

Lesson Name : 38

Lesson Title : Sentence Fragments and Run-On Sentences

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Use your digital notebook to keep notes on new grammar concepts that you may need to reference later.

For today's lesson, let's focus on the related problems of **sentence fragments** and **run-on sentences**. These are common errors, but they are easy to fix if you understand some basic grammar concepts.

Sentence Fragments

First, let's look at the definition of a **sentence**. A **sentence** is a group of words with a subject (noun) and predicate (verb) that expresses a complete thought. A **fragment** is occurs when at least one of these elements is missing.

Example: After we left the party.

This group of words has a subject (we) and a predicate (left the party), but it does not express a complete thought. What happened after we left the party?

Example: Over the river and through the woods.

This group of words does not contain a subject or a verb, so it cannot express a complete thought. Who did what over the river and through the woods?

Example: Tripping over the stack of books.

This group of words does not include a subject. Who is tripping?

The way to fix a **sentence fragment** is to add in the missing information.

Examples:

After we left the party, *we took the shortcut home.*
We traveled over the river and through the woods.
 Tripping over the stack of books, *Colin spilled his cup of coffee.*

Run-On Sentences

A **run-on sentence** has the opposite problem: It contains too much information! More specifically, a **run-on sentence** contains two independent clauses that are not punctuated correctly.

Example: He finished the test early, he waited a few minutes to turn it in.

Notice that both parts of this sentence could stand on their own as complete sentences. So, we've accidentally combined two thoughts that should be separated.

Here are some ways to fix a run-on sentence.

1. Add a comma and conjunction:

He finished the test early, but he waited a few minutes to turn it in.

2. Add a semicolon:

He finished the test early; he waited a few minutes to turn it in.

3. Add a period:

He finished the test early. He waited a few minutes to turn it in.

4. Add a comma and a subordinating conjunction, which makes one of the clauses dependent:

Although he finished the test early, he waited a few minutes to turn it in.

Note that the grammar rules for **sentence fragments** and **run-on sentences** can be broken for specific reasons. For example, the “stream of consciousness” style of writing often uses **run-on sentences**, because those writers are intentionally trying to duplicate the way our thoughts flow through our heads (which is generally without semicolons!).

Likewise, you can use sentence fragments in your dialogue, because this reflects how we really speak. For example:

Character A: “Where did you buy that dress?”

Character B: “At the department store.”

Character B probably would not say, “I bought this dress at the department store.” So, **sentence fragments** can make your written dialogue seem more natural.

Sentence fragments may also come in handy for emphasis or to create an intentionally conversational style. But, take note: It's only okay if you do it on purpose, and for a specific, well-considered reason.

Effective Listening Skills

Let's shift gears now and focus on effective listening skills. For today's lesson, you will be listening to a podcast about a controversial topic. As you listen, ask yourself the following questions:

What is the controversial topic?

What are the different sides of the controversy?

What are the arguments on each side?

Does one side of the controversy seem to have more or stronger arguments?

What are your opinions about this controversy?

Before you listen to the podcast, review the [steps for active listening](#) in a new window. Now, open the [podcast](#) in a new window and listen to a segment on a controversial topic.

Now, let's look more closely at the arguments on each side of this controversy. With which side do you most strongly agree? Of course, there isn't always an easy answer!

Choose the side with which you most closely identify, and make a list of pros and cons. Which arguments for your side are strong? Which arguments are more in favor of the other side? What are some bad things about the arguments on your side?