



Correcting Fragments, Run-Ons, and Comma Splices

Sometimes writers inadvertently write fragments, comma splices, and run-ons. If you seem to frequently create these kinds of errors in your writing, give yourself time to revise specifically to eliminate them, separate from the general revision you do on the ideas and content of the paper.

What is a sentence fragment?

There are two kinds of fragments. Some fragments are incomplete sentences trying to stand as whole, independent sentences: I knew where to find the missing jewels. On the bookshelf.

Other fragments are “subordinate” clauses trying to stand independently: We went to the store. Although we didn’t buy anything.

How do I correct a sentence fragment?

To correct a sentence fragment, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Does the sentence have a subject and verb and no subordinating words?

Example: Walked to the store. (This fragment needs a subject.)

Example: The books on the shelf. (This fragment needs a verb.)

2. Is the sentence a dependent clause, which means that it’s subordinate to another sentence and therefore should be part of it? Common subordinating words that turn a sentence into a dependent clause are: *although, as, because, since, though, that, unless, when, where*

Example: We went to the store. Although we didn’t buy anything.

Corrected sentence: We went to the store, **although** we didn’t buy anything.

What is a comma splice?

Comma splices are two or more complete, independent sentences which are joined by a comma rather than separated by a period or some other mark of punctuation.

Example: In the distance there was a commotion, it turned out to be an approaching tornado.

What is a run-on sentence?

Run-on sentences are usually comma splices without the comma separating the two sentences. If you’re not careful about where sentences begin and end, your words can run on and on and on:

Example: In the schoolroom there were desks there were chairs I saw a bookshelf, the wastebaskets and several chalkboards hung on the walls.

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How do I correct a comma splice or a run-on sentence?

You might have been told at some point that a sentence makes “a complete thought.” Comma splices and run-ons usually happen when your mind is telling you that what you’ve written equals one complete thought, but you have actually written two or more sentences.

There are many ways to gracefully link two or more sentences. Here are a few:

1. **Separate the sentences into two complete sentences.**

Example: We walked into the woods. I picked a flower.

2. **Join them with a semicolon.** Semicolons work like periods by separating complete sentences. The difference is that semicolons signal that the second sentence is closely linked to the first, almost making the two sentences one idea.

Example: We walked in the woods; I picked a flower.

3. **Join the sentences with a comma and a coordinating conjunction** (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so). You can remember the list of conjunctions with the acronym *FANBOYS*.

Example: We walked into the woods, and I picked a flower.

4. **Use subordinating words to make one sentence dependent on the other.** Remember, a subordinating word turns a sentence into a dependent clause which must be connected to another complete clause.

Example: **While** walking in the woods, I picked a flower.

Example: **When** I went to the store, I bought cookies, candy, and Coke.