Fragments & Run-on Sentences

A Quick Guide to Writing Complete Sentences

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What makes up a complete sentence?

For a sentence to be a complete sentence, it needs **two** essential parts:

1. A subject (who, what)
2. A verb (action)

Lastly, the sentence needs to be *independent*, meaning that it can be understood on its own.

Examples of complete sentences

1. **Carla** *drove* to the store.

2. **Peter** *ordered* pasta for dinner.

3. **They** *waited*.

4. **It** finally *stopped* raining.

5. If you are free, **we** should *go* to the game.

Key:
Subject, *Verb*

Examples of incomplete sentences/fragments

1. <u>Because</u> Carla needed groceries. *(What did Carla do?)*

2. <u>When</u> Peter arrived at the restaurant. *(What happened at the restaurant?)*

3. <u>Since</u> Shayla was stuck in traffic. *(What happened as a result?)*

4. <u>After</u> Sunday. *(What happens after Sunday?)*

5. <u>If</u> you are free. (*What should you do?*)

The <u>underlined</u> words are key to understanding why these sentences are fragments.

Subordinating conjunctions

Words like *because, when, since, after, & if* are examples of subordinating conjunctions.

These words indicate:

- Cause/effect
- Time
- Comparison
- Conditions
- Relations

Using subordinating conjunctions makes a sentence an incomplete thought. These are known as *dependent clauses.*

Dependent clauses & independent clauses

Dependent clauses cannot convey a complete thought/idea on their own. They need to be joined with an independent clause to fully communicate the full picture of an action.

Independent clauses, however, do contain a complete thought. Some examples of these can be found in slide #3 of this slideshow (examples #1-4).

Examples of complete sentences with dependent clauses

Here are some examples of complete sentences that incorporate dependent clauses. Note that all of these dependent clauses are joined *with* an independent clause, and that the dependent clause can be placed before *or* after the independent clause.

1. <u>Because</u> she needed groceries, **Carla *drove*** to the store.

    a. Carla drove to the store because she needed groceries.

2. <u>When</u> Peter arrived at the restaurant, **he *ordered*** pasta for dinner.

    a. Peter ordered pasta for dinner when he arrived at the restaurant.

3. **We** should ***go*** to the game, <u>if</u> you are free.

    a. If you are free, we should go to the game.

4. **They *waited*** <u>since</u> Shayla was stuck in traffic.

    a. Since Shayla was stuck in traffic, they waited.

Refresher

Sentence	Does it have a subject?	Does it have a verb?	Does it have a subordinating conjunction?	Does it form a complete thought?	Complete sentence?
While they were waiting for the rain to stop.	✅ *(they)*	✅ (waiting)	✅ *(while)*	❌ (what did they do?)	❌
They waited.	✅ *(they)*	✅ *(waited)*	❌	✅	✅
While they were waiting for the rain to stop, they stayed in the car.	✅ *(they)*	✅ *(waiting, stayed)*	✅ *(while)*	✅	✅

Independent clauses v.s. Dependent clauses

In each of these examples, the *dependent clause* is italicized, while the **independent clause** is bolded. Notice how despite having a subject and verb, a clause can still be dependent if they have a <u>subordinating conjunction</u>. Also, notice how the **independent clauses** would be a complete sentence if we ended the sentence there (e.g., "Lina contacted a tutor" would be a complete sentence).

1. *<u>While</u> they were waiting for the rain to stop*, **they stayed in the car**.
   a. **They stayed in the car** *<u>while</u> they were waiting for the rain to stop*.
2. *<u>Since</u> she was late,* **Shayla ran to the bus stop**.
   a. **Shayla ran to the bus stop** *<u>because</u> she was late*.
3. **Peter ordered pasta** *<u>because</u> he was craving Italian food*.
   a. *<u>Because</u> he was craving Italian food*, **Peter ordered pasta**.
4. **Lina contacted a tutor** *<u>because</u> she needed help with math homework*.
   a. *<u>Because</u> she needed help with math homework,* **Lina contacted a tutor**.

Run-on sentences

A **run-on** sentence is when two complete sentences are combined *without* separating them by using: **1)** a coordinating conjunction, **2)** a form of punctuation, or **3)** a subordinating conjunction.

Run-on sentences *cannot* be combined with a comma. This is called a ***comma splice***. Comma splices essentially occur when a comma is used as a form of punctuation. Luckily, comma splices can also be corrected by either using: **1)** a coordinating conjunction, **2)** a form of punctuation, or **3)** a subordinating conjunction.

Examples of run-on sentences and comma splices

Run on sentence (complete sentence 1, complete sentence 2, complete sentence 3):

1. I adopted a kitten it is one month old.
2. I passed my exam I got a 90% it was very easy.
3. I want to go for a walk it is very nice outside.

Comma splice (complete sentence 1, complete sentence 2):

1. My favorite cuisine is Thai food, it is very delicious.
2. What a nice day, it is 65 degrees fahrenheit today!

How can I fix run-on sentences and comma splices?

Method 1: Adding punctuation

One simple way that we can fix these kinds of sentence errors is to add a form of punctuation (think period, semicolon.) We can also add something called an "em dash" (—) to add emphasis to the subsequent sentence.

Run on sentence:

1. I adopted a kitten. It is one month old. (corrected using a **period**)
2. I passed my exam. I got a 90%—it was very easy. (corrected using an **em dash** and **period**)
3. I want to go for a walk; it is very nice outside. (corrected using a **semicolon**)

Comma splice:

1. My favorite cuisine is Thai food; it is very delicious. (corrected using a **semicolon**)
2. What a nice day—it is 65 degrees fahrenheit today! (corrected using an **em dash**)

How can I fix run-on sentences and comma splices?

Method 2: Adding a coordinating conjunction

Coordinating conjunctions are words like for, and, nor, but, or, yet, & so. These words conjoin phrases and ideas and prevent run-on sentences from occurring.

Run on sentence:

1. I adopted a kitten **and** It is one month old. (corrected using "**and**")
2. I passed my exam**.** I got a 90% **for** it was very easy. (corrected using a period & "**for**")
3. It is very nice outside **so** I want to go for a walk. (corrected using "**so**")

Comma splice:

1. My favorite cuisine is Thai food **for** it is very delicious. (corrected using a **"for"**)
2. It is 65 degrees fahrenheit **so** the weather today was nice! (corrected using an **"so"**)

How can I fix run-on sentences and comma splices?

Method 3: Adding a subordinating conjunction

Subordinating conjunctions are words like *because, since, while*, etc. Remember that adding a subordinating conjunction will make a sentence an incomplete thought.
(Please reference slide #5 on subordinating conjunctions)

Run on sentence:

1. I adopted my kitten **when** it was one month old. (corrected using **"when"**)
2. **Because** it was very easy, I passed my exam**.** I got a 90%**!** (corrected using "**because**" & "!")
3. I want to go for a walk **since** it is very nice outside. (corrected using a **"since"**)

Comma splice:

1. My favorite cuisine is Thai food **as** it is very delicious. (corrected using "**as**")
2. **While** it is only 65 degrees fahrenheit today, it was still a nice day! (corrected using "**while**")

Adapted from:

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Writing Center. (n.d.). *Fragments and run-ons*. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/fragments-and-run-ons/

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