Split Infinitives

- **Infinitive:** an infinitive is the basic part of a verb, e.g., to dance, to sing, to play, to go.
    - In English it is always characterized by the word 'to':
    - e.g. to work, to pay, to eat, to find, to inhabit, to bribe...
- A 'split infinitive' is a grammatically construction that occurs when the 'to' is separated from its verb by other words.
    - [**split infinitive]** “To boldly go where no man has gone before”
        - [fix] "to go boldly"
    - [**split infinitive]** She used to **secretly** admire him.
        - [fix] She used **secretly** to admire him.
    - [**split infinitive]** You have to **really** watch him.
        - [fix] You **really** have to watch him.
- Harry's teacher told him **to** never **look** back.
    - Harry's teacher told him never **to look** back.
- She told me I had **to** quickly **finish** this sandwich.
    - She told me I had **to finish** this sandwich quickly.
- I thought it best **to** quietly **sneak** away from the accident.
    - I thought it best **to sneak** away from the accident quietly.
- I was told **to** always **pay** attention in class.
    - I was told always **to pay** attention in class.

- The ‘rule’ against splitting infinitives isn’t followed as strictly today as it used to be. Nevertheless, some people do object very strongly to them. As a result, it’s safest to avoid split infinitives in formal writing, unless the alternative wording seems very clumsy or would alter the meaning of your sentence.

Split Infinitive Exercises

1. I was told to always keep a good look out.
2. She said I had to quickly finish my homework.
3. I really want to fully understand this concept.
4. She was impatient to finally leave home.
5. He decided to completely re-write his essay.
6. I decided to definitely accept the invitation.
7. The bandits wanted to suddenly strike.

Answers

1.
    a. The correct answer is: I was told always to keep a good look out.
    b. Alt: I was always told to keep a good look out.
2.
    a. The correct answer is: She said I had to finish my homework quickly.
    b. This is really the only option for this sentence.
3.
    a. The correct answer is: I really want to understand this concept fully.
    b. An alternative possible answer is: I really want fully to understand this concept. To my ears, this does not read as well as the answer given above.
4.
    a. The correct answer is: She was impatient finally to leave home.
    b. An alternative answer is: She was impatient to leave home finally.
5.
    a. The correct answer is: He decided to re-write his essay completely.
6.
    a. The correct answer is: I decided definitely to accept the invitation.
    b. You could say: I definitely decided to accept the invitation. or even: I decided to accept the invitation, definitely.
7.
    a. The correct answer is: The bandits wanted to strike suddenly.
    b. Saying, 'The bandits suddenly wanted to strike.' alters the meaning of the sentence slightly. The suddenly refers to the wanting rather than to the striking.

Dangling Participles (Modifiers)

- Participles – adjectives ending in –ing, -ed
- Rush**ing** to the catch the bus, Bob's wallet fell out of his pocket.
- Fly**ing** south for the winter, I saw a huge flock of swallows.

- Rushing to catch the bus, Bob's wallet fell out of his pocket.
    - The modifying clause (Rushing to catch the bus) contains a participle (rushing).
    - "Rushing" is said to be dangling because the subject of the main clause (Bob's wallet) is not the thing modified by the initial modifying clause. It was not Bob's wallet that was rushing.
- Flying south for the winter, I saw a huge flock of swallows.
    - The modifying clause (flying south for the winter) does not modify the subject of the sentence (I). I was not flying south, the birds were.
- Falling through the thin ice, the jogger dived into the lake to save the dog.
    - The modifier (Falling through thin ice) does not refer to the subject of the sentence (the jogger). The jogger was not falling through the ice, the dog was.

- It is easy to fall into the trap of having dangling participles (modifiers) in your work. They are not corrected by computer grammar checkers and can be easily overlooked. The more you look at examples of dangling participles, the more you will be able to spot them and remove them from your own writing.

Collective Grammar Exercise

Dangling Modifier

1. Stuck in the mud, Tim could see a man waving.
2. Stuck in the mud, the man tried to free himself.
3. Stuck in the mud, the man called for help.
4. Stuck in the mud, the rescue services rushed to the man's assistance.

1. Breathing his last, the man passed away.
2. Breathing his last, we saw the man pass away.
3. Breathing his last, the old man shut his eyes.
4. Breathing his last, the man's dog jumped up and gave a howl.

1. Rushing to catch the bus, the old man slipped and fell.
2. Rushing to catch the bus, the old man's wallet fell out of his pocket.
3. Rushing to catch the bus, the old man's face was covered in sweat.
4. Rushing to catch the bus, the old man cursed his advancing years.

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2. He decided to completely re-write his essay.
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Comma Splice?

1. I'll never be able to buy a house, prices these days are just ridiculous. (Comma Splice, or not)
2. After a couple of drinks, we enjoyed a lovely stroll along the beach. (Comma Splice, or not)
3. Hungary is an interesting country, the churches contain some of the finest frescos found anywhere in Europe.

Fragment (Run-on)?

1. The meal was a huge success despite his lack of skill in the kitchen.
2. The meal was a disaster he is useless in the kitchen.
3. Given his ineptitude with a food mixer, the meal was a surprising success.
4. I really enjoyed the smoked kippers that he had prepared the night before.

Answers

Commas

1. After a hard day at the office, I like to relax with a large gin.
2. The recipe needed jam flour sugar fruit eggs ketchup and baking powder.
3. "Look at this," he whispered.
4. The correct answer is: Paulina, his wife of many years, had decided to go and live in Greece.
5. The correct answer is: As the sun began to sink over the sea, Karen got ready to go out.
6. The correct answer is: The thief was wearing impractical high heels, so she could not run fast.
7. The correct answer is: "I advise you," said the teacher, "not to cross me again today."

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Semi-Colon

Which can/should be connected with a semi-colon?

1. I hate rice pudding _____ dairy products don't agree with me.
2. Spain is lovely _____ hot weather and friendly people.
3. Spain _____ lovely beaches, endless blue sea and great weather.
4. Spain is a lovely country _____ the beaches are endless and the weather is always good.

Which can/should be connected with a semi-colon?

1. Paris is a beautiful city _____ wide streets and sunshine.
2. Havana is a lovely city _____ rice pudding is one of my favorite foods.
3. I would love to go to France _____ Paris is a lovely city.
4. I would love to go to Greece _____ I love ancient history.

Which can/should be connected with a semi-colon?

1. Understanding grammar is very important _____ despite its complexity.
2. Understanding grammar is very important _____ clear communication is an essential skill.
3. Understanding grammar is very important _____ most high level jobs require good writing skills.
4. Understanding grammar is very important _____ although it is not always the most fascinating subject on the planet.

Correct Punctuation?

Correct /Incorrect. Explain why.

1. Steve always went to watch football: he loved the atmosphere at the games.
2. Steve always went to watch football, he loved the atmosphere at the games.
3. Steve always went to watch football; he loved the atmosphere at the games.

1. Jill Paul's wife was kind, generous, clever and a fantastic cook.
2. Jill, Paul's wife, was kind generous clever and a fantastic cook.
3. Jill, Paul's wife, was kind, generous, clever and a fantastic cook.