

Fragments

What is a fragment?

A fragment is an incomplete sentence or thought because the sentence lacks either a subject or a verb. When readers encounter fragments in academic prose, they often stumble and become distracted from the meaning the author wants to convey.

Ex. 1 Shania Twain's CD Up popular.

Ex. 2 After discussing the social position of the medieval anchorite, discusses the literature the enclosed read.

Neither of these sentences makes much sense because they are fragments. When assessing their work, writers should check to see if every sentence has a subject, verb, and a direct object. Technically, a direct object is not required, but writers usually have one in the sentence constructions used for academic papers.

Subject

The Who
The What



The boy
(subject)

Verb

The Action



threw
(verb)

Direct Object

The Result



the ball.
(object)

In academic sentences, writers insert other grammar elements as they create strong sentences, but the rule still applies. To determine if a sentence is a fragment, a writer needs to check his or her sentences for subjects, verbs, and objects.

Ex. In Damia, which is a sequel to her book The Rowan, Anne McCaffrey creates a future world where people possess the ability to move objects with their minds.

When assessing complete sentences, writers need to identify the “real” sentence. Words such as “when,” “in,” “after,” “although,” “because,” and “despite” start phrases but never show a reader the subject of a sentence. Writers need to notice the point where the phrase ends and the “real” sentence begins. In the example above, the phrase beginning with “in” and the phrase beginning with “which” provide extra information that helps to add meaning to the “real” sentence that has the subject Anne McCaffrey.

Fragments and Style

Many writers of academic prose complain that they use fragments in creative writing superbly. Creative writing and academic prose require different grammar. In fiction, writers often use fragments to help readers see their meaning or to assist in a scene with dialogue, but all writers need to know the grammar rules before they break them. In academic writing, fragments are rarely acceptable.

The Definition of a Run-On

Run-ons are what happen when sentences collide due to a lack of punctuation. When they occur, readers find themselves reading sentences that lack clarity and appear endless. In academic prose, run-ons wreck essays by destroying the flow of the paper and undermining the credibility of the writer.

Ex. 1 I just finished Beowulf now I want to read John Gardner's Grendel.

Ex. 2 I needed to pick a paper topic after wanting to examine the use of punctuation in Emily Dickinson's poems, I decided to examine the use of old words in the poetry of Spenser then I decided to write an essay on Donne's use of imagery in his poem "Good Morrow finally I moved on to discussing the idea of the ball in Samuel Beckett's Krapp's Last Tape.

Runs-Ons v. Comma Splices

Many people ponder which is worse a run-on or a comma splice. The only difference between a run-on and a comma splice is the comma, and both errors are equally incorrect. When assessing their work, writers should consider these two grammar errors as evil cousins who need to be destroyed.

Five Simple Solutions

Most run-ons and comma splices are easy to fix, and this type of error can be eliminated by employing other grammar elements or by reshaping sentences. These five solutions are the most common ways to fix run-ons and comma splices.

Example Run-On: Many people enjoy literature it is unfortunate that millions cannot read.

Example Comma Splice: Chris prefers classical music, Susan enjoys heavy metal.



1. Periods to Separate

Ex. Many people enjoy literature. It is unfortunate that millions cannot read.

Ex. Chris prefers classical music. Susan enjoys heavy metal.

2. Commas with Coordinating Conjunctions

Ex. Many people enjoy literature, so it is unfortunate that millions cannot read.

Ex. Chris prefers classical music, but Susan enjoys heavy metal.

(Coordinating Conjunctions: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, & so)

3. Semicolons between Short Sentences

Ex. Many people enjoy literature; it is unfortunate that millions cannot read.

Ex. Chris prefers classical music; Susan enjoys heavy metal.

4. Semicolons with Transitional Expressions

Ex. Many people enjoy literature; therefore, it is unfortunate that millions cannot read.

Ex. Chris prefers classical music; however, Susan enjoys heavy metal.

(Transitional Expressions: however, therefore, moreover, nevertheless, furthermore, & hence etc.)

5. Rephrasing the sentence

Ex. Because many people enjoy literature, it is unfortunate that millions cannot read.

Ex. Chris prefers classical music while Susan enjoys heavy metal.