

Comma Splices, Run-ons, and Fragments

Note: This document should only be used as a reference and should not replace assignment guidelines.

Comma Splices and Run-ons

Comma splices and run-on sentences are caused by punctuation errors and are corrected in similar ways.

A **comma splice** occurs when two independent clauses (groups of words that can stand alone as sentences) are joined together by a comma.

COMMA SPLICE: Lazy Lou heard that a particular machine would do half his work, he ordered two.

This sentence is a comma splice because the clauses on both sides of the comma are independent, meaning they can stand alone as complete sentences.

A **run-on sentence** occurs when two or more independent clauses are joined without punctuation or conjunctions.

RUN-ON: I was never very good at cooking I bought a gas grill to learn.
This sentence is a run-on because it can be separated into two complete sentences.

Correcting Comma Splices and Run-ons

Correct a comma splice or run-on sentence with one of the following options:

- **Adding a period**

Separate the two independent clauses with a period and make two sentences.

EXAMPLE: Lazy Lou heard that a particular machine would do half his work. He ordered two.

- **Adding a coordinating conjunction**

Use a coordinating conjunction (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*) after a comma and between two independent clauses.

EXAMPLE: I was never very good at cooking, **so** I bought a gas grill to learn.

- **Adding a subordinating conjunction**

Add a subordinating conjunction (*after, before, if, once, since, so that, though, where, while, unless, until, etc.*) to the beginning of one independent clause to make it dependent.

EXAMPLES: **When** Lazy Lou heard that a particular machine would do half his work, he ordered two!
I was never very good at cooking **until** I bought a gas grill to learn.

- **Adding a semicolon**

Connect the two independent clauses with a semicolon.

EXAMPLES: Lazy Lou heard that a particular machine would do half his work; he ordered two.

- **Adding a semicolon and an adverb**

Use a semicolon plus a conjunctive adverb (*accordingly, however, meanwhile, therefore, furthermore, nevertheless, etc.*) and a comma to separate independent clauses.

EXAMPLES: Lazy Lou heard that a particular machine would do half his work; accordingly, he ordered two.

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Sentence Fragments

A sentence needs to form a complete thought and have both a complete subject and a complete verb. Sentence fragments are usually missing one or more of these elements.

EXAMPLES: Have been going to school regularly. (no subject)
 The teacher who said that grades don't matter. (no complete verb)
 Helping Jackie decorate her car for the festival. (no subject or complete verb)
 Because I love to read and write. (not a complete thought)

Correcting Sentence Fragments

Correct a sentence fragment with one of the following options:

- **Adding a subject**

Sentences that lack subjects do not say who is acting or whose state is being described.

Fragment: Have been going to school regularly.
Correct: **Sanjay and Alisha** have been going to school regularly.

- **Adding a complete verb**

Sentences that lack complete verbs do not say what the subject is doing, thinking, feeling, being, etc.

Fragment: The teacher who said that grades don't matter.
Correct: The teacher, who said that grades don't matter, **was only trying to comfort me.**
 The **teacher said** that grades don't matter.

- **Adding a subject and a complete verb**

Sentences that lack subjects and complete verbs do not say what is going on or who is acting.

Fragment: Helping Jackie decorate her car for the festival.
Correct: **Michelle helped** Jackie decorate her car for the festival.
 Helping Jackie decorate her car for the festival **wasted Michelle's Saturday afternoon.**

- **Completing an incomplete thought**

Some phrases have a subject and a verb, but they still don't make sense on their own. These phrases are often dependent clauses and start with a subordinating conjunction (*after, when, unless, while, even though, until, since, etc.*).

Fragment: Because I love to read and write.

In this fragment, the reader is confused about what happens because you love to read and write. To make this complete, either remove the subordinating conjunction that makes it a dependent clause (*because*), or add an independent clause (a phrase with a subject and verb that makes sense on its own). You can add the independent clause either before or after the dependent clause. If the independent clause is added after the dependent clause, you will need to include a comma as well.

Correct: I love to read and write. (remove subordinating conjunction)
 Because I love to read and write, **I became an English major.** (add independent clause)