



Sentence Fragments and Run-Ons

Sentence Fragments

There are many ways of writing incomplete sentences. A correct sentence contains a subject and a verb. The subject is the “who or what” of a sentence. When trying to locate the subject of a particular sentence, ask yourself the question, “who or what is doing the action of the sentence?”

Exercise 1

In the sentences below determine what the subject of each sentence is by asking “who” or “what” is doing the action in the sentence. Circle the subject in each sentence.

1. Pizza is my favorite food.
2. My favorite food is pizza.
3. The child ran quickly down the street.
4. The table by the door must be moved.
5. Pencils are usually located in the top drawer of the file cabinet.

Once you become more able to determine the subject of a sentence, it’s time to move on to verbs. Verbs are either action words like run, jump, scramble, or they can be simple links between two parts of a sentence to make it sound right. Words like – is, are, was, were, become, etc. are this type of non-action verb.

Exercise 2

Identify the verbs in the sentences below. Underline them. (Remember that there can be more than one verb in a sentence.)

1. Michael scrambled up the loose shale of the mountain.
2. The accident was the result of drunk driving.
3. Susan is very ornery in the morning.
4. The trees on the trail scratched her arms.
5. The speedboat leapt into the air over the jump.

Identifying the subjects and verbs in the sentence is the first step to being able to recognize any type of sentence fragment. If a sentence is lacking a subject or a verb, then it cannot be a complete sentence.

Prepositional Phrase Fragments

There are many kinds of errors in sentence recognition. One of the most common is assuming a prepositional phrase is a proper sentence, e.g., “*From under the bushes*”. This sentence lacks a what or a who. This means there is no subject.

Exercise 3

Identify and underline the fragments in each of the following sentences. They will be in the form of prepositional phrases which can be recognized because they begin with words from the following list:

of	in	by	to
up	from	about	at
behind	within	for	off
into	with	down	over
under	between	near	below
beneath	around	above	along
before	amid	beside	among
without	through	during	across
toward	below		

1. Under the outcropping of rocks, in the tidal pools. The sea life can be found.
2. The child was found wandering on the deserted road. Beside the stands of tall pines.
3. Some people appeared at our door. During the hockey playoffs.
4. Throughout the entire house. The echoes of children’s voices could be heard.
5. Secrets are usually kept by people who respect one another. Between you and me. This is very true.

Verbal Phrase Fragments

Assuming verbal phrases are sentences is another common error made by writers. Phrases that begin with –ing words are common culprits e.g., “*Driving happily down the road in the country.*” This example is a phrase because it doesn’t answer “who” or “what” is driving. There is no subject or doer of the action in this sentence fragment. Another common mistake involves the use of the word “to” followed by an action verb. e.g., *She made a major decision. To run for the provincial party nomination.* The phrase “to run” starts this sentence fragment.

Exercise 4

Identify the verbal phrase fragments in each of the following sentences. Rewrite the sentences in the space provided to ensure they are proper sentences.

1. Mitchell finally agreed to see the guidance counselor. To ask about entering University in the fall.

2. The Olympic Plaza was a great accomplishment. Showing the enthusiasm of Calgarians.

3. Albertans blasted the new Federal tax. Being angry at having to tighten their belts once again.

Subordinate Clauses as Fragments

Subordinate clauses are simply less important ideas, and therefore cannot stand as sentences by themselves. e.g., *After the sudden rain shower*. This subordinate clause is a definite fragment. It has left some needed information up in the air. For instance, “what happened after the rain?”

The list below contains subordinate conjunctions. Use them to identify this type of fragment.

after
as
as if
though
when
where

because
before
in order that
whenever
why
until

although
unless
if
since
how
as long as

Exercise 5

Identify the fragments in each of the following. Circle the subordinate conjunctions.

1. Because we were very late last night. We didn't wake the children.
2. My favorite salad must contain croutons and Caesar salad dressing. Although I really like spinach salad too.
3. Before you even think of leaving this house. Please go and clean up that bathroom.

Run-On Sentences

There are basically three reasons for sentences that go on, and on, and on...

1. The Comma Splice

When two main ideas are joined by a comma (,) instead of a coordinating conjunction – and, but, or, for – then a major sentence error has happened.

e.g., “Michael went to the store, Susan went for a walk.”

instead, write

“Michael went to the store and Susan went for a walk.”

or

“Michael went to the store; Susan went for a walk.”

Don't let main ideas run together in your writing.

2. The second difficulty that causes a run-on sentence can be caused by **adverbial conjunctions**; words like *accordingly, also, consequently, furthermore, however, instead, likewise, nevertheless, otherwise, therefore, moreover....*

or can be caused by **transitional phrases**.

Phrases such as *for example, in fact, on the other hand*, can lead a writer to use just a comma (,) instead of the correct semi-colon (;).

e.g., “He disliked school, however he studied every day.”

Should be

“He disliked school; however, he studied every day.”

3. A third common run-on error concerns forgetting about punctuation altogether. e.g., “He gazed upon her still face and his heart was ready to break.”

The two ideas in the sentence above run together and mess up the meaning of the sentence.

It should be corrected in one of the following ways:

- a) He gazed upon her still face, and his heart was ready to break.
- b) He gazed upon her still face; his heart was ready to break.
- c) As he gazed upon her still face, his heart was ready to break.

Try the following exercise by correcting the run-on sentences.

Exercise 6

1. The automobile crashed headlong into the wall then all was quiet.

2. The best way to publicize a movie is to say it’s “For Adults Only” then everyone will flock to see it.

3. After the blood transfusion, the patient was quiet the doctor left for coffee.

Answer Key

Exercise 1

1. Pizza
2. food
3. child
4. table
5. pencils

Exercise 2

1. scrambled
2. was
3. is
4. scratched
5. leapt

Exercise 3

1. Under the outcropping of rocks, in the tidal pools.
2. beside the stands of tall pines.
3. during the hockey playoffs.
4. throughout the entire house.
5. between you and me.

Exercise 4

1. Mitchell finally agreed to see the guidance counselor to ask about entering university in the fall.
2. Showing the enthusiasm of Calgarians, the Olympic Plaza was a great accomplishment.
3. Being angry at having to tighten their belts again, Albertans blasted the new Federal tax.

Exercise 5

1. Because we were very late last night
2. although I really like spinach salad too
3. Before you even think of leaving this house