# Fragments and Run-ons

Fragments and run-ons are characteristics of informal writing, and many people consider them inappropriate in formal academic writing. They are easily corrected through punctuation choices; sometimes the addition or removal of a conjunction or relative pronoun solves the problem.

## What is a sentence fragment?

Sentence fragments can be phrases (groups of words) that lack one of the major components of a sentence: a subject or a verb. Sentence fragments can also be clauses (groups of words that have subjects and verbs) that begin 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 or a dependent clause, functions within a complete sentence when it is combined with an independent clause, which includes a subject, verb, and complete sense.

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.

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

In these particular examples, the fragments may be easily combined with an adjacent sentence.

The genre and audience for your writing will determine the extent to which sentence fragments are appropriate to use. Resumes, for example, require the use of sentence fragments. A hiring committee expects to find them in such a document. In academic writing, many instructors expect that students hew to the conventions of American Edited English. If you are unsure of your instructor’s expectations, ask for clarification so that you may adjust your writing to accommodate them.

## How do I edit a sentence fragment?

Most of the time, the easiest way to get rid of a fragment is to connect it to a complete sentence 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 address a fragment is to turn it into a separate complete sentence. You may need to add a subject or a verb, or you may need to remove a subordinate conjunction. 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*:

Please be quiet so I can concentrate.

## What is a Run‑on?

A run-on sentence consists of two or more sentences punctuated as one. It’s called a comma splice when the two sentences are connected with a comma. It’s called a fused sentence when no punctuation connects the two sentences.

Comma splices, which use a comma to connect two sentences, are the more common type of run-on (Example 1). While the comma splice is common and considered acceptable in many World Englishes, the conventions of American Edited English suggest that most comma splices be revised.

If a writer puts no punctuation between independent clauses, the result is called a fused sentence (Example 2). Fused sentences can negatively impact the clarity of the writer’s expression.

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 edit a run‑on?**

* You can use a semicolon. For example, you could rewrite Example 1 as follows:

1. 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.)

1. To make room for the new UT tower, the Old Main building was torn down in 1932; however, many people protested its destruction.
2. 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:

1. 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:

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:

1. Although many people protested its destruction, the Old Main building was torn down in 1932 to make room for the new UT tower.