

Fragments and Run-on Sentences

Two common errors that occur in writing are fragments and run-on sentences. The problem with both stems from the definition of a clause. A clause is a group of related words containing a subject and a predicate (verb). There are two major types of clauses: *dependent* and *independent*.

A **dependent** clause does not express a complete thought and cannot stand alone as a sentence. (e.g. “the orange egg,” “running down the street,” and “known as a mean old man.”)

An **independent** clause expresses a complete thought and can stand alone as a sentence. (e.g. “Henry was a jolly fellow.” “The committee reached their conclusions at midnight.”)

Therefore, a **sentence** is an *independent* clause which expresses a **complete thought** and contains a **subject** and a **predicate**.

The **subject** of a sentence is a word, phrase, or clause that names the person, place, or thing about which something is said. (e.g. “Tracy,” “the black cat,” “many biblical authors,” etc.)

The **predicate** is the part of the sentence that states what the subject does. It expresses action or state of being. (e.g. “is,” “ran down the street,” “roared,” “eloquently proved his point,” etc.)

Fragments

A **fragment** is a separated sentence part that does not express a complete thought. Dependent clauses, verbal phrases, and appositive phrases are common types of fragments. They are incomplete sentences.

Incorrect:

Nehemiah sought God’s will for four months. **Before he knew exactly what to do.** (Dependent clause fragment)

Freddy stayed up late. **Working on an overdue assignment.** (Participial phrase fragment)

They all went to the airport. **To bid goodbye to their friend.** (Infinitive phrase fragment)

The detective discovered the thieves’ hideout. **An old abandoned house in town.** (Appositive phrase fragment)

The usual way to correct a fragment is to rejoin it to the sentence from which it has been separated.

Correct:

Freddy stayed up late, working on an overdue assignment.

They all went to the airport to bid goodbye to their friend.

Run-on Sentences

A **run-on** sentence is two or more sentences written incorrectly as one sentence. Sentences cannot be correctly written with only a comma or with no punctuation between them.

Incorrect:

Nothing is all dark there cannot be a picture without its bright spots.
Nothing is all dark, there cannot be a picture without its bright spots.

A comma does not fix the problem

Correct:

Nothing is all dark. There cannot be a picture without its bright spots.

Run-on sentences may be corrected several ways.

- If the sentences contain separate and distinct ideas, use a period and capital letter:
 - Incorrect:**
There are very few who will admit a mistake, such obstinacy is a barrier to all improvement.
 - Correct:**
There are very few who will admit a mistake. Such obstinacy is a barrier to all improvement.
- If the sentences are so closely related as to form one idea and are equally important, use a comma and coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, nor, for, yet):
 - Incorrect:**
Take time to deliberate, lose no time in executing your resolutions.
 - Correct:**
Take time to deliberate, but lose no time in executing your resolutions.
- Or you may use a semicolon instead of a comma and coordinating conjunction:
 - Incorrect:**
But God is faithful, he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.
 - Correct:**
But God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.
- If the sentences are so closely related as to form one idea and are not equally important, make the less important sentence into a dependent (subordinate) clause. They are always set apart with an adverb (i.e. when).
 - Incorrect:**
A man's temper gets the best of him, it reveals the worst of him.
 - Correct:**
When a man's temper gets the best of him, it reveals the worst of him.
A man's temper reveals the worst of him when it gets the best of him.