

Simple Sentences and Fragments

A sentence is a group of words expressing a **COMPLETE** thought.

NOTE: There are **four kinds of sentences** in English: **simple sentences, compound sentences, complex sentences, and compound-complex sentences.** First, Let's learn about simple sentences.

A simple sentence is a single independent clause with at least one subject and at least one predicate, or verb.

EXAMPLE: Amy studies monkey behavior.

A **simple sentence** has one subject-verb pair. The subject tells *who* or *what* did something. The verb tells the action (*jump, work, think*) or condition (*is, was, seem, appear*).

┌─── s ───┐ ┌─── v ───┐
Filmmaker George Lucas has changed the film industry in many ways.

┌─── s ───┐ ┌─── v ───┐
One new technology was a special computer-assisted camera crane.

If a group of words does not contain at least one subject and at least one predicate, it is considered a fragment.

Definition of a Sentence Fragment

Sentence fragments are groups of words that look like sentences, but aren't. To be a sentence, groups of words need to have at least one independent clause. An **independent clause** is any group of words that contain both a subject and a verb and can stand on its own. For example, 'I like cheeseburgers' is an independent clause.

Sentence fragments never have independent clauses, but instead are dependent clauses or phrases. Fragments can masquerade as real sentences because they begin with a capital letter and end with a period. If you read them more closely, you'll see that fragments don't form a complete thought. A sentence fragment is a little like having only half of the pieces to a puzzle. Without all the pieces, you won't have the whole picture.

Fragments are incomplete sentences. Usually, **fragments** are pieces of sentences that have become disconnected from the main clause. One of the easiest ways to correct them is to remove the period between the **fragment** and the main clause.

- EXAMPLE: 1- Caused problems everywhere.
2- The importance of money.
3- Going to London.
4- Before I went to bed.
5- While he was walking.

Where to Find Sentence Fragments?

Sentence fragments usually appear before or after the independent clauses to which they belong. For example:

When we got in the car, We rolled down the windows.

'When we got in the car' is a sentence fragment and a dependent clause. It clearly belongs to the independent clause that follows it and should be rewritten like this:

When we got in the car, we rolled down the windows.

Or like this:

We rolled down the windows when we got in the car.

Warning: DO NOT begin a simple sentence with a **subordinate conjunction** because *it will make it an incomplete thought, or a fragment.*

EXAMPLE: **Because Amy studies monkey behavior.** There should be a complement for this sentence

a-Subordinators

The sentence fragment 'When we got in the car' also has the subordinator 'when'. Some other examples of **subordinators** are: 'after', 'although', 'before', 'if', 'since', 'until', 'when', 'where', 'while', and 'why'. Clauses with subordinators can be called either dependent clauses or subordinating clauses, but when those clauses appear at the beginning of a sentence, they should be followed by a comma.

b-Fragment Phrases

Phrases are groups of words that are missing a subject or verb, or both. Phrases can also masquerade as sentences, like dependent clauses can. Here are some examples.

1- Here's an example missing subject and verb:

From morning until night.

This fragment can be made a complete sentence by changing it to:

I worked from morning until night.

Adding 'I' as the subject and 'worked' as the verb corrects this fragment and makes it an independent clause and a complete thought.

2-Here an example of a missing subject:

Start after the weekend.

This fragment can be made a complete sentence by changing it to:

Classes start after the weekend.

Adding the subject 'classes' corrects this fragment and makes it an independent clause and a complete thought.

3-Finally, here's an example of a missing verb:

Some girls in the class.

This fragment can be changed to:

Some girls in the class study together.

WRITING TIP: It's not uncommon to write first drafts quickly. You may want to get all your ideas down before you forget them, or you may be so enthusiastic about your topic that you just write and write without regard for good grammar. When you revise your work, it is VERY important to check and to see that each group of words beginning with a capital letter and ending with a period or other end mark is actually a complete sentence and not a fragment!!!

A. Label each of the following groups of words as either a simple sentence (SS) or a fragment (F).

_____ 1. The survivors of the earthquake showed great courage.

_____ 2. Caused problems everywhere.

_____ 3. Every Sunday their family went hiking.

_____ 4. Even the rain couldn't dampen their spirits.

_____ 5. Rode calmly and quietly in the backseat.

_____ 6. Since hundreds of firefighters fought the forest fires last summer.

_____ 7. The thought escaped him.

_____ 8. Rose in the air like a bird.

_____9. Although they played their very best.

_____10. The mystery of space.

Run-ons

These are also called fused sentences. You are making a run-on when you put two complete sentences (a subject and its predicate and another subject and its predicate) together in one sentence without separating them properly. Here's an example of a run-on:

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus it is very garlicky.

This one sentence actually contains two complete sentences. But in the rush to get that idea out, I made it into one incorrect sentence. Luckily, there are many ways to correct this run-on sentence.

You could use a semicolon:

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus; it is very garlicky.

You could use a comma and a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so):

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus, for it is very garlicky.

-OR-

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus, and it is very garlicky.

You could use a subordinating conjunction (see above):

**My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus because it is very garlicky. -OR-
Because it is so garlicky, my favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus.**

You could make it into two separate sentences with a period in between:

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus. It is very garlicky.

You could use an em-dash (a long dash) for emphasis:

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus—it is very garlicky.

You CANNOT simply add a comma between the two sentences, or you'll end up with what's called a "comma splice." Here's an example of a comma splice:

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus, it is very garlicky.

You can fix a comma splice the same way you fix a run-on—either change the punctuation or add a conjunction.

Finding run-ons

As you can see, fixing run-ons is pretty easy once you see them—but how do you find out if a sentence is a run-on if you aren't sure? Rei R. Noguchi, in his book *Grammar and the Teaching of Writing*, recommends two methods for testing your sentences. **Try these two tests:**

1. Turn your sentences into yes/no questions.
2. Turn your sentences into tag questions (sentences that end with a questioning phrase at the very end—look at our examples below).

These are two things that nearly everyone can do easily if the sentence is not a run-on, but they become next to impossible if it is.

Look at the following sentence:

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus.

If you turn it into a question that someone could answer with a yes or no, it looks like this:

Is my favorite Mediterranean spread hummus?

If you turn it into a tag question, it looks like this:

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus, isn't it?

The first sentence is complete and not a run-on, because our test worked.

Now, look again at the original run-on sentence:

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus it is very garlicky.

The yes/no question can only be made with each separate thought, not the sentence as a whole:

Is my favorite Mediterranean spread hummus? Is it very garlicky?

But not:

Is my favorite Mediterranean spread hummus is it very garlicky?

The tag question can also only be made with each separate thought, rather than the whole:

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus, isn't it? It's very garlicky, isn't it?

But never:

My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus it is very garlicky, isn't it?

Unlike the complete sentence, the run-on sentence doesn't pass these tests. When you try to turn the run-on sentence into a single question, you immediately see that the sentence has more than one complete concept. Make sure you try both tests with each of your problem sentences, because you may trick yourself by just putting a tag on the last part and not noticing that it doesn't work on the first. Some people might not notice that "My favorite Mediterranean spread is hummus it is very garlicky isn't it?" is wrong, but most people will spot the yes/no question problem right away.

ALL simple sentences MUST contain at least one subject and one predicate, or verb. However, sometimes the subject, the predicate, or both may be compound. The sentences below are all simple sentences, even though they have compound parts.

Compound Subject: Apes and monkeys are primates.

Compound Subject: Apes and monkeys are primates.

Compound Predicate: Scientists observe and study wildlife

Compound Subject and

Compound Predicate: Jane Goodall and Dian Fossey observed and studied primates in the wild

- B. Each of these simple sentences has either a compound subject, a compound predicate, or both. Draw one line under the simple subjects in each compound subject. Draw two lines under the simple predicates in each compound predicate.

Example: Copper and iron have many uses.

1. Apples and pears grow on trees.
2. Workers pick apples and package them for sale.

3. Joy and her sisters sang for the congregation.
4. Wes or Raquel showed the office to the guests.
5. We ate and slept on the bus.
6. The ceiling and the walls are the same color.
7. Both Arizona and New Mexico have hot deserts.
8. Thoughtful neighbors and friends of the family sent sympathy cards.
9. Crocodiles and alligators swim in the water but hunt on land.
10. Many Europeans both understand and use the English language.