

# Usage Comma Splices & Run-ons

Comma splices and run-on sentences are two common punctuation errors. These punctuation errors are different but are corrected in similar ways.

## COMMA SPLICES

A comma splice occurs when two independent clauses (groups of words that can stand alone as sentences) are joined together by only a comma.

COMMA SPLICE: Lazy Lou heard that a particular machine would do half his work, he ordered two. The above sentence is a comma splice because the clauses on both sides of the comma can stand alone as complete sentences.

## RUN-ON SENTENCES

A run-on sentence occurs when two or more independent clauses are joined without proper punctuation or conjunctions.

RUN-ON: I bought a gas grill two weeks ago I like to cook every day. The above sentence is a run-on because it can be separated into two complete sentences.

## CORRECTING COMMA SPLICES AND RUN-ON SENTENCES

Correct a comma splice or run-on sentence with one of the following options:

1. Separate the two independent clauses with a period, and make two sentences.  
EXAMPLE: Lazy Lou heard that a particular machine would do half his work. He ordered two.
2. Use a coordinating conjunction (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*) after a comma and between two independent clauses.  
EXAMPLE: I bought a gas grill two weeks ago, **and** I like to cook every day.
3. Add a subordinating conjunction (*after, before, if, once, since, so that, though, where, while, unless, until, etc.*) to the beginning of one independent clause to make it dependent.  
EXAMPLES: **When** Lazy Lou heard that a particular machine would do half his work, he ordered two!  
I bought a gas grill two weeks ago **because** I like to cook every day.
4. Connect the two independent clauses with a semicolon.  
EXAMPLES: Lazy Lou heard that a particular machine would do half his work; he ordered two.
5. Use a semicolon plus a conjunctive adverb (*accordingly, however, meanwhile, therefore, furthermore, nevertheless, etc.*) and a comma to separate independent clauses.  
EXAMPLES: I bought a gas grill two weeks ago; **however**, I have not yet used it.

# Usage Sentence Fragments

## SENTENCE FRAGMENTS

A sentence needs to form a complete thought and have both a complete subject and a complete verb. Sentence fragments are usually missing one or more of these elements.

- EXAMPLE: Have been going to school regularly. (no subject)  
The man wearing the red hat. (no complete verb)  
On my desk, beside the stapler and under the pencils. (no subject or complete verb)  
Although she is my friend. (not a complete thought)

## CORRECTING SENTENCE FRAGMENTS

### ADDING A SUBJECT

When a sentence lacks a subject, it does not make sense because it does not say who is doing the action or whose state of being is being described.

FRAGMENT: Doesn't make much sense.

Correct this mistake by adding the subject.

CORRECT: **This sentence** doesn't make much sense.

### ADDING A COMPLETE VERB

When a sentence lacks a complete verb, the reader does not know what the subject is doing, thinking, feeling, being, etc.

FRAGMENT: The teacher who said that grades don't matter.

To be complete, this sentence needs a phrase to show what the teacher did. Add a verb phrase or remove the word *who*, making *said* the action of the sentence rather than a description of the teacher.

CORRECT: The teacher who said that grades don't matter **was only trying to comfort me**.  
The **teacher said** that grades don't matter.

### ADDING A SUBJECT AND A COMPLETE VERB

A sentence that lacks a subject and a complete verb does not say what is going on or who is acting.

FRAGMENT: Helping Jackie decorate her car for the festival.

You can fix this sentence by adding a subject and changing the verb to a form that works on its own, or you can use *helping* as the subject and add a phrase with a complete verb.

CORRECT: **Michelle helped** Jackie decorate her car for the festival.  
Helping Jackie decorate her car for the festival **wasted Michelle's Saturday afternoon**.

### COMPLETING AN INCOMPLETE THOUGHT

Some phrases have a subject and a verb, but they still don't make sense when they are separated from the writing around them. These are often dependent clauses and start with a subordinating conjunction (*after, when, unless, while, even though, until, since, etc.*).

FRAGMENT: Because I love to read and write.

In this fragment, the reader is confused about what happens because you love to read and write. To make this complete, either remove the subordinating conjunction that makes it a dependent clause (*because*), or add an independent clause (a phrase with a subject and verb that makes sense on its own). You can add the independent clause either before or after the dependent clause.

CORRECT: I love to read and write. (removal of subordinating conjunction)  
Because I love to read and write, **I chose to be an English major**. (addition of independent clause)