

Mullins

Mixed Constructions

Any time you start a sentence, there are only so many ways it can go. The rules of grammar limit the possibilities. A mixed construction is a sentence that is mixed grammatically or logically.

Sometimes the problem is simple:

Although the United States is one of the wealthiest nations in the world, but more than twelve million of our children live in poverty.

Although starts a subordinate clause and a subordinate clause cannot be linked to an independent clause with the conjunction *but*. Also, *although* and *but* mean basically the same thing. Having both in the same sentence is not just grammatically incorrect, it's redundant. To fix this sentence either make the subordinate clause independent, or get rid of the conjunction. In other words, get rid of either *although* or *but*.

Yet some mixed constructions are more complicated:

In the whole-word method children learn to recognize entire words rather than by the phonics method in which they learn to sound out letters and groups of letters.

This sentence defies grammatical analysis. In this case, you need to step back and rethink the sentence. What is the main point of the sentence? It seems to be a contrast between two learning models. How can the difference be stated more clearly? Here's one possibility:

The whole-word method teaches children to recognize entire words, while the phonics method teaches them to sound out letters and groups of letters.

Logical Connections

Make sure that all of the parts of the sentence fit logically together.

Under the new plan, the elderly who receive a tax exemption will be abolished.

You're going to get rid of the elderly? No, you're going to get rid of the tax exemption.

Being a tax accountant is a very lucrative field.

A tax accountant is a person, not a field.

Avoid *is when, is where, and the reason... is because* constructions

We often use constructions like this when we speak, but they are not correct. Try to avoid them in your writing.

Anorexia nervosa is where people believe they are too fat and starve themselves.

Use *where* only to talk about place. Anorexia is a disorder, not a place.

The reason I didn't do my grammar exercise is because my grandmother ate it.

The reason and *because* mean the same thing. Use one or the other, not both.

Mixed Constructions Exercise

name:

Edit the following sentences to untangle mixed constructions.

a. Using surgical gloves is a precaution now worn by dentists to prevent contact with patients' blood and saliva.

b. A physician, the career my brother is pursuing, requires at least ten years of challenging work.

c. The reason the pharaohs had bad teeth was because tiny particles of sand found their way into Egyptian bread.

d. The change in quality of service has worsened each year.

e. In this box contains the key to your future.

1. Early diagnosis of prostate cancer is often curable.

2. Depending on the number and strength of drinks, the amount of time that has passed since the last drink, and one's body weight determines the concentration of alcohol in the blood.

3. Dyslexia is where people have a learning disorder that impairs reading ability.

4. Even though Ellen had heard French spoken all her life, yet she could not speak it.

5. By obtaining the correct form is the first step in the application process.

