

CCSU Writing Center – Grammar Guide

www.ccsu.edu/english/writingcenter/resources.asp

Fragments and Run-ons

A 5-step writing center resource to help you produce clear, well-constructed, and grammatical sentences

1. What is a Fragment? What is a run-on?

A **fragment** is a phrase or clause that is supposed to be a sentence, but it's lacking one of the elements needed to make it complete. (We will examine these elements below!)

A **run-on** sentence is a compound sentence that is not punctuated correctly. (We'll also look at compound sentences!)

2. Wait! But what exactly makes a sentence?

That's a good question! **Sentences** are words that are strung together in a way that conveys a complete thought. They must have at least one subject and a predicate.

The **subject** of your sentence is the person, place, or thing that you are talking or writing about. The **predicate** is the information about your subject, and it always contains a verb.

Let's look at a few examples of complete sentences:

1. Kendall waits.
2. The Writing Center has candy.
3. Kim ran here.
4. I feel lazy.

Note how each sentence is about someone or something. That is the *subject*.
(*Kendall* waits. *The Writing Center* has candy.)

Also note how there is always information about the subject doing something. That is the *predicate*.
(*Kim ran here*. *I feel lazy*.)

3. Now that we have looked at complete sentences, let's look at some fragments.

Here are some incomplete sentences (or fragments):

1. The tutor at the Writing Center.
2. Working very hard.
3. Always sitting at the computer.
4. The five-page paper.

Note how all of the sentences above are lacking either a subject or a predicate. Example 1 introduces a subject, the tutor at the writing center. However, there is no further information to convey a complete thought (the predicate!). Namely, this sentence lacks a verb. By adding a *predicate*, we can make it a complete sentence. Here is what it could look like:

1. The tutor at the Writing Center looks funny.
2. The tutor at the Writing Center annoys me.
3. The tutor at the Writing Center never smiles.

Now, there is information about the subject doing something in all of the sentences (all of the sentences have verbs). They are complete sentences!

A good way to check for fragments when revising is to ask yourself these questions:

What is my subject?
What is my subject doing?

If you can easily answer these questions, you likely have a complete sentence.

4. How do you make a compound sentence? And what is it?

A compound sentence is a sentence with more than one subject and predicate. However, if it is not punctuated correctly, it could become a run-on.

Here are a few examples of compound sentences:

1. The professor gave us homework, and I didn't like that.
2. The Writing Center is so busy, but I love going there.
3. I like working with Kendall, so I hope he is here today.

Note how all of the examples have multiple subjects and predicates. For instance, in example 1, "the professor" is the first subject. The predicate is the information about what the professor did ("gave us homework"). However, there is another subject in the sentence, and that subject is also doing something ("I didn't like that"). These two clauses that could be complete sentences (as they both have subjects and predicates) are joined together as a compound sentence. For further information on correctly punctuating compound sentences, refer to the Writing Center's Comma Pamphlet.

It's important to know, however, that, despite common practice, sentences can technically go on forever, so long as they are punctuated correctly and convey clear thoughts, so don't think that just because a sentence is long, it's incorrect, even though there does come a point when it gets a little ridiculous and hard to follow, which is the point here.

5. Correcting Run-Ons

Before we begin, let's look at some examples of run-on sentences:

1. I love coming to the Writing Center, the tutors here are the best.
2. The author writes well she reads a lot of books.

3. The students here always work hard and seeing them makes me happy.

What makes a run-on is the fact that it is not punctuated correctly.

So let's look at a few ways to correct these run-ons:

1. I love coming to the Writing Center. The tutors here are the best.
2. The author writes well; she reads a lot of books.
3. The students here always work hard, and seeing them makes me happy.

All of these sentences are now complete, well-constructed, and grammatical. In example 1, two independent clauses (clauses that could stand alone as complete sentences) were originally joined with a comma. Joining two independent clauses with only a comma is called a comma splice, which is something we should try to avoid. One solution to a comma splice is to place a period in place of the comma and make two separate sentences (as shown in the revised example 1).

In example 2, two complete thoughts were originally joined together with no punctuation. However, since the second independent clause ("she reads a lot of books") suggests a close correlation with the first clause (she writes well *because* she reads a lot), a semicolon is used to connect the clauses.

Lastly, in example 3, two independent clauses were originally joined with the word "and." The problem with the original example 3, though, is that when you connect two independent clauses with a coordinating conjunction (and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet), a comma is required before the conjunction. The reason for this is clarity. Without the comma, the second verb ("seeing") could be attributed to the first subject ("The students"), leading to a bit of confusion for your reader.

To check for run-ons while you are revising your papers, ask yourself these questions:

- Do I have multiple independent clauses in my sentence?
- Is it hard to determine my subject?
- Is it hard to determine which subject a predicate is attached to?
- Am I running out of breath while reading the sentence?

If the answers to these questions are yes, you may want to check for run-ons. Even if a sentence is not a run-on, sometimes it can be good to break it up anyway. Just because a sentence is syntactically correct, doesn't mean it's the best way of expressing your thought. Always strive for clear and readable sentences!

Resources:

Purdueowl.com
esl.fis.edu
ccsu.edu/english/writingcenter/resources.asp