Fragments and Run-Ons

What is a sentence fragment?

Sentence fragments are phrases that lack one of the two necessary components for a complete sentence: a subject or a verb. A fragment may also be a clause that has a subject and a verb, but that begins with a subordinating word (like *although, because, since, that, than, if, when, where, why, though, how,* or *unless*). A clause that begins with a subordinating word is called a subordinate clause, and it can only function within other sentences.

Simple examples: out of context, fragments can be easy to spot.

Waiting in line at the Help Desk. (no subject)

Many students. (no verb)

Until a computer was available. (subordinate clause)

Harder examples: fragments are more difficult to identify when they follow a complete sentence in context or resemble conversational speech. Note how the second "sentence" in each of these examples logically belongs with the sentence before it, even though they "sound" right.

I saw two of my classmates at the Help Desk. One from my economics and one from my biology lab.

It will be a miracle. If I finish typing my paper tonight.

At least I've already planned the major parts. For example, the thesis, body paragraphs, and evidence.

How to Correct a Sentence Fragment

The easiest way to get rid of a fragment is to connect it to a complete sentence, usually either the one before or the one after it, changing the punctuation accordingly. The revised versions of the previous examples could read as follows:

Many students were waiting in line at the Help Desk until a computer was available.

I saw two of my classmates at the Help Desk: one from my economics class and one from my biology lab.

If I finish typing my paper tonight, it will be a miracle.

At least I've planned the major parts—for example, the thesis, body paragraphs, and supporting evidence.

Another way to correct a sentence fragment is to turn it into a separate complete sentence.

I saw two of my classmates at the Help Desk. One is in my economics class and the other is in my biology lab.

Be aware that some subjects are understood rather than implicitly stated. Sentences with these types of subjects are still complete sentences. For example, the following sentence is a command where the subject is understood to be "you."

Please be quiet so I can concentrate.

What is a Run-on Sentence?

A run-on sentence is the flip side of a fragment – a sentence where two independent clauses (complete sentences) are joined incorrectly. Run-on sentences are grammatically incorrect and tend to make writing confusing and unwieldly. There are two types of run-on sentences: **comma splices** and **fused sentences**.

A **comma splice** occurs when two or more independent clauses are joined only by a comma.

My cat meowed, I knew she wanted food.

I rushed out the door, leaving my lunch on the counter, now I have nothing to eat.

Many famous authors have lived in Minnesota, examples include Sinclair Lewis, Laura Ingalls Wilder, and Louise Erdrich.

A **fused sentence** occurs when independent clauses run together with no marks of punctuation or coordinating conjunctions to separate them.

My professor read my paper she said it was excellent.

My cat bites me she wants to play.

A visit to the Writing Center improves your papers we all know that.

How to Correct a Run-on Sentence

There are many ways to correct a run-on sentence. The method you choose will depend on the focus and flow of your paper.

Use a semicolon (or, in some cases, a colon or a dash). You can use a semicolon alone or with a transitional expression (*however*, *therefore*, *in contrast*, etc.).

I rushed out the door, leaving my lunch on the counter<u>;</u> now I have nothing to eat.

My cat meowed<u>; therefore,</u> I knew she wanted food.

Many famous authors have lived in Minnesota<u>:</u> examples include Sinclair Lewis, Laura Ingalls Widler, and Louise Erdich.

Use a comma and a coordinating conjunction (*and*, *but*, *yet*, *so*, *nor*, *for*). When you join two independent clauses with a coordinating conjunction, place a comma before the conjunction.

My professor read my paper<u>, and</u> she said it was excellent.

My cat meowed<u>, so</u> I knew she wanted food.

Separate the independent clauses into sentences. This is an especially good technique if one of the sentences is long – otherwise, the result can sound choppy.

A visit to the Writing Center improves your paper<u>.</u> We all know that.

I rushed out the door, leaving my lunch on the counter<u>.</u> Now I have nothing to eat.

Restructure the sentence to subordinate one of the clauses. If one of the sentences is less important than the other, you can turn it into a subordinate clause. Sometimes, all this takes is the addition of a subordinating word like *although*, *that*, *when*, etc. Other times, you may need to restructure the whole sentence.

My cat bites me <u>when</u> she wants to play.

<u>We all know that</u> a visit to the Writing Center improves your paper.

Many famous author <u>– including Sinclair Lewis, Laura Ingalls Wilder, and Louise Erdrich –</u> have lived in Minnesota.