

CONFUSED SENTENCES

Confused sentences result when we mix two ways of putting a sentence together. Or they may result when we cut a sentence short before some of the basic relationships in the sentence are clear. To straighten out confused sentences, ask questions like these: “Who does what? Who or what is the target? What is being compared with what?”

1. When two ways of putting a sentence together have become *mixed*, retrace your steps.

Mixed: He said *that* if we invited him *that he would come*.

Unscrambled: He said *that he would come* if we invited him.

He said *that* if we invited him *he would come*.

Mixed: They showed us a model airplane *of which* they were proud *to have built*.

Unscrambled: They showed us a model airplane *of which* they were proud.

They showed us a model airplane *that* they were proud *to have built*.

Mixed: *Just because* you are my friend *does not mean* that I owe you a living.

Unscrambled: *Just because* you are my friend, I do not owe you a living.

The fact that you are my friend *does not mean* I owe you a living.

2. The subject in a sentence maps out the territory. The verb that follows is the core of the **predicate**—it is the statement maker in the sentence. Once we have identified the subject, the predicate answers our question: “What about it?” Here is a typical subject followed by possible predicates, possible statements: Rome *burnt*. Rome *was built on seven hills*. Rome *conquered the known world*.

Make sure the statement made by the verb can logically apply to your subject.

Faulty Predicate: *The price* of their new home *was expensive*.

Revised: Their *new home* *was expensive*. (The *price* was *high*.)

Faulty Predicate: *Attendance* at the hearings *was always crowded*.

Revised: The *hearing room* *was always overcrowded*.

Faulty Predicate: *Her job* *was a court recorder*.

Revised: *She* *was a court recorder*. (A *job* is not a person.)
Her job *was that* of a court recorder.

Faulty Predicate: An eclipse *is when* the moon passes in front of the sun.

Revised: An eclipse *occurs when* the moon passes in front of the sun.
(It *happens* at that time.)

3. An **appositive** is a kind of sentence pocket where we can put information that might come in handy. Technically, it enables us to put one noun next to another noun for added information.

Right: Ronald Reagan, *a former governor of California*, was elected President.

Right: The President, *a skillful speaker*, defended his policies.

Revise appositives that do not talk about the same person or thing as the preceding noun.

Faulty: We have one *vacancy*, *a physics teacher*.

Revised: We have one *vacancy*, *a position* for a physics teacher. (A position is vacant.)

Faulty: There was *a telephone call*, *a customer* with a complaint.

Revised: There was *a telephone call*, *a complaint* from a customer. (The call was not a customer.)

4. Look out for incomplete or misleading *comparisons*. Spell out clearly what is being compared:

Incomplete: Carmen has *more* dedication.

Complete: Carmen has *more* dedication *than anyone else* on the staff.

Confusing: *My brother's cooking* has always been better than *his wife*.

Revised: *My brother's cooking* has always been better than *his wife's*.

Confusing: *The slides* taught *the students* more than *the teacher*.

Revised: *The slides* taught the students more than *the teacher* did.

What is the problem in each of the following sentences? Revise the italicized part.

1. My typing is not *as good as a trained secretary*.

2. *Tolerance is when we respect other people's views*.

3. When I came home, *the furnace had to be lit and fed the dog*.

4. We finally visited the famous sites *of which we had read about*.

5. I have acquired these views gradually *and are not based on any particular instance*.

6. *The Hawaiian Islands are composed of many races and mixtures of races.*

7. *The purpose of the station wagon is designed to serve as an all-purpose car for suburbs.*

8. *Parole is where a prisoner is released before his or her sentence has expired.*

9. According to her card, her profession *was a management consultant*.

10. *The American ambassador was black, an unprecedented appointment.*
