

Run-ons and Fragments



Two of the most common student errors are run-on sentences and sentence fragments. Understanding the structure of a sentence can help eliminate these errors.

Sentences are composed of *clauses*. A clause must have a *subject* and a *verb* (or *predicate*).

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Verb</i>
Dogs	bark.

Some clauses are *independent*: they make sense on their own (as in the example above). Others are *dependent* (or *subordinate*), as follows:

<i>Subordinating Conjunction</i>	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Verb</i>
While	dogs	bark

Sentence Fragments

A sentence must have *at least one* independent clause. A *fragment* occurs when either the subject or verb is missing; thus, there is either no clause, or—more commonly—only a dependent clause.

<i>Incomplete:</i>	Dogs and cats. (no verb)
<i>Complete:</i>	Dogs bark.
<i>Incomplete:</i>	While dogs bark. (no independent clause)
<i>Complete:</i>	While dogs bark, cats nap.

Run-on Sentences

If a sentence has more than one independent clause, the two clauses must be joined either by a semicolon or by a comma and a *coordinating conjunction* (FANBOYS: For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So).

<i>Run-on:</i>	Dogs bark cats nap.
<i>Correct:</i>	Dogs bark; cats nap.
<i>Correct:</i>	Dogs bark at anything they think is suspicious or interesting, and cats prefer to nap in the sun.
<i>Correct:</i>	Cats are quiet: they are usually asleep.