Fragments and Run-Ons Study Sheet

Goals of this Study Sheet

There is a difference between short sentences and fragments. Similarly, there is a difference between long sentences and incorrect run-on sentences. After reading this study sheet, you will be able to identify the discrepancies between correct sentences and fragments/run-ons. Furthermore, you’ll see pinpoint examples of fragments and run-ons, as well as have an explanation of what exactly went wrong in the sentence.

Fragments

Simply put, fragments are incomplete sentences. Different components may be missing in different sentences, but all fragments are similar in that they are lacking something. A sentence is like a factory line. When all parts are present, everything runs smoothly; if a piece is faulty, it falls to shambles. The same is true of the structure of a sentence.

There are several reasons that a sentence could be considered a fragment:

There Is No Subject

Who? What? These are pressing things to know when reading a sentence. Otherwise, it will apart. The reader has to know who or what you are talking about to understand the entirety of the sentence.

Ex. Jumped on the trampoline. (Incorrect)

Who jumped on the trampoline? This sentence is a fragment because it lacks a subject, thus blocking its comprehension.

Ex. She jumped on the trampoline. (Correct)

There Is No Verb (Or Word That Connects To The Verb)
Obviously, if there is no verb, the subject performs no action, allowing nothing to happen in the sentence. Verbs are essential to complete sentences.

**Ex.** She during the school concert. (Incorrect)

What is she doing during the concert? The reader has no idea.

**Ex.** She performs during the school concert. (Correct)

Verb strings are also important, as they allow the reader to understand the action of the subject.

**Ex.** Charlie writing a paper for his English class. (Incorrect)

This sentence is missing a word before “writing,” leaving the verb string incomplete.

**Ex.** Charlie is writing a paper for his English class. (Correct)

**Prepositional Phrases Don’t Have Relation To Any Subject/Verb**

Prepositional phrases must get around to building a relationship with a subject and verb, otherwise it is a fragment.

**Ex.** Before the baseball game. (Incorrect)

There is no subject or verb that allows anything to happen within this thought.

**Ex.** Before the baseball game, I drank a bottle of water. (Correct)

**Run-Ons**

Contrary to popular belief, a sentence is not a run-on because it’s “too long.” If all the parts are present, and it’s grammatically correct, the sentence is fine. A run-on sentence occurs when 2 independent clauses are put together improperly.

**Ex.** I like to go outside and play soccer I have a new soccer ball to play with. (Incorrect)

“I like to go outside and play soccer” and “I have a new soccer ball to play with” are two separate, independent clauses; this means they are individual thoughts that can form 2 different sentences.
Another mistake that makes a sentence a run-on is the **comma splice**. This occurs when only a comma is placed between 2 separate clauses.

**Ex.** I like to go outside and play soccer, I have a new soccer ball to play with. *(Incorrect)*

A comma is not enough to separate 2 independent clauses. Lack of punctuation and the use of only a comma can lead to the formation of run-on sentences. Although this is a run-on, there are various ways to fix it:

**Use a Period**

Simply putting a period between the two clauses can fix the issue of having a run on sentence. Stop where the sentence is a complete thought and the run-on portion begins. Using the example above, the thought ends at “play soccer,” and a new thought follows, starting with “I have a new…”

**Ex.** I like to go outside and play soccer. I have a new soccer ball to play with. *(Correct)*

The period separates the 2 independent clauses, in turn fixing the run-on sentence.

**Use a Comma and a Coordinating Conjunction**

Using a comma **plus** a coordinating conjunction can fix the issue of a run on sentence, without cutting it into 2 pieces. This isn’t a comma splice either, as you are adding a conjunction after the use of a comma.

**Ex.** I like to go outside and play soccer, **and** I have a new soccer ball to play with. *(Correct)*

The comma combined with the coordinating conjunction allows the 2 clauses to become linked together, displaying the relation between them.

**Use a Subordinating Conjunction**

While you may have to restructure your sentence, a subordinating conjunction allows the sentence to flow fluidly, transforming an independent clause to a dependent clause.
Ex. Since I have a new soccer ball to play with, I like to go outside and play soccer. (Correct)

The subordinating conjunction “since” allows the first part of the sentence above to become a dependent clause, relying on the independent clause to make a sentence.

**Use a Semicolon**

The semicolon not only allows the sentence to become structurally correct, but also highlights how closely the two ideas are related.

Ex. I like to go outside and play soccer; I have a new soccer ball to play with. (Correct)

Semicolons give the writer a sense or freedom, easily allowing them to break up clauses and continue to tie ideas to one another.

**In Conclusion**

Just because a sentence is short doesn’t make it a fragment; just because a sentence is long doesn’t make it a run-on. It’s important to know what grammatical issues cause sentences to be fragments or run-ons, and what solutions to use so that our writing isn’t scattered with errors. Easily adding a word or punctuation mark can change sentences completely, developing them into complex, compound sentences that are structurally sound. It isn’t hard, but it’s important to recognize when a sentence is fragment/run-on, and what can be done to correct it.

**Sources Referenced**


From the Writing Center
at the Academic Resource Center