

Run-Ons, Comma Splices, and Fragments

Run-ons, comma splices, and fragmented sentences are the bane of the college students' existence. Word processors like Microsoft Word can catch many grammatical errors, but they aren't perfect. It's helpful to know how to find and prevent these common errors!

Run-Ons

A run-on sentence is when two (or more) ideas that could be complete sentences on their own have no punctuation to separate them. Just like in verbal conversations, there needs to be room to take a breath.

For example:

You make my heart flutter but we should just be friends until you are serious about this.

A better way to write this would be:

You make my heart flutter, but we should just be friends until you are serious about this.

This first sentence is long and missing a pause. The re-written version, with the comma, permits this pause, and thus flows correctly (and effectively)!

Let's look at another example:

I met his mother she was wonderful.

These are two distinct ideas. Using a comma alone will not make this grammatically correct. We have three basic options: make two complete sentences, add a comma and a conjunction, or use a semicolon. Let's look at each of these possibilities:

I met his mother. She was wonderful.

I met his mother, and she was wonderful.

I met his mother; she was wonderful.

Comma Splices

Comma splicing happens when commas are used to separate two (or more) independent, but related, clauses (ideas that could be complete sentences).

Here is an example of comma splicing:

Maverick waves are the best waves to surf, surfing is exciting.

This sentence consists of two independent clauses separated by a comma. We *can't* separate independent clauses in this way.



(510) 885-3674

www.csueastbay.edu/scaa

scaa@csueastbay.edu

Run-Ons, Comma Splices, and Fragments

Consider using a conjunction and a comma, just like with the run-on examples:

Maverick waves are the best waves to surf, and surfing is exciting.

Let's look at this sentence with a semicolon:

Maverick waves are the best waves to surf; surfing is exciting.

If the second part of your comma-spliced sentence is a continuation of your thought, a semicolon can be used. To improve flow, a transition like however, therefore, as a result, consequently, nevertheless, later, or in addition can be used along with a semicolon.

Let's look at an example of a comma-spliced sentence where a transition word and a semicolon might be useful:

Living in the Bay Area is expensive, wages tend to be higher than elsewhere.

Here it is with a semicolon and a transition word:

Living the in the Bay Area is expensive; therefore, wages tend to be higher than elsewhere.

Fragments

Fragments are groups of words that either lack a subject or verb, or otherwise need more information. They are *not* complete sentences.

Here is an example:

Running to class.

Who is running to class? You? A student? The professor? A subject is needed to show who the action applies to. Here's a complete version of this sentence:

The student is running to class.

We could also correct this sentence by talking about who was running *and* what happened:

Running to class, I dropped my phone and broke the screen.

Let's look at a complete sentence along with a fragment:

We went to the movies. And had dinner at a great Italian restaurant.

The first sentence is complete - it has a subject ("we"), and a verb ("went"). "And had dinner...", however, does not say *who* had dinner, so it's incomplete.



(510) 885-3674

www.csueastbay.edu/scaa

scaa@csueastbay.edu

Run-Ons, Comma Splices, and Fragments

We can either make the fragment part of the first sentence, or make two complete sentences (adding transition words to improve flow):

We went to the movies and had dinner at a great Italian restaurant.

We went to the movies. Afterward, we had dinner at a great Italian restaurant.

Let's look at one more type of fragment:

When Justin went home.

In the example on the previous page, we have a subject ("Justin"), and a verb ("went"). However, what *happened* when Justin went home?

When Justin went home, he encountered a lot of traffic on the freeway.

This sort of fragment also happens when using words like "although", such as:

Although I was tired.

This says that something happened despite the fact that you were tired, but *what?* Here's a correction:

Although I was tired, I got a lot done today.

Tips for Catching Errors

- Read your paper out loud from beginning to end, so you can see and hear whether each group of words sounds grammatically correct. (You might want to exaggerate pauses associated with periods, commas, and semicolons.) If you stop where there has not been a complete thought, or if you keep going without pausing, you might need to make changes.
- Check each sentence for a subject and a verb.
- If you are unsure, ask for the help of a professor, classmate, or SCAA tutor.

--

References

The following works were used during the creation of this handout: [Run on Sentences Shmoop](#), [Comma Splices Shmoop](#), [Fragments Shmoop](#), "Run-Ons, Comma Splices and Fragments OH MY!" by John Cervantez, "Run-Ons, Comma Splices Fragments" from the Valle Verde Writing Center at El Paso Community College.



(510) 885-3674

www.csueastbay.edu/scaa

scaa@csueastbay.edu