

FRAGMENTS AND RUN-ONS

La Salle University Writing Handouts



Fragments and run-ons don't respect the boundaries of complete sentences. They should be avoided in formal academic writing. In general, when you read through your paper, make sure that every sentence has a subject and a verb and that independent clauses are connected appropriately.

WHAT IS A SENTENCE FRAGMENT?

Sentence fragments are phrases that lack one of the major components of a sentence: a subject or a verb.

Also, a fragment can be a clause (a group of words) that has a subject and verb, but that begins with a subordinating word, such as *although*, *because*, *since*, *than*, *that*, *if*, *when*, *where*, *which*, *why*, *though*, *how*, or *unless*. A clause that begins with a subordinating word, also called a subordinate clause, can only function within other sentences.

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|--------------------|---|
| 1. No Subject | Waiting in line at the computer center. |
| No Verb | Many students. |
| Subordinate Clause | Until a computer was available. |

Fragments are more difficult to identify when they follow a complete sentence in context or resemble conversational speech, such as in the following examples.

2. I saw two people I know at the computer center. A guy who's in my economics class and a friend from my dorm.
3. It will be a miracle. If I finish typing my paper tonight.
4. At least I've already planned the major parts. For example, the thesis, body paragraphs, and supporting evidence.

Note how the second "sentence" in each of these examples logically belongs with the sentence before it. No fragment, whether it's a subordinate clause or missing a subject or verb, can stand on its own, even if it "sounds right."

HOW DO I CORRECT A SENTENCE FRAGMENT

Most of the time, the easiest way to get rid of a fragment is to connect it to a complete sentence, usually either the one before or the one after it, and change the punctuation accordingly. Hence, the revised versions of examples 1, 2, 3 and 4 could read as follows:

1. Many students were waiting in line at the computer center until a computer was available.
2. I saw two people I know at the computer center: a guy who's in my economics class and a friend from my dorm.
3. If I finish typing my paper tonight, it will be a miracle.
4. At least I've planned the major parts—for example, the thesis, body paragraphs, and supporting evidence.

Another way to get rid of a fragment is to turn it into a separate complete sentence. Every complete sentence needs a subject and a verb. Be aware that some subjects are understood rather than implicitly stated, although they are still complete sentences. For example, the following sentence is a command where the subject is understood to be *you*:

1. Please be quiet so I can concentrate.

WHAT IS A RUN-ON?

A run-on is the flip side of a fragment—a sentence that is “too much” rather than “not enough.” A run-on occurs when two independent clauses (clauses with subjects and verbs that can stand as complete sentences) aren't joined correctly. Run-ons are classified as either fused sentences or comma splices. Most commonly, writers will try to connect the independent clauses with a comma, resulting in a comma splice (Example 1). If a writer puts no punctuation between independent clauses, the result is called a fused sentence (Example 2).

1. The UT tower was built in the late 1930s, it has since become a distinctive part of the Austin skyline.
2. The Old Main building on the UT campus had a library, 9 lecture halls, 30 classrooms, and a grand auditorium it was not large enough for the growing University.



HOW DO I CORRECT A RUN-ON?

- You can use a semicolon. For example, you could rewrite Example 1 as follows:
 - The UT tower was built in the late 1930s; it has since become a distinctive part of the Austin skyline.
- A semicolon can also be used with an appropriate conjunctive adverb or transitional phrase (as in Example 4.) In addition, you may use a colon when the first independent clause introduces the second (as in Example 5.)
 - To make room for the new UT tower, the Old Main building was torn down in 1932; however, many people protested its destruction.
 - The UT tower houses the largest carillon in Texas: it contains 56 bells.
- You can also connect the two independent clauses with a comma and a coordinating conjunction (and, but, nor, or, for, so, yet). You could rewrite Example 2 as follows:
 - The Old Main building on the UT campus had a library, 9 lecture halls, 30 classrooms, and a grand auditorium, but it was not large enough for the growing University.
- Of course, you can always fix a run-on by turning the independent clauses into separate sentences, as long as the result doesn't sound too choppy. Here is another acceptable revision of Example 1:
 - The UT tower was built in the late 1930s. It has since become a distinctive part of the Austin skyline.
- Finally, you can restructure the sentence to get rid of one of the independent clauses, usually by subordinating one of the clauses. Example 2 may be rewritten in this manner:
 - Although many people protested its destruction, the Old Main building was torn down in 1932 to make room for the new UT tower.

