

Common Sentence Structure Errors

Sentence Fragments

A sentence fragment is a phrase that is used like a complete sentence, but it does not contain the three essential parts for all sentences: subject, verb, and a complete thought. Sentence fragments usually lack a subject (the “who” or “what” of the sentence) or a verb (the “action word”).

Examples of Sentence Fragments:

- Ran all the way to the store.
- The boy in the blue sweatshirt.

The reader is left to wonder *who* (subject) ran all the way to the store, or what *action* (verb) the boy in the blue sweatshirt did. These kinds of sentence fragments can be made into complete thoughts by adding the necessary subject or verb:

- Veronica ran all the way to the store.
- The boy in the blue sweatshirt ate the sandwich.

Another tip for correcting sentences fragments is to look at what you have written and see if the fragments can be put together to form a complete thought.

- The boy in the blue sweatshirt ran all the way to the store.

Subordinate Clauses

A subordinate clause contains both a subject and a verb but still is not a complete thought. It contains a conjunction which joins two clauses together. One of these clauses depends upon the other to complete the thought.

A few examples of subordinating conjunctions include:

- after, although, because, before, how, if, since, than, unless, when, and while

A few other words that can be used this way are:

- that, who, whom, whose, and which

A problem occurs if a subordinate clause is not connected to an independent clause.

- When a new school year is about to begin.

You can fix this problem by attaching the piece of a sentence to an independent clause.

- When a new school year is about to begin, students usually buy new books and supplies.

It can also be fixed by removing the subordinating conjunction, which will make an independent clause.

- ~~(When)~~ A new school year is about to begin.

Both ways of changing the sentence result in a complete thought that can stand on its own.

Run-on Sentences

There are two different forms of run-on sentences: the comma splice and the fused sentence.

A comma splice occurs when two complete sentences are incorrectly connected with a comma.

- Dolores needed a new car, she bought a Volkswagen Beetle.

A fused sentence occurs when two complete sentences run together without punctuation or conjunctions.

- George and Ruth went to the Bahamas they stayed for two months.

There are several different ways to fix both comma splices and fused sentences.

Separate the clauses using a period:

- Dolores needed a new car. She bought a Volkswagen Beetle.

Separate the clauses using a semicolon:

- George and Ruth went to the Bahamas; they stayed for two months.

Create a compound sentence by adding a comma and a coordinating conjunction:

- George and Ruth went to the Bahamas, and they stayed for two months.

Create a complex sentence by making one of the clauses subordinate to the other:

- Because Dolores needed a new car, she bought a Volkswagen Beetle.

Whatever you do to fix your sentence fragments or run-ons, make sure that the result is a complete thought that makes sense!

Test your knowledge!

Revise to create proper sentences:

1. The big hairy dog on the slippery front porch steps.
2. Singing and laughing all the way to the swimming pool.
3. The man in the pink shirt.
4. Stares at the horizon.
5. The bake sale was a success, the class raised enough money to fund their field trip.
6. The large brick house with green shutters on East Street.
7. Because we both lived in the same city for fifteen years.
8. I don't understand algebra it makes my head ache.