered an error because they aren't strong enough to hold two independent clauses together (unless accompanied by a coordinating conjunction).

People still ask me why I chose to major in English, I tell them I do because it's meaningful to me.

- Comma splices can be avoided by doing the following:
 - Replace the comma with a period
 - *People still ask me why I chose to major in English. I tell them I do because it's meaningful to me.*
 - Replace the comma with a semicolon
 - *People still ask me why I chose to major in English; I tell them I do because it's meaningful to me.*
 - Insert a semicolon and conjunctive adverb
 - *People still ask me why I chose to major in English; nonetheless, I tell them I do because it's meaningful to me.*
 - Insert a coordinating conjunction after the comma
 - *People still ask me why I chose to major in English, and I tell them I do because it's meaningful to me.*

Places to remember to use commas:

- Before the word "which" → I walked to the building two blocks down, which is at the intersection of Peachtree Rd and International Ave.

- Before the word “too” → Because I am in graduate school, I am a student, too.
- As an Oxford comma in a series → Some key concepts we’re learning about in DOC 1 are racial formation, intersectionality, and antiracism.
- After a dependent clause → When I was an undergrad, I didn’t declare my major until the end of freshman year.
- Before coordinating conjunctions that join two complete sentences together → My research includes feminist science studies and Indigenous literatures, and I hope to work with professors who can support my research projects.
- After transition words or phrases → After attending class, it might be helpful to review your notes to ensure you’ve understood the material.

The 7 coordinating conjunctions are FANBOYS:

for	but	so
and	or	
nor	yet	

Coordinating conjunctions bring equal parts of speech together

My dog and I went to the park. → dog (noun) and I (noun)

I like ice cream, but I don’t like pie. → I like ice cream (independent clause), but I don’t like pie (independent clause)

Coordinating conjunctions will always be accompanied by a comma preceding it when linking two independent clauses together.

You can choose to pay with cash, or you can pay with a card.

I don’t want to go to class, nor do I want to go to work.

However, be careful. Coordinating conjunctions will only contain a comma beforehand if both clauses are independent. Sentences with an independent and dependent clause will not need a comma.

On the inside she’s shy but doesn’t act like it in the classroom.

You can hang out in the library but not actually study.

The word “because” is a **subordinating conjunction** (although it’s not the only one). Subordinating conjunctions/dependent clauses don’t express complete meaning when standing alone. For this reason, when “because” starts a sentence, you will insert a comma after the clause in the same way a transitional word or phrase requires a comma.

Because I loved to read and write, I became a teacher.

Yet, when “because” is in the middle of a sentence, no comma is required.

I became a teacher because I loved to read and write.

Other subordinating conjunctions include but are not limited to:

<i>after</i>	<i>if</i>	<i>until</i>
<i>although</i>	<i>once</i>	<i>when, whenever</i>
<i>as</i>	<i>since</i>	<i>where, wherever</i>
<i>because</i>	<i>so that whereas</i>	
<i>before</i>	<i>though whether or not</i>	

even though unless while

Semicolons are also pretty fun. Here's why:

Semicolons require two independent clauses, one on each side of the semicolon. Think of a semicolon as a balanced scale. If the scale is balanced with two complete independent clauses, you can use one. If the scale is unbalanced due because of an independent clause on one side and a dependent clause on the other, don't use one.

*Georgia State University was founded in 1913; the university's mascot is a panther.
It's really important to tip your servers 20% when dining out; that's how they make a living.*

A note on semicolons:

If you can put a period there, you can put a semicolon there.

If you can put "and" there, you can put a semicolon there.

Don't overuse semicolons; use them sparingly to connect ideas that are related to each other.

Semicolons also sometimes require conjunctive adverbs.

Conjunctive adverbs = transition words

Transition words = can begin sentences but also begin the independent clause following a semicolon. Here are a few common ones:

<i>accordingly</i>	<i>instead</i>
<i>additionally</i>	<i>likewise</i>
<i>also</i>	<i>meanwhile</i>
<i>consequently</i>	<i>moreover</i>
<i>finally</i>	<i>nevertheless</i>
<i>furthermore</i>	<i>nonetheless</i>
<i>hence</i>	<i>on the contrary</i>
<i>however</i>	<i>on the other hand</i>
<i>in addition</i>	<i>otherwise</i>
<i>in conclusion</i>	<i>still</i>
<i>in contrast</i>	<i>then</i>
<i>indeed</i>	<i>therefore</i>
<i>in fact</i>	<i>thus</i>

These transition words are almost always accompanied by a comma.

If I could have majored in anything else, I would have majored in physics; however, I'm not the best at math.

It's scientifically proven that smoking cigarettes may cause cancer; on the contrary, some people still smoke.

A note on passive voice:

Passive voice is not grammatically incorrect, but it can weaken your writing and the ideas you want to convey. Passive voice is when a verb indicates that the subject of a sentence is not performing the action.

Active voice is when the subject *is* performing the action.

Passive verbs always consist of at least two words, a form of the *be* verb, followed by the past participle (the verb form that would follow the modal word "have").

Active: *She threw the ball.*

Passive: *The ball was thrown by her.*

Active: *Dan gave me a slice of pizza.*

Passive: *The slice of pizza was given to me by Dan.*

Active: *The author states that it's important to check ourselves on our biases.*

Active: *The author is stating that it's important to check ourselves on our biases.*

Here's a way to remember passive voice: think of zombies. For example:

My car was destroyed (by zombies).

My arm was sliced in half (by zombies).

The entire city of Atlanta turned into a ghost town because it was invaded (by zombies).

Content Credit to Joan Bañez.