

1 SENTENCE STRUCTURE

FRAGMENTS—COMMA SPLICES—FUSED SENTENCES (RUN-ONS)

FRAGMENTS

Although professional writers sometimes use sentence fragments for emphasis, recognizing and avoiding them is best for your student papers. Basically, a fragment is an incomplete sentence because it lacks one or more of these three necessary sentence elements: a subject, a complete verb, or a complete thought.

Fragment: **A first year student.** (No verb/predicate)

Fragment: **Can always take UFOs in American History.**
(No subject. Who can take UFOs in American History?)

Fragment: **If no other class is available.** (Not a complete thought)

Complete: **If no other class is available, a first year student can always take UFOs in American History.**



This sentence is now complete and expresses a completed activity.

Subordinate or dependent clauses cannot stand alone; a sentence containing a subordinate clause must also have an independent clause. Subordinate clauses are introduced by **subordinating conjunctions** or **relative pronouns**.

Subordinating conjunctions help the reader understand the relationship between the idea in the main clause and the idea expressed in the subordinate clause.

Subordinating Conjunctions	Type of Relationship
after as before once since until while	time
where wherever	Place
because	cause
although	concession
although though whether if unless	condition
In order that so that	result

Fragment: **Because I could not stop for death.**

Fragment: **Because I could not stop for death. Death kindly stopped for me.**

Correct: **“Because I could not stop for death, death kindly stopped for me.”—Emily Dickenson**

Relative pronouns begin clauses that further explain a noun. The relative pronoun becomes the subject of the subordinate clause it starts.

Relative Pronouns
who whom which that whose

Fragment: The girl who had only recently discovered The Beatles.

Correct: The girl, who had only recently discovered The Beatles, immediately bought all of their music and declared herself queen of their fan club.

FUSED OR RUN-ON SENTENCES

A fused sentence is a serious error that confounds a reader. It occurs when the writer combines two sentences with no punctuation between them.

Fused (Run-on): Alfred had not eaten dinner yet he stopped at McDonald's on the way home.

Fused (Run-on): His new car was already in the shop perhaps he should have bought a Honda.

Fused (Run-on): I wish we could eat lunch outside the weather is beautiful.



There are three primary ways to fix a fused sentence. The writer can add a semicolon; add a comma and a coordinating conjunction (**for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so**); or create two sentences by adding a period and a capital letter between the clauses.

Correct: Alfred had not eaten dinner yet, so he stopped at McDonald's on the way home. (A comma and a conjunction. Remember that the comma always goes before the conjunction.)

Correct: His new car was already in the shop; perhaps he should have bought a Honda. (A semicolon. **Note:** Semicolons should be used sparingly. The only time you need a semicolon is when the two thoughts are so closely connected that they can't be separated by a conjunction or when you are using "however," "nevertheless," etc.)

Correct: I wish we could eat lunch outside. The weather is beautiful. (A period and a capital letter making two complete sentences.)

COMMA SPLICE

A comma splice is another serious punctuation error that creates confusion for a reader. Writers often create comma splices when trying to correct a fused sentence. The writer uses a comma alone in place of a period, semicolon, or a comma/conjunction combination to join two independent clauses that could separate sentences.

Comma Splice: **A trip to New York City can be exciting, it can also cost a fortune.**

Comma Splice: **We do not know what happened, the canary was gone when we got here.**

Comma Splice: **He has failed math three times, he thinks he needs a tutor.**

Comma splices are fixed in the same ways as run on sentences: with a period, a semicolon, or a comma paired with a coordinating conjunction.

Correct: **A trip to New York City can be exciting. I can also cost a fortune.**

Correct: **We do not know what happened; the canary was gone when we got here.**

Correct: **He has failed math three times, so he thinks he needs a tutor.**

© Randy Glasbergen
www.glasbergen.com



"No, I can't explain my D in math. That class teaches us about numbers, not letters!"