

## 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.