Fragments and Run-on Sentences

Fragments and run-ons are mistakes that are the opposite of each other. A fragment doesn’t have all of the parts of a complete sentence; a run-on has too many of those parts. So that we don’t have to keep calling them “parts,” we’ll briefly define some grammar terms.

Clauses: The Building Blocks of Sentences
Clauses are grammatical units that include at least one subject and one complete verb. All sentences are created using one or more clauses. There are two main types of clauses:

Independent clauses express a complete thought and can stand on their own as sentences.

Example: The apple fell.

Dependent clauses begin with subordinating words and cannot stand alone as sentences.

Example: Because the apple fell

Complete sentences must include at least one independent clause.

Fragments
A fragment is an incomplete sentence because it does not include an independent clause. Often, a fragment is either missing a subject or a verb, or it consists of a dependent clause punctuated as a complete sentence.

There are two ways to fix a fragment:

Add the missing subject or verb.

Fragment: The boat on the ebbing tide.
Revised: The boat drifted out on the ebbing tide.

Add an independent clause.

Fragment: If I told you about yesterday.
Revised: If I told you about yesterday, could you keep it a secret?

Run-ons
A run-on, or fused sentence, consists of two complete sentences that have not been separated by punctuation or joined by a connecting word.
To fix a run-on, ensure that the sentence includes correct punctuation and ends when the idea is complete.

*Run-on:* The speed limit is fifty miles per hour on this road but we should go no faster than forty since it’s raining so hard this weather is dangerous.

*Revised:* The speed limit is fifty miles per hour on this road, but we should go no faster than forty since it’s raining so hard. This weather is dangerous.

**Exercises**

Use these exercises to get some hands-on experience with fragments and run-ons. Do them in sequence: they’re designed to work that way.

1. *Circle the answer that is not a clause:*
   A. The dream faded quickly.         B. When I forgot the dream.         C. Forgetting a dream.

2. *Circle the independent clause:*
   A. Although I was lost.            B. I had ice cream.               C. That I bought from a stand.

3. *Circle the fragment:*
   A. I came inside when it started hailing.                            B. The lightning lit up the sky like a giant camera flash.    C. The old oak in the rain, split by lightning.

4. *Circle the run-on:*
   A. The storm broke all the skylights in the Wal-Mart they cost a fortune to replace.
   B. One of my friends saw the tornado as he was getting into shelter, so he took a picture of it.
   C. I was on the bridge over the lake when the tornado alert happened, which is a terrible place to be for a storm.

5. *Underline the dependent clause in this sentence:*

I tried to make it to my house before finding shelter, but I had to stop because the hail and rain made it impossible to see.

6. *Pick the answer that would fix the run-on sentence below:*

Soon after the big storm, a hail repair shop sprung up in a vacant lot the owner must be quite the opportunist.
   A. Put a comma after “lot.”
   B. Put “the owner. . . opportunist” at the beginning of the sentence.
   C. Put a period after “lot” and capitalize “The owner.”

7. *Pick the answer that would fix the fragment below:*

The baseball-sized hail at just the wrong angle, shattering my windshield.
   A. Add “struck” after “hail.”
   B. Remove the comma.
   C. Delete “at. . . angle.”
8. Arrange the pieces in the table below into a single correct sentence. You may or may not use all the punctuation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I wanted to be a stormchaser</th>
<th>I never figured out how to become one</th>
<th>I loved thunderstorms</th>
<th>I was a kid</th>
<th>,</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>,</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>when</td>
<td>because</td>
<td>but</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

9. Do it again, but differently!

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Contact
Got questions about fragments and run-ons? Come talk to a tutor at the Writing Center! Drop by or use the information below to contact us and set up an appointment.

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Answer Key
1. (C) 2. (B) 3. (C) 4. (A) 5. I tried to make it to my house before finding shelter, but I had to stop because the hail and rain made it impossible to see. 6. (C) 7. (A) 8 and 9. Talk to a tutor!