

COMMON SENTENCE PROBLEMS

The sentence problems that occur most frequently in college students' writing are sentence fragments and run-on sentences.

This handout will discuss strategies for identifying and correcting **sentence fragments** and **run-on sentences**.

Note: Throughout this handout, a dotted underline will be used to identify sentence fragments and run-on sentences. A solid underline will be used to identify complete sentences.

SENTENCE FRAGMENTS

A **sentence fragment** is essentially an incomplete sentence. There are two types of sentence fragments: missing piece fragments and dependent clause fragments.

MISSING PIECE FRAGMENT

A **missing piece fragment** is missing either a subject or a verb, and it is therefore unable to express a complete idea.

Here are a few examples:

the kitten mischievous

Missing piece fragment
(no verb)

seems mischievous

Missing piece fragment
(no subject)

the kitten being mischievous

Missing piece fragment
(no verb—*being* is a
participle, not a verb)

There are many ways to correct the missing piece fragments examples above.

Here are a few examples:

is
The kitten ^mischievous.

Complete sentence
(verb has been added)

My kitten
^ seems mischievous.

Complete sentence
(subject has been added)

tackled my shoelaces.
The kitten, being mischievous, ^

Complete sentence
(verb has been added)

RUN-ON SENTENCES

COMMA SPLICE RUN-ON

A **comma splice run-on** (or simply **comma splice**) occurs when two independent clauses are joined by a comma.

I'm not hungry for dinner, I ate a big lunch.

Comma splice run-on

This "sentence" is grammatically incorrect because a **comma cannot be used to join two independent clauses**. A comma is a helpful connector in many instances, but it does not work here.

FUSED SENTENCE RUN-ON

A **fused sentence run-on** (or simply **run-on**) occurs when two independent clauses are "fused together," with no punctuation or conjunction to demonstrate that the ideas are distinct from one another.

I'm not hungry for dinner I ate a big lunch.

Fused sentence run-on

This "sentence" is grammatically incorrect because **two independent clauses must be distinguished from one another** with the help of punctuation and/or a conjunction.

As independent clauses are complete sentences, one option is to simply separate the ideas into two distinct sentences. If you'd like to correct the run-on while keeping the ideas in one sentence, however, there are several ways to do so.

Here are a few examples:

1. I'm not hungry for dinner because I ate a big lunch.

Subordinating Conjunction
No comma

You may join the clauses through subordination: make one clause subordinate by adding a subordinating conjunction (sentences 1 & 2).

2. Because I ate a big lunch, I'm not hungry for dinner.

Subordinating Conjunction
Comma

Follow rules for punctuation explained in the Sentence Structure Basics handout.

3. I ate a big lunch; I'm not hungry for dinner.

Semicolon

You may join two independent clauses with a semicolon (sentence 3).

4. I ate a big lunch; consequently, I'm not hungry for dinner.

Semicolon + transitional word + comma

You may join two independent clauses with a semicolon, transitional word, and comma (sentence 4).

5. I ate a big lunch, so I'm not hungry for dinner.

Comma + Coordinating Conjunction

You may join two independent clauses with a comma and a coordinating conjunction (sentence 5).

EXERCISE – Provide two different corrections for each of the following sentences or parts of sentences.

1. Isabelle being a college student.

Correction: _____

Correction: _____

2. I've heard that Newfoundland is a beautiful place, I hope to go there someday.

Correction: _____

Correction: _____

3. Saw your brother at the library last week.

Correction: _____

Correction: _____

4. Nina trained all summer she was ready for the marathon.

Correction: _____

Correction: _____

5. The character's inner struggle exemplifying the theme that when one fails to put trust in those closest to them.

Correction: _____

Correction: _____