

## Sentence Fragments

A sentence fragment is an incomplete sentence. Some fragments are incomplete because they lack either a subject or a verb, or both. The fragments that most students have trouble with, however, are dependent clauses—they have a subject and a verb, so they look like complete sentences, but they don't express a complete thought. They're called "dependent" because they can't stand on their own (just like some people you might know who are SO dependent!). Look at these dependent clauses. They're just begging for more information to make the thoughts complete:

1. Because his car was in the shop (...What did he do?)
2. After the rain stops (...What then?)
3. When you finally take the test (...What will happen?)
4. Since you asked (...Will you get the answer?)
5. If you want to go with me (...What should you do?)

Does each of these examples have a subject? Yes. Does each have a verb? Yes. So what makes the thought incomplete? It's the first word (Because, After, When, Since, If). These words belong to a special class of words called subordinators or subordinating conjunctions. If you know something about subordinating conjunctions, you can probably eliminate 90% of your fragments.

**First**, you need to know that subordinating conjunctions do three things:

1. join two sentences together
2. make one of the sentences dependent on the other for a complete thought (make one a dependent clause)
3. indicate a logical relationship

**Second**, you need to recognize the subordinators when you see them. Here is a list of common subordinating conjunctions and the relationships they indicate:

- Cause / Effect: because, since, so that
- Comparison / Contrast: although, even though, though, whereas, while
- Place & Manner: how, however, where, wherever
- Possibility / Conditions: if, whether, unless
- Relation: that, which, who
- Time: after, as, before, since, when, whenever, while, until

**Third**, you need to know that the subordinator (and the whole dependent clause) doesn't have to be at the beginning of the sentence. The dependent clause and the independent clause can switch places, but the whole clause moves as one big chunk. Look at how these clauses switched places in the sentence:

1. Because his car was in the shop, John took the bus.
2. John took the bus because his car was in the shop.

Finally, you need to know that every dependent clause needs to be attached to an independent clause (remember, the independent clause can stand on its own).

### **Finding Fragments**

Remember the basics: subject, verb, and complete thought. If you can recognize those things, you're halfway there. Then, scan your sentences for subordinating conjunctions.

If you find one, first identify the whole chunk of the dependent clause (the subject and verb that go with the subordinator), and then make sure they're attached to an independent clause.

1. John took the bus. (Independent clause. So far, all is well!)
2. Because his car was in the shop. (Dependent clause all by itself. Uh oh! Fragment!)
3. Sami took the bus because his car was in the shop. (Now that is okay!)

## **EXERCISES ON SENTENCE FRAGMENTS**

### **Exercise I**

**Directions: Each of the 15 items in this self-test is in two parts. In the spaces to the right of each item, indicate whether each part is a fragment (F) or sentence (S).**

Examples:

- a. Not really knowing what to do. So running away from home. F F
  - b. I studied for hours. Preparing myself for the next test. S F
  - c. We jogged around the park. We covered five miles in 40 minutes. S S
1. Startled by the loud noise of the engine. I dropped the wrench and jumped out of the way.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  2. Sami was standing on the corner. Watching all the cars go by. \_\_\_\_\_
  3. Ridita gathered some dry twigs. And tried to start a fire for us. \_\_\_\_\_
  4. All of us waited at the door. To let the man in the wheelchair by. \_\_\_\_\_
  5. Written by a Black poet. Who had spent many years in the ghetto. \_\_\_\_\_
  6. I have wanted to drive a race car. For as long as I can remember. \_\_\_\_\_
  7. Even though Mr. Ahmed is more than seventy years old. He enjoys watching young, active children. \_\_\_\_\_
  8. She gave me her phone number. So I could call her later. \_\_\_\_\_
  9. Without spilling a drop on the driveway. Sami drained the oil from her car. \_\_\_\_\_
  10. Our instructor gave us a mid-semester test. Which was not as difficult as we had expected.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  11. Merely by giving him a gentle tap with a newspaper. Skippy can be controlled quite easily.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  12. He grinds his teeth only during his sleep. Never while studying or watching TV. \_\_\_\_\_
  13. Ms. Ahmed has a very low, soft voice. She plans to use a speaker during her speech. \_\_\_\_\_
  14. He asked me to check my figures with the clerk. The usual procedure in matters of this sort.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  15. After a long day of hard classes. A student needs a good rest. \_\_\_\_\_

## Exercise II

**Directions: If a group of words does not make a complete thought, place an X beside it and rewrite it as a sentence.**

1. When the rest of the class rushed out into the sunshine.
2. Up in the library, I ran through the required chapters in the two different books, and they differed on several points.
3. The opinion that when times are thoroughly bad a wise man will merely stand by the wall.
4. But we have gone to the other extreme and are so obsessed with the idea of society as a whole that it no longer seems quite respectable to seek even intellectual or spiritual self-improvement.
5. A second reason for wishing to be philosophic is that mistaken beliefs do not, as a rule, enable you to realize good purposes.
6. The movement of a concept or an image from the mind of the speaker to the mind of the listener.
7. If there is no excuse for blurring and meandering in conversation, there is even less excuse for it in written forms of communication.
8. The middle classes defended not only their purses and property but also their women better than the barons.

## Exercise III

**Directions: Place a check mark beside each group of words that makes a complete thought. If a group of words does not make a complete thought, place an X beside it and rewrite it as a sentence.**

1. Maria, with great curiosity, cautiously pushed open the door of the cellar.
2. That he was right. Jamil, being quite sure that he was right.
3. The mayor's acceptance of the current status quo.
4. The clouds, massing on the horizon, gave warning that a storm was approaching.
5. Although the dress came from a local shop, it looked quite fashionable.
6. The large, overstuffed chairs that someone had pushed in the corner.
7. That a penny earned is no longer a penny saved is a sad but true alteration of that old saying.
8. The largest cities of the U.S.--New York, Chicago, Los Angeles--cultured as they are, with industries and fashion centers.
9. Essay in which the truly educated person brings the intellectual world and daily life into harmony.
10. The old writer, like all of the people in the world, having a great many notions in his head.

## Exercise IV

**Directions: Decide whether each of the following groups of words is a sentence or a sentence fragment. If the word group is a sentence, underline the subject once and the verb**

twice, and write S for sentence on the line provided. If the subject you is understood, write you in parentheses at the end of the item. If the word group is a sentence fragment, write F for fragment.

Examples \_\_S\_\_ 1. The director is looking for talented, hardworking performers.

\_\_F\_\_ 2. Kneeling near the edge of the stage.

\_\_S\_\_ 3. Raise the curtain. (you)

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. The audience moved by his dramatic performance.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. Mrs. Lina, the director of this classic tragedy.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. Near the end of the first act.

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. Was playing the part of Lady Macbeth.

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. Walking aimlessly about and rubbing her hands.

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. At the final curtain came a loud burst of applause.

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. The actors staying in character during five curtain calls.

\_\_\_\_\_ 8. The most successful performance of the season.

\_\_\_\_\_ 9. What is the director planning next?

\_\_\_\_\_ 10. In the spring she will direct the well-known musical West Side Story.

\_\_\_\_\_ 11. That story based on Romeo and Juliet?

\_\_\_\_\_ 12. Are you interested in musicals?

\_\_\_\_\_ 13. Hoping for the role of Bernardo?

\_\_\_\_\_ 14. Practice the part now, and memorize the lines in time for the audition.

\_\_\_\_\_ 15. Who will play Maria?

## Run-ons

These are also called fused sentences. You are making a run-on when you put two complete sentences (a subject and its predicate and another subject and its predicate) together in one sentence without separating them properly. Here's an example of a run-on:

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus it is very garlicky.

(\*Hummus is a food item made from cooked, mashed chickpeas or other beans, blended with olive oil, lemon juice, salt and garlic. It is popular in the Middle East and Mediterranean, as well as in Middle Eastern cuisine around the globe.)

This one sentence actually contains two complete sentences. But in the rush to get that idea out, I made it into one incorrect sentence. Luckily, there are many ways to correct this run-on sentence.

1. You could use a semicolon:

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus; it is very garlicky.

2. You could use a comma and a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so):

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus, for it is very garlicky. -OR- My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus, and it is very garlicky.

3. You could use a subordinating conjunction (see above):

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus because it is very garlicky. -OR- Because it is so garlicky, my favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus.

4. You could make it into two separate sentences with a period in between:

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus. It is very garlicky.

5. You could use an em-dash (a long dash) for emphasis:

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus—it is very garlicky.

REMEMBER, you CANNOT simply add a comma between the two sentences, or you'll end up with what's called a "comma splice." Here's an example of a comma splice:

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus, it is very garlicky.

You can fix a comma splice the same way you fix a run-on—either change the punctuation or add a conjunction. The good news is that writers tend to be either comma splicers or run-on artists, but almost never both. Which one are you?

### Finding Run-ons

As you can see, fixing run-ons is pretty easy once you see them—but how do you find out if a sentence is a run-on if you aren't sure? Try these two tests:

- Turn your sentences into yes/no questions.
- Turn your sentences into tag questions (sentences that end with a questioning phrase at the very end—look at our examples below).

These are two things that nearly everyone can do easily if the sentence is not a run-on, but they become next to impossible if it is.

Look at the following sentence:

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus.

If you turn it into a question that someone could answer with a yes or no, it looks like this:

Is my favorite Mediterranean spread hummus?

If you turn it into a tag question, it looks like this:

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus, isn't it?

The first sentence is complete and not a run-on, because our test worked. Now, look again at the original run-on sentence:

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus it is very garlicky.

The yes/no question can only be made with each separate thought, not the sentence as a whole:

Is my favorite Mediterranean spread hummus? Is it very garlicky?

But not:

Is my favorite Mediterranean spread hummus is it very garlicky?

The tag question can also only be made with each separate thought, rather than the whole:

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus, isn't it? It's very garlicky, isn't it?

But never:

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus it is very garlicky, isn't it?

Unlike the complete sentence, the run-on sentence doesn't pass these tests. When you try to turn the run-on sentence into a single question, you immediately see that the sentence has more than one complete concept. Make sure you try both tests with each of your problem sentences, because you may trick yourself by just putting a tag on the last part and not noticing that it doesn't work on the first. Some people might not notice that "My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus it is very garlicky isn't it?" is wrong, but most people will spot the yes/no question problem right away.

## EXERCISES ON RUN-ON SENTENCES

### Exercise I

**Directions: Try to correct the following run-on sentences.**

1. My mother and father and sister are coming to dinner tonight.
2. I like learning English it makes me tired.
3. My sister was taller than me when we were young now I am the tallest it is fun.
4. I love school, I love learning, my teacher is nice.
5. I don't want much for my birthday just some chocolates and a little toy car.
6. Blue is my favorite color it is the color of the sky and the sea and it reminds me of my favorite insect which is the butterfly.
7. When I get older I want to have a big family I like big families.
8. We usually leave at 11:00 but today is different we are leaving at 10:30.
9. I like Tuesdays and Wednesdays and I like Fridays because the weekend starts on Friday.
10. We should get moving there's no time to waste.

### Exercise II:

**Directions: Fifteen of the following sentences are run-on sentences. Please correct each one of them on the lines below. Use all three ways to correct run-on sentences at least three times each (period, semicolon, comma plus coordinating conjunction). Five of them are correct. Write a C under each correct sentence.**

1. My father retired from the Air Force last year he is writing a book about his experiences.
2. Sami mowed the grass this morning tonight he will water the flowers and bushes.
3. The small girl seemed to be lost, she was crying and looking for her mother.
4. Mrs. Ahmed inherited a large sum of money from her brother she can buy a new car now.
5. Sami and Rumi worked very hard on their project therefore they felt they deserved a high grade.
6. I can never beat my little brother at video games, he has them all mastered.
7. Sami is flying to Sylhet for spring break, he will be gone a week.
8. We are moving to Rajshahi in July I'll go to school there.
9. The storm passed quickly through the area last night, and it caused a lot of damage.
10. We will be on vacation next week we will be unable to attend your party.
11. We bought shoes, luggage, and hats at the mall fortunately; we have a large trunk in our car.
12. I didn't think it would be necessary to take my umbrella; after all, the sun was shining when I left home.
13. Most of my study time is spent on biology it's my toughest class.
14. My car ran out of gas therefore I was late for my appointment.
15. A fifth-grade student from our school won the spelling competition; she spelled words I had never heard before.
16. My younger brother collects aluminum cans to recycle and is saving the money for a new computer.

17. Sami's dad is a pilot for a large airline sometimes he is gone for several days at a time.
18. My family reunion is in three months I wonder if everyone will be there.
19. I've missed several classes because I was ill I hope I will pass English class.
20. Sami is planning on going to Thailand for vacation; he'll need to take a lot of money.

**Exercise III:**

**Directions: Decide which of the following groups of words are run-on sentences. If the group of words is a correct sentence, write S; if it is a run-on, write R-O. Revise each run-on sentence by (1) making it two separate sentences; (2) inserting a semicolon, or (3) using a comma and a coordinating conjunction.**

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Brown bears include the grizzly and the Kodiak, the largest brown bear is the Kodiak.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Kodiak bears weigh as much as 1,700 pounds, they grow to a height of ten feet.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Bears can live more than 30 years in the wild.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Bears' sense of smell is more developed than their hearing or sight.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Females give birth to as many as four cubs, the cubs stay with their mother two or three years.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Many people are afraid of bears, encounters with bears are actually infrequent.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Grizzly bears are solitary animals, they do not want to interact with people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Generally, bears attack only when they are surprised, or when they are protecting their young.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. People should always store food and garbage properly, bears could be attracted by the smell.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Never try to outrun a bear, it can run more than 30 miles per hour.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. School in Munich was too rigid and boring for young Einstein he did not do well.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. However, young Einstein showed a talent for mathematics, at the age of 12, he taught himself Euclidean geometry.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. After finishing secondary school, he entered the Federal Polytechnic Academy in Switzerland, he did not like the teaching methods there.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. The academy frustrated him he could learn in a way that interested him.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. Einstein chose to educate himself, he missed classes often and spent the time studying physics on his own.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. His professors had low opinions of him, he graduated anyway in 1900.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. In 1905, he published a paper on physics the University of Zürich awarded him a Ph.D. for this work.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. In the same year, he published four more papers that presented new thoughts on the nature of light and other important concepts.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. Physicists resisted his ideas at first, eventually his general theory of relativity was confirmed through observation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. Einstein achieved international recognition, in 1921 he received the Nobel Prize in physics.