English: sentence formation, agreement and punctuation

Original skill preparation; versioned source scope

ACT English: Sentence Formation, Agreement and Punctuation

- Build complete sentences, each with an **independent clause** 独立分句 and a **finite verb** 限定动词.
- Use a full stop, **semicolon** 分号, comma plus conjunction or **colon** 冒号 correctly between clauses.
- Make verbs and pronouns agree with what they refer to.
- Place each **modifier** 修饰语 next to what it describes, and keep lists parallel.

Complete sentences

- A sentence needs a subject and a **finite verb** (a verb with tense): "The cards show the stage."
- "-ing" forms and "to" forms alone are not finite: "The volunteers recording names." is a fragment.
- A dependent clause ("because the room was small") cannot stand alone.

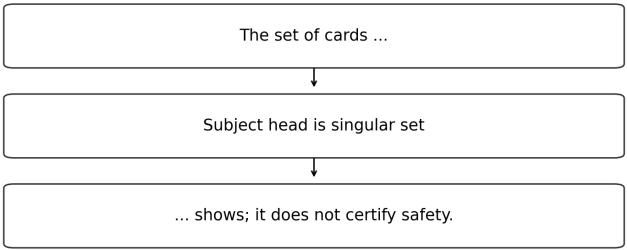
Joining clauses

- Full stop or semicolon between two independent clauses.
- Comma plus and, but, or, so, yet, for or nor.
- Colon after a complete clause, before an explanation, list or example.
- Never a comma alone between two independent clauses.

Agreement

- Subject–verb: find the true subject. "The set of blue cards shows…"
- Pronoun–noun: "The group updates its records."
- "Its" is possessive; "it's" means "it is" or "it has".

Figure: Agreement



- Worked steps: The set of cards ... $\rightarrow$ Subject head is singular set $\rightarrow$ ... shows; it does not certify safety.
- Match each part of the diagram to the text.

Modifiers and parallel lists

- An opening phrase describes the subject right after the comma.
- Keep list items in one form: "to inspect, record and advise".

Practice passage

- Original continuous editing passage — A place to mend

P1 On the first Saturday of each month, a group of volunteers opens a repair table in the public library. [S1] The project began when librarian Noor noticed a row of broken desk lamps outside a nearby building. [S2] Some needed specialist work, but others had loose switches or damaged cables. [S3] Noor did not want untrained visitors to try unsafe electrical repairs. [S4] She invited a qualified repairer to explain which items the group could inspect and which should go to a professional.

- The first session accepted only battery-powered objects, with damaged batteries excluded.
- Visitors registered their items and described the faults before any work began.

Worked example: the passage gets it right

- P2: "A blue card goes beside an object awaiting inspection; a white card marks one ready for collection." Two independent clauses, joined by a semicolon.
- P5: "The project now has a practical aim: help visitors make an informed next decision…" A complete clause, then a colon introducing the aim.
- P1: "Some needed specialist work, but others had loose switches or damaged cables." Comma plus "but" between two independent clauses.

Worked example: three repairs

- "The set of blue cards show the current stage, they do not certify safety." → "The set of blue cards shows the current stage; it does not certify safety." (singular "set"; a comma splice fixed with a semicolon).
- "Inspecting the lamp, a loose switch was noticed by Noor." → "Inspecting the lamp, Noor noticed a loose switch."
- "The group aims to inspect, recording, and advise." → "to inspect, record, and advise". And: "The group updates its records"; "It's important to label outcomes."

Common errors

- Writing a fragment with an "-ing" verb and no **finite verb**.
- Joining two independent clauses with a comma alone.
- Putting a colon after an incomplete clause.

Common errors (2)

- Making the verb agree with the nearest noun.
- Confusing "its" and "it's".

Key terms

- **conventions**: The accepted rules of grammar and punctuation.
- **independent clause**: A clause with a subject and **finite verb** that can stand alone.
- **finite verb**: A verb with tense that can be a clause's main verb.
- **semicolon**: A mark (;) that joins two closely related independent clauses.

Check yourself

- Is "Volunteers checking each item at the door." a complete sentence?
- Correct: "The lamp worked, the fan did not."
- Choose: "Each of the volunteers ____ a card." (has / have)