The Writing Center
METHODIST UNIVERSITY

THE DIRTY DOZEN
WITH EXAMPLES & CORRELATION TO HANDOUTS
(The Dirty Dozen web address is www.methodist.edu/english/dd_index.htm.)

BRIEF DESCRIPTIONS WITH EXAMPLES

1. (**frag) fragment**: A fragment occurs when a group of words is punctuated as if it were a sentence, but it is not a sentence because (1) it needs a subject, (2) it needs a verb, (3) it needs both a subject and a verb, (4) it is a dependent clause.

> **Fragment example:** Runs down the street. (This fragment needs a subject.)
> **Fragment example**: The teacher writing on the board. (This fragment needs a helping verb—*is, was, has been.*).
> **Fragment example**: I found my keys. On the table. (*On the table* is a prepositional phrase and needs both a subject and a verb.)
> **Fragment example:** Because it is too wet and cold. (This fragment is a dependent clause.)

2. **(fs) fused sentence:** (also called a run-on sentence): A fused sentence occurs when two independent clauses (complete sentences) are joined with no punctuation.

> **Fused sentence example:** It is a dark and cloudy day I will go home and take a nap. (The two independent clauses are run together, creating a fused sentence.)

3. **(cs) comma splice:** A comma splice occurs when two independent clauses (complete sentences) are joined with only a comma between them.

> **Comma splice example:** It is a dark and cloudy day, I will go home and take a nap. (The two independent clauses are joined with a comma, creating a comma splice.)

4**. (s/v) subject-verb agreement error:** A subject-verb agreement error occurs when a singular subject is matched with a plural verb and vice versa. Subjects and verbs must agree in number.

> **Subject-verb agreement error example**: I likes apples.
> **Subject-verb agreement error example:** The boys in the band is out of practice.

5**. (p/a) pronoun-antecedent agreement error**: A pronoun-antecedent agreement error occurs when a singular pronoun is matched by a plural antecedent and vice versa. (The antecedent is the word, phrase, or clause to which the pronoun refers.)

> **Pronoun-antecedent agreement error example:** A high school senior should research their college options carefully. (*Senior* is singular, but *their* is plural)

6**. (pro) vague or unclear pronoun reference:** A vague or unclear pronoun reference occurs (1) when it is not clear to which noun a pronoun refers, (2) when a pronoun refers to a concept rather than to a previous noun, or (3) when the reference of the pronoun is indefinite.

> **Unclear pronoun reference example:** The teacher gave the girl her book. (It is unclear whether *her* refers to *teacher* or *girl.*)
> **Vague pronoun reference example:** Bob spent the entire day fishing, but he didn't catch a single one. (*One* refers to *fish*, but the noun *fish* is not in the sentence. *One* cannot refer to *fishing.*)

7. **(mm) misplaced modifier**: A misplaced modifier occurs when a modifier is placed too far away from the word it modifies. (A modifier is a word or phrase that modifies or describes another word.)

> **Misplaced modifier example**: The robber was described as a six-foot-tall man with brown hair and a mustache weighing 150 pounds. (The misplaced modifier is *weighing 150 pounds.* The man, not the mustache, weighed 150 pounds.)

8**. (dm) dangling modifier:** A dangling modifier is a modifier that does not relate sensibly to any word in the sentence.

> **Dangling modifier example:** While reading a magazine, my cat sat with me on the porch swing. (Was the cat reading the magazine?)

9. **(//) lack of parallel structure:** A lack of parallel structure occurs when two or more parts of a sentence should be worded in the same grammatical way but are not. Faulty parallelism occurs especially in lists.

> **Lack of parallel structure example:** I like apples, oranges, and pears are tasty too. *(Apples* and *oranges* are nouns. *Are tasty too* is a phrase, so the items are not parallel. To maintain parallel structure, the third item should be *pears.)*

10**. (shift) inappropriate shift in person or tense:** A shift occurs when a writer changes from one person or tense to another person or tense without a logical reason.

> **Shift in person example**: *I* hate to go to the mall because *you* can never find a parking place. (There is a shift from first person—*I*—to second person—*you*.)
> **Shift in tense example**: The server *took* our order but then *disappears* for an hour. (There is a shift from past tense—*took*--to present tense—*disappears.)*

11. **(apos) error in the use of an apostrophe**: An error in the use of an apostrophe occurs (1) when an apostrophe is used for no reason, (2) when an apostrophe is needed but is not used, or (3) when an apostrophe is misplaced.

> **Error in the use of apostrophe example:** The girl's are having a lot of fun at summer camp. (*Girl's* should be *girls.*)
> **Error in the use of apostrophe example**: Its hot today. (*Its* should be *It's.)*
> **Error in the use of apostrophe example:** The girls shoe is untied. (*Girls* should be *girl's.)*
> **Error in the use of apostrophe example**: The three girl's shoes are all alike. (*Girl's* should be *girls'.)*

12**. (fp) faulty predication**: Faulty predication occurs when a subject does not work grammatically with its predicate (verb).

> **Faulty predication example:** The most valued trait in a friend is a person who is loyal. (Because a person is not a trait, the sentence should read "The most valued trait in a friend is loyalty.")

Avoid constructions such as "the reason… is because," "is when," and "is where."

(ISS) illogical sentence structure: Some sentences students write do not conform to any of the Dirty Dozen errors: they're just grammatically off-kilter, out of whack, illogical. We will label such sentences as "illogical sentence structure," and we'll mark these errors "**iss**."

CORRELATION OF THE DIRTY DOZEN TO WC HANDOUTS

Dirty Dozen Error	WC Handout
1. **Sentence fragment** (**frag**)	• **Models for Joining Clauses and Phrases into Sentences**
2. **Fused or run-on sentence (fs)**	• **Clauses and Complex Sentences** • **Models for Joining Clauses and Phrases into Sentences** • **Conjunctions**
3. **Comma splice (cs)**	• **Clauses and Complex Sentences** • **Models for Joining Clauses and Phrases into Sentences** • **Conjunctions**
4. **Subject-verb agreement error (s/v)**	• **Subject-Verb Agreement**
5. **Pronoun-antecedent agreement error (p/a)**	• **Personal Pronouns, Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement, and Vague or Unclear Pronouns**
6. **Vague or unclear pronoun reference (pro)**	• **Personal Pronouns, Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement, and Vague or Unclear Pronouns**
7. M**isplaced modifier (mm)**	• **Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers**
8. **Dangling modifier (dm)**	• **Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers**
9. **Lack of parallel structure (//)**	• **Parallel Structure**
10**. Inappropriate shift in person or tense (shift)**	• **Verb Tenses** • **Personal Pronouns, Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement, and Vague or Unclear Pronouns**
11. **Error in apostrophe use (apos)**	• **Apostrophes**
12**. Faulty predication (fp)**	• **Faulty Predication**

You can download the handouts mentioned above at the Writing Center's Resources webpage (https://www.methodist.edu/writing-center/handouts/) and view PowerPoint slides from our Dirty Dozen workshops at https://www.methodist.edu/writing-center/resources/