

Comma Splices, Run-On Sentences & Fragments

Comma Splices

A **comma splice** is a common grammatical error occurring when two independent clauses (sentences with a subject and a verb that can stand alone) are joined only with a comma.

example:

The university provides quality education, the students are very grateful for this opportunity.

This problem can be solved several ways:

- Separate the independent clauses into two sentences:

example:

The university provides quality education. The students are very grateful for this opportunity.

- Add a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, or, nor, for, so, or yet*) after the comma:

example:

The university provides quality education, and the students are very grateful for this opportunity.

- Use a semicolon with a conjunctive adverb or transitional phrase:

example:

The university provides quality education; consequently, the students are very grateful for this opportunity.

- Restructure the sentence by subordinating one of the clauses:

example:

Because the university provides quality education, the students are very grateful for this opportunity.

Run-ons

A **run-on** or **fused sentence** can occur when two or more independent clauses are joined together without a coordinating conjunction or appropriate punctuation.

example:

Hiking up a mountain is hard work it provides a sense of accomplishment.

Like a comma splice, this problem can be solved using similar methods:

- Separate the independent clauses into two sentences:

example:

Hiking up a mountain is hard work. It provides a sense of accomplishment.

- Use a comma and a coordinating conjunction:

example:

Hiking up a mountain is hard work, but it provides a sense of accomplishment.

- Use a semicolon with a conjunctive adverb or transitional phrase:

example:

Hiking up a mountain is hard work; however, it provides a sense of accomplishment.

- Restructure the sentence by subordinating one of the clauses:

example:

Although hiking up a mountain is hard work, it provides a sense of accomplishment.

- A **run-on** is also caused by stringing too many ideas together with *and* or *then*.

example:

I went to the zoo and fed the monkeys some bananas and then I went to the reptile house and saw a gigantic snake consume a tiny mouse.

This sentence can be remedied by breaking the thoughts into smaller, more distinct parts:

Revised example:

While at the zoo, I fed the monkeys some bananas. I then went to the reptile house where I saw a gigantic snake consume a tiny mouse.

Fragments

A **sentence fragment** is a dependent clause incorrectly punctuated as a complete sentence. You can usually fix a fragment by fusing it with a nearby sentence.

Fragment example:

John arrived. Early again.

Revised example:

John arrived early again.

Fragments also may lack either a subject or a verb or fail to express a complete thought.

- **Missing subject**

Fragment example:

Was a disaster.

Revised example:

The trip was a disaster.

- **Missing verb**

Fragment example:

The singers practicing for hours.

Revised example:

The singers were practicing for hours.

- **Incomplete expression of thought**

Fragment example:

When the ball dropped in Times Square.

Revised example:

We screamed at the top of our lungs when the ball dropped in Times Square.

Types of Fragments

- **Infinitive Phrase**

Fragment example:

*He wanted to run the **race**. **To** prove to his friends that he wasn't helpless.*

Revised example:

*He wanted to run the **race to** prove to his friends that he wasn't helpless.*

- **-ing Participle Phrase**

Fragment example:

*Bob goes out dancing every night of the **week**. **Thinking** that the woman of his dreams can be found in a bar.*

Revised example:

*Bob goes out dancing every night of the **week thinking** that the woman of his dreams can be found in a bar.*

- **Past Participle Phrase**

Fragment example:

*Mike talked to her for **hours**. **Enamored** with her missing tooth.*

Revised example:

*Mike talked to her for **hours, enamored** with her missing tooth.*

- **Prepositional Phrase**

Fragment example:

*He kept dialing her **number**. **With** no luck.*

Revised example:

*He kept dialing her **number but** without luck.*

- **Noun Phrase**

Fragment example:

*The trophy was awarded to **Cameron**. **The** best dancer in the contest.*

Revised example:

*The trophy was awarded to **Cameron**. **She** was the best dancer in the contest.*

– or –

*The trophy was awarded to **Cameron, the** best dancer in the contest.*

- **Dependent Clause Fragment**

Fragment example:

*In the novel, a conspicuous character was the writer's evil **protagonist**. **Who** became a fictional embodiment of himself.*

Revised example:

*In the novel, a conspicuous character was the writer's evil **protagonist, who** became a fictional embodiment of himself.*

- **Missing Verb or Verb Part**

Fragment example:

Too many people on the dance floor.

Revised example:

Having too many people on the dance floor is a nuisance.

- **Missing Subject**

Fragment example:

*The children were staring longingly at the puppies in the pet shop **window**.*

***Just** wanted to pet them before they went home.*

Revised example:

*The children were staring longingly at the puppies in the pet shop **window**.*

***They just** wanted to pet them before they went home.*

Source:--Raimes, Ann. *Keys for Writers*, 3rd Edition, 2002.