

Fragments and Run-ons

The main way to avoid fragments and run-ons is to understand how clauses work, specifically independent and dependent clauses.

Main (Independent) Clause

A main clause can stand by itself in a sentence. It expresses a complete thought and contains a subject and a verb. You can think of a main clause as a simple sentence:

- The door is wide open.
- My friends and I walked to class.

Dependent Clause

A dependent clause contains a subject and verb but cannot be an independent sentence because it does not express a complete thought on its own.

Fragments

Fragments occur when a sentence's main clause is incomplete. One common error that creates fragments is omitting one or more of the essential elements of the main clause, like the noun and/or verb:

- A time of grave danger. *It was a time of grave danger.*
- Showing off her prize. *Amy was showing off her prize.*

Another common error is adding an unnecessary conjunction (e.g., because, if, although, when, unless, etc.), turning the clause into a dependent clause:

- Although he led the army. *He denied responsibility although he led the army.*
- Because it was raining. *We rescheduled the event because it was raining.*
- When the artifact was discovered.

There was much excitement when the artifact was discovered.

Run-ons (also known as Fused Sentences)

Run-ons occur when two main clauses are combined without appropriate punctuation. Two clauses must be connected with a period, a semicolon, or a comma and a coordinating conjunction (e.g., and, or, for, but, yet).

- I went to the movies but my friend stayed at home.
I went to the movies, but my friend stayed at home.
- She took twenty classes she wanted to graduate in the spring.
She took twenty classes; she wanted to graduate in the spring.

Run-on Doesn't Mean "Too Long"

One common misconception people have is that any sentence that is overly long or wordy is a run-on. This is not true. A long sentence may still be grammatically accurate if it is clear, complete, and punctuated correctly.