

How to Fix Problem Sentences

- Fragments
- Run-ons
- Comma Splices



What is a sentence fragment?

A fragment is an incomplete sentence. It is not an independent clause and often lacks a subject, a verb, or both. Though a *dependent clause* does contain both a subject and a verb, using one of these alone as a sentence also makes a fragment because it is *dependent on* an independent clause and should not stand alone.

Example of a fragment with no subject:

Finding that he cannot possibly imagine life without her.

To correct, add a subject:

***The man finds** that he cannot possibly imagine life without her.*

When you add the subject, you may have to modify the verb and/or add a helping verb for the sentence to make sense. Above we modified the verb needed for our new subject, **man**.

You can also connect the fragment to a new sentence. You will be using the same idea, only making it more concrete by specifically attaching it to a related thought.

*Finding that he cannot possibly imagine life without her, **the man takes off running for her house.***

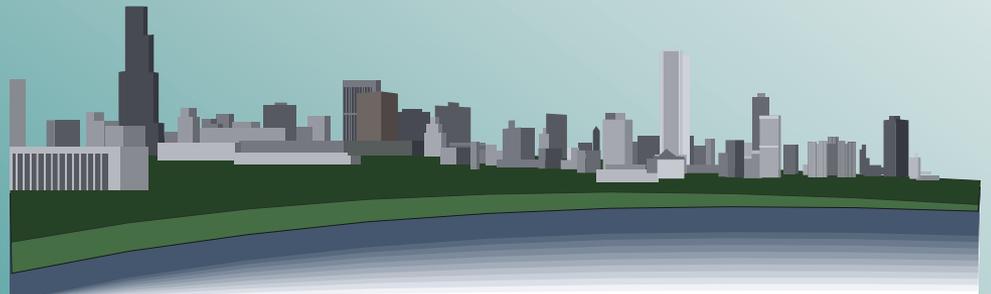


Example of a fragment with no verb:

My brothers Luke, Adam, and Robbie in Chicago who have never had real full-time jobs.

To correct, add a verb:

*My brothers Luke, Adam, and Robbie, who have never had real full-time jobs, **live** in Chicago.*



Example of a fragment with a subject and incomplete verb:

A hornet buzzing by my ear.

To correct, add a helping verb:

*A hornet **is** buzzing by my ear.*



**Any dependent clause (clause that begins with a subordinating conjunction) standing alone as a sentence is a fragment.*

Examples of a dependent clause:

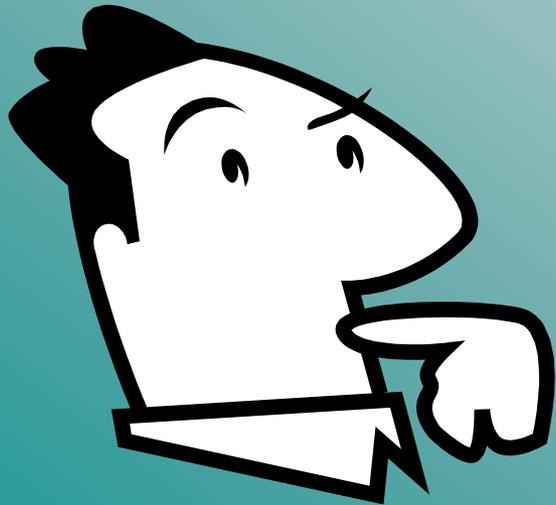
If you understand the directions.

When the parking lot is full.

Because she hates her roommate.

Even though someone does all their work.

Just think of it this way: If you spoke any of those dependent clauses to anyone and simply stopped talking, people would be waiting for you to finish your thought. Connect those kinds of incomplete thoughts to a complete thought. Look at the examples in the following slide.



To correct, connect the dependent clause to an independent clause (either clause can begin the sentence):

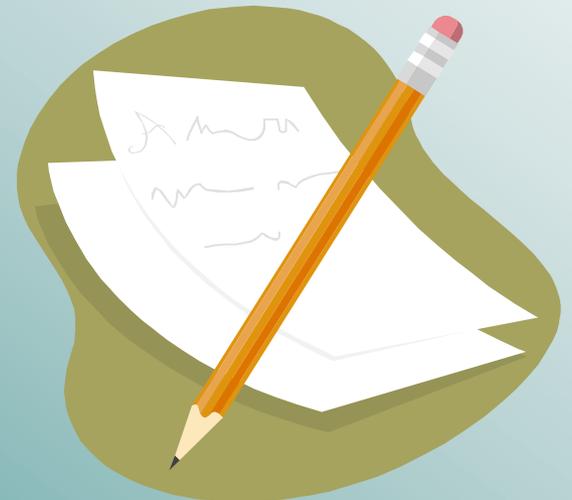
If you understand the directions, you will be able to complete the exam.

When the parking lot is full, please use the metered parking on the street.

Marie avoids her dorm room as often as she can because she hates her roommate.

They are stressed out most of the time, even though someone does all their work.

When you identify a fragment, know that there are many ways to correct it. Make sure it has a subject and a complete verb (main verb with helping verbs, if needed). Having someone else read your paper will help you find fragments that you might not see on your own.



What is a run-on sentence?

A run-on is formed when two independent clauses (each containing at least one subject and one verb) are brought together in a sentence with no punctuation. They could each form their own complete sentence, so when you bring them together, you need punctuation (and possibly extra conjunctions) that are strong enough to hold the sentence together.

Example:

Tina has been taking the bus to work her car is totaled.

Independent clause #1:

Tina has been taking the bus to work

Independent clause #2:

her car is totaled

When you read the above example of a run-on sentence, you almost run out of breath. There is no pause for the reader to process the ideas in the sentence. Don't make your instructor exhausted over reading your paper. Make it easy for him or her by punctuating each clause!



Ways to correct a run-on:

- 1) Make each I.C. (independent clause) its own sentence:

Tina has been taking the bus to work. Her car is totaled.

- 2) Place a **semi-colon** where the clauses meet:

Tina has been taking the bus to work; her car is totaled.

NOTE: Periods and semi-colons function almost identically. Both are strong enough punctuation marks to correct a run-on sentence with no extra words needed. However, they don't work to show the relationship between the clauses if it is not clear already.



3) Use a comma with a coordinating conjunction
(FANBOYS: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so)
where the clauses meet:

*Tina has been taking the bus to work, **for**
her car is totaled.*

(When used as a coordinating conjunction, ‘for’
means ‘because’)

4) Use a conjunctive adverb where the clauses meet. There are a ton of these words, but some of the more common ones are:

furthermore, in addition, likewise, moreover, however, instead, nevertheless, nonetheless, on the other hand, thus, therefore, in fact, indeed, consequently, finally, also, hence, incidentally, meanwhile, next, otherwise, still, then

Notice the punctuation for these:

IC; conjunctive adverb, IC.

The conjunctive adverb is used in between the two independent clauses, and it is sandwiched in between a semi-colon and a comma.

*Tina's car is totaled; **therefore**, she has been taking the bus to work.*

NOTE: You may need to reword the sentence slightly to make your choice work, but whatever gets you to a correctly punctuated sentence is fair game.

5) Transform the run-on into a **complex sentence** by making one of the clauses **dependent**. You will use a **subordinating conjunction** to do this. These words tell **how** something happens, **when** something happens, **where** something happens, **why** something happens, and **under what conditions** something happens.

as if, as though, after, as, as soon as, before, until, when, whenever, while, where, wherever, because, in order that, since, so that, although, as long as, even though, if, even if, though, unless

***Because** Tina's car is totaled, she has been taking the bus to work.*

*Tina has been taking the bus to work **because** her car is totaled.*

Notice the punctuation rule here: If the dependent clause comes first in the sentence, it is followed by a comma and then the IC. If the DC follows the IC in the sentence, then no comma is used.

An exception to this rule is when **though**, **although**, **even though**, and **even if** are used. In those cases, you **do use** the comma after the IC when a DC using one of these words follows.

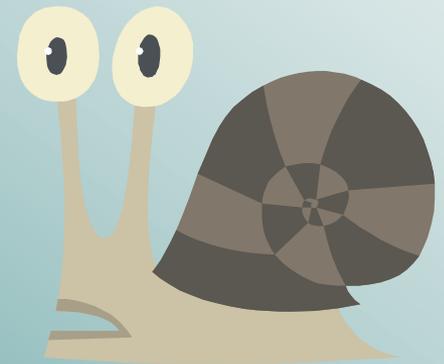
Examples:

*Fiona appears busy today, **although** she has no customers.*

*Fiona appears busy today, **even though** she has no customers.*

There are countless additional ways to improve your sentences and avoid run-ons. These are the most common and useful ways to do so.

Keep your eyes open for run-on sentences in your own writing! If you feel like you might be rambling, you're probably right.



What is a comma splice?

A comma splice is one step more correct than a run-on sentence, but it's still not correct enough. It puts only a comma in between two independent clauses, where more punctuation (and possibly additional words) is needed.



Example:

We're playing softball tomorrow night, rain is predicted.

Independent clause #1:

We're playing softball tomorrow night

Independent clause #2:

rain is predicted



Ways to correct a comma splice:

The rules for correcting comma splices are the same for correcting run-on sentences. You can make separate sentences, swap out the comma for a semi-colon, add a coordinating conjunction after the comma, use a conjunctive adverb, or try forming a complex sentence with a dependent clause.

One warning against always using short, separate sentences for your independent clauses: Your writing will become choppy, making you sound like an elementary school student. Your writing could lose its appeal if you don't venture out and try the more complex ways of forming sentences.



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