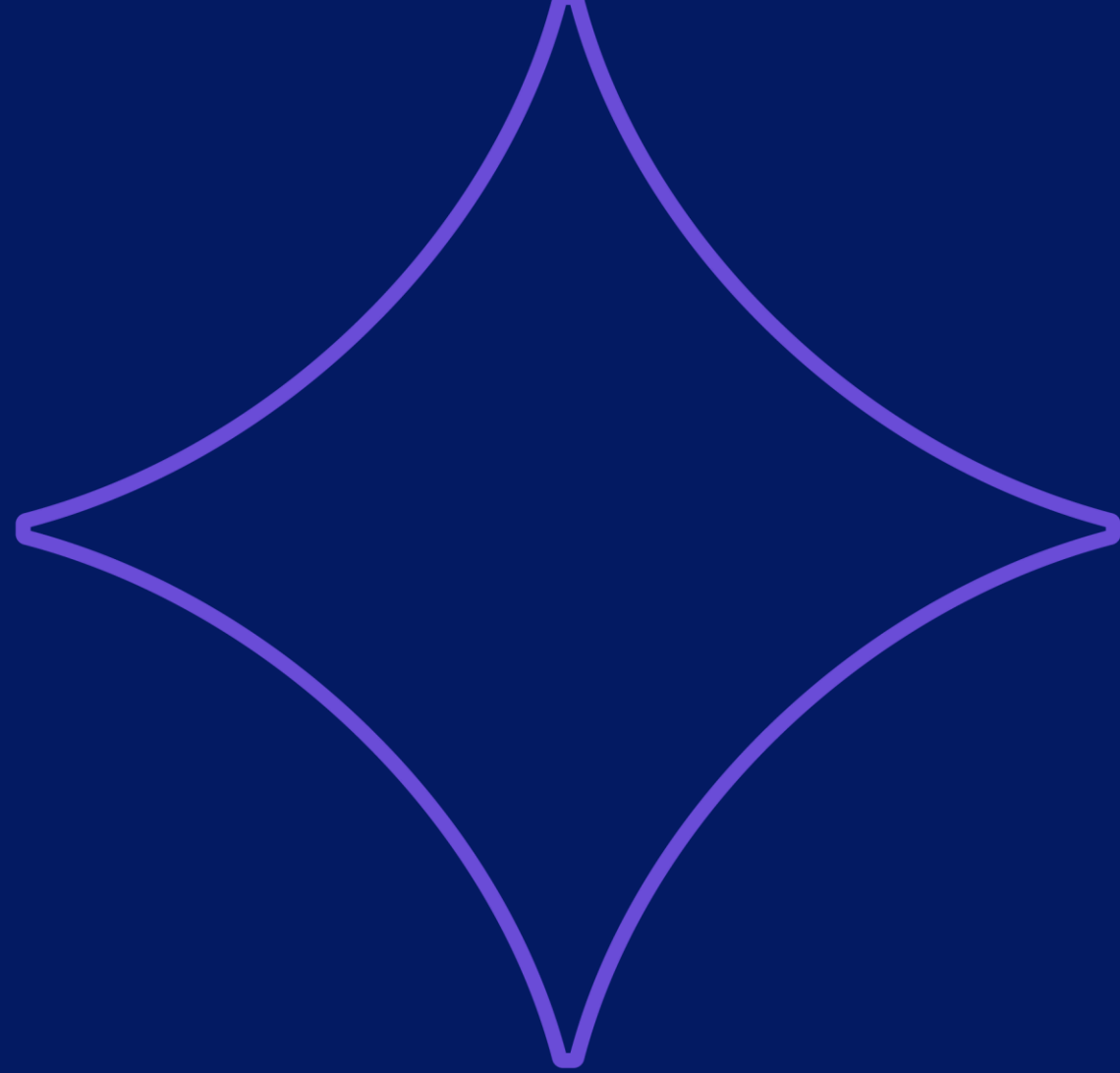


Common Errors in Writing: Run-ons, Fragments, and Comma Splices



Overview

The Important Parts of Sentences

- Subject + Verbs

- Independent Clauses

- Dependent Clauses

Common Errors and How to Fix Them

- Run-on sentences: Comma splices and Fused sentences

 - Add a period, semi-colon, or conjunction.

- Sentence fragments

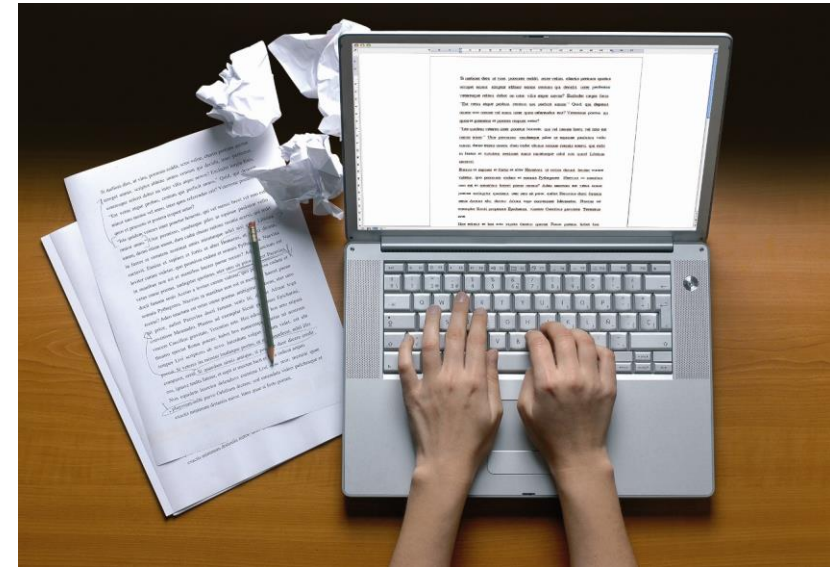
 - Add the missing part: subject, verb, or independent clause.



Every Sentence Needs...

At the very least, a sentence must have a subject + verb

- A subject is usually a noun (person, place, thing, idea) or a pronoun (a word that substitutes for and refers to a noun). The subject of a sentence is the noun or pronoun that name who or what the sentence is about (Trent University, 2020).
- A verb is the action or state associated with the subject of the sentence.
 - We want to ensure that the verb is written using the proper verb tense to express the correct time we want the reader to understand (PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE).
- Eg. The three students meet in the library every Wednesday at 2:00pm.
- Using a period helps the reader to understand where one thought/idea ends and the next will begin.



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Independent Clause = Simple Sentence

A simple sentence can also be considered an **independent clause**.

- This means that a reader can make sense of all of the necessary parts we have included to make a complete thought.
 - Eg. The boy and his sister in the library. X
No verb.

A clause is a group of words containing both a subject and a verb. Clauses can be independent or dependent. (University of Guelph, 2020a)

- Eg. The boy and his sister played on the computers in the library.
 - This is a simple sentence AND an independent clause. It expresses a complete thought.



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Dependent Clauses

A **dependent clause** is the part of a complex sentence that clarifies the relationship with the independent clause.

- The clauses in a complex sentence are combined using words that help the dependent clause relate to the independent clause.
- It is essential to understand that a dependent clause **cannot** act as a complete sentence in most academic writing!
 - Eg. **Even though it was late in the evening.**
 - We need more information to understand what is 'happening' in the sentence.
 - This would be considered a **sentence fragment.**
 - Eg. **Even though it was late in the evening, Samira felt like eating cereal.**

We want to think of these words as being part of the dependent clause. They are one 'unit'.



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Subordinating Words

A **dependent clause** will begin with certain words or phrases called subordinating words.

- Trent University (2020) provides a list of some examples:
 - after, although, as, as if, as long as, because, before, even if, even though, ever since, if, in order that, provided that, since, so that, than, that, though, unless, until, what, whatever, whenever, when, where, whereas, wherever, whether.
- Checking for these words in our writing is a good way to monitor our ideas and make sure that we have sentences with all of the necessary parts to give our reader clear, complete thoughts.



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Common Errors in Writing

Errors happen from time to time! However, we want to try our best to catch some of these miscues to avoid creating unnecessary confusion for the reader and prevent the loss of marks in assignments.

Proofreading our writing is one way that we can look closely at the smaller details we have used. Sometimes writers leave out important parts of a sentence like punctuation, a subject or verb, or maybe even a connecting word like 'and' or 'because'.

- These issues are often identified by instructors as:
 - Run-on Sentences
 - Comma Splices and Fused Sentences
 - Sentence Fragments



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Run-on Sentences

- Joining two or more independent clauses without the correct punctuation, connecting word(s), or both will result in a run-on sentence.
 - There are two types of run-on sentences:
 - Comma splice
 - This type of error happens when two independent clauses have been connected with a comma but no connecting word.
 - Eg. The man and his daughter tried to find her new apartment, they searched for most of the morning with no luck.
 - Fused sentence
 - Independent clauses have been put together without any punctuation or connecting word at all.
 - Eg. The man and his daughter tried to find her new apartment they searched for most of the morning with no luck.



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Fixing Run-on Sentences

There are a few different ways we can correct a run-on sentence.

- Use a period
 - The man and his daughter tried to find her new apartment. They searched for most of the morning with no luck.
- Use a semi-colon
 - The man and his daughter tried to find her new apartment; they searched for most of the morning with no luck.
- Make a compound sentence using a coordinating conjunction
 - The man and his daughter tried to find her new apartment, but they searched for most of the morning with no luck.
- Make a complex sentence using a subordinating word
 - Though the man and his daughter tried to find her new apartment, they searched for most of the morning with no luck.



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Sentence Fragments

A sentence fragment occurs when there is an important piece of a sentence that is missing.

- The thought presented in the sentence is a 'fragment', so the reader will not be able to clearly understand the meaning the you are trying to convey. They will need some more information!

This may happen when:

- There is a subject missing
 - Has been feeling sick for the last week.
- There is a verb missing
 - The family who lives next door.
- There is only a dependent clause
 - Although the lineup was very long.



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There are a few different ways we can correct a sentence fragment depending on what we kind of information we need to add:

- Subject: Who or what? has been feeling sick for the last week.
 - Joanna has been feeling sick for the last week.
- Verb: The family who lives next door Action/feeling/state?
 - The family who lives next door got their flu shots on Monday.
- Independent clause: Although the lineup was very long. Subject+Verb
 - Although the lineup was very long. Abdi and Hussein waited to buy a coffee.

Proofreading Your Writing

You should always try to give yourself an opportunity to read over your work to check the clarity and meaning in your writing. Though this is not always possible, it can save many potential headaches for you after submitting an assignment.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (2020) makes the following recommendations:

- Focus on trying to find one kind of error at a time – check your spelling, then your punctuation, and finally your grammar.
- Take your time – read as slowly as you can, trying to make note of every word, comma, and period.
- Read out loud – sometimes we can catch errors in our writing when we follow natural pauses and breaks.
- Learn from your mistakes – the best way to avoid these issues is by seeing what some of your tendencies are and doing your best to correct them.

Contact Us!

A Writing Specialist is available to provide you with help in two different ways.

- **Email:** Send your assignments for comments and review to:
academicsuccess@bowvalleycollege.ca
- **Writing Support Appointment:** Book a 30 minute meeting at:
<https://v2.waitwhile.com/welcome/ascwriting>

We look forward to hearing from you soon.



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References

- The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. (2020). *Editing and proofreading: The writing center*.
<https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/editing-and-proofreading/>
- Trent University. (2020). *Sentence structure: Revising sentence fragments, run-on sentences, and comma splices*.
<https://www.trentu.ca/academicskills/how-guides/how-edit-your-writing/grammar-and-style/sentence-structure>