

Avoiding MAJOR SENTENCE ERRORS: Run-Ons, Comma Splices, and Fragments

In the courses I teach, I frequently see the three main sentence errors that should be avoided when we write for academic or professional purposes: *run-ons*, *comma splices*, and *fragments*.

None of these is a correctly written complete sentence.

So, what makes a complete sentence?

For a sentence to be “complete,” the following three elements must be present:

subject + verb + a complete thought

NOTE: Another name for a *complete sentence* is an *independent clause*.

What are RUN-ONS and COMMA SPLICES?

A “**run-on**” **occurs** when two independent clauses “run together” without proper punctuation to separate them. (Some folks also call this a *fused sentence*.)

A “**comma splice**” **occurs** when two independent clauses are incorrectly “spliced” together with just a comma. (A **comma alone** is not a strong enough mark of punctuation to join/separate two independent clauses.)

Here are the 5 Ways to Correct Run-Ons & Comma Splices. Any of these will work!

1. Place a **period** between the two independent clauses.
2. Place a **semicolon** between the two independent clauses.
3. Place a **comma and a coordinating conjunction** (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*) between the two independent clauses.
4. Place a **semicolon, and a conjunctive adverb** (*however, therefore, for example, for instance, consequently, in fact, moreover, nevertheless, furthermore, then, indeed, also, as a result, nonetheless, after all, instead, still, in general*), and a comma between the two independent clauses.
5. Turn one of the independent clauses into a dependent clause with a **subordinate conjunction** (*because, since, when, although...*)

Here are some examples:

Incorrect Run-On: I loved his mother she was patient.

You can correct it one of five ways:

1. I loved his mother. She was patient.
2. I loved his mother; she was patient.
3. I loved his mother, and she was patient.
4. I loved his mother; indeed, she was patient.
5. I loved his mother because she was patient.

Incorrect Comma Splice: She opened the window, I fell out.

You can correct it one of five ways:

1. She opened the window. I fell out.
2. She opened the window; I fell out.
3. She opened the window, so I fell out.
4. She opened the window; as a result, I fell out.
5. I fell out because she opened the window.

What are FRAGMENTS?

A “**fragment**” occurs when a required element of a sentence is missing.

Fragments are groups of words that lack a **subject** or a **verb** or **do not express complete thoughts**.

The most common fragment error in college papers is what we call a **dependent clause fragment**. It is considered a *fragment* because it does not express a complete thought. Think of the sentence as “fragmented,” with a piece missing.

Here is an example:

Incorrect Fragment: Because I love turkey.

In order to correct this fragment, you need to complete the thought:

Because I love turkey, Thanksgiving is my favorite holiday.

or

Thanksgiving is my favorite holiday because I love turkey.

You will need to study this lesson handout and, going forward, edit you own writing in this course in ordert to avoid fragments, comma splices, and run-ons.
