**Sentence Faults**

1. **Fragments**

A full **sentence** satisfies two conditions: (1) it has a subject and a verb, and (2) it can stand alone as a complete thought. Although a **fragment** is punctuated like a full sentence, it doesn’t satisfy these two requirements. There are two kinds of fragments: **phrase** fragments and **dependent** **clause** fragments.

* 1. **Phrase Fragments**

If you punctuate a phrase as if it were a sentence, the result is a **phrase fragment**.

Following are five kinds of phrase fragments and ways to correct such fragments.

* **Noun Phrase Fragment**

I was afraid of my wrestling coach. *A harsh and sarcastic man.* He was never satisfied with my performance.

* **Added-Detail Phrase Fragment**

Many people have difficulty getting up in the morning. *Especially on Mondays after a hectic weekend.* They wish they had one more day to relax.

* **Prepositional Phrase Fragment**

*After a long day at work.* I drove to the bank that opened last week. *On the corner of Holly Avenue and Red Oak Lane. Next to the discount supermarket*.

* **Present Participle, Past Participle, or Infinitive Phrase Fragment**

*Waiting* [present participle] *to buy tickets for the concert.* The crowd stood quietly in line. No one cared that the box office would be closed until the morning.

The children presented the social worker with a present. *Wrapped* [past participle] *in gold aluminum foil*.

After years of negotiating, several nations signed a treaty. *To ban* [infinitive] *the sale of ivory in their countries*.

* **Missing-Subject Phrase Fragment**

Every weekend, the fraternities sponsored a joint open-house party. *And blared music all night long.* Not surprisingly, neighbors became furious.

* 1. **How to Correct Phrase Fragments**

There are four strategies for eliminating phrase fragments from your writing. When using these strategies, you may need to reword sentences slightly to maintain smoothness.

**1. Attach the fragment to the preceding or following sentence, changing punctuation and capitalization as needed.** When attaching a phrase fragment to the *beginning of a preceding sentence,* place a comma between the fragment and thestart of the original sentence:

**Fragment** Environmentalists predict a drought this summer. *In spite of heavy spring rains.* Everyone hopes the predictions are wrong.

**Correct** In spite of heavy spring rains, environmentalists predict a drought this summer. Everyone hopes the predictions are wrong.

To attach a phrase fragment to the *end of a preceding sentence,* change the period at the end of the preceding sentence to a comma and change the first letter of the fragment to lowercase:

**Fragment** I spent several hours in the college’s Career Services Office. *Trying to find an interesting summer job.* Nothing looked promising.

**Correct** I spent several hours in the college’s Career Services Office, trying to find an interesting summer job. Nothing looked promising.

To attach a phrase fragment to the *beginning of a full sentence that follows it,* change the period at the end of the fragment to a comma and make the capital letterat the start of the full sentence lowercase:

**Fragment** *Overwhelmed by school pressures and family demands.* She decided to postpone her education. That was a mistake.

**Correct** Overwhelmed by school pressures and family demands, she decided to postpone her education. That was a mistake.

**2. Insert the fragment into the preceding or following sentence, adding commas as needed:**

**Fragment** The tests were easy. *Especially the essay questions.* We felt confident that we had done well.

**Correct** The tests, especially the essay questions, were easy. We felt confident that we had done well. [fragment inserted into preceding sentence]

**Fragment** *A robust girl who loved physical activity from the time she was a baby.* My sister qualified for the Olympics when she was seventeen.

**Correct** My sister, a robust girl who loved physical activity from the time she was a baby, qualified for the Olympics when she was seventeen. [fragment inserted into following sentence]

**3. Attach the fragment to a newly created sentence:**

**Fragment** Although I proudly call it mine, my apartment does have some problems.

*For example, very little heat in the winter*.

**Correct** Although I proudly call it mine, my apartment does have some problems.

For example, *it has* very little heat in the winter.

**4. Supply the missing subject:**

**Fragment** Although they argued frequently, my grandparents doted on each other. *And held hands wherever they went*.

**Correct** Although they argued frequently, my grandparents doted on each other. *They* held hands wherever they went.

*or*

Although they argued frequently, my grandparents doted on each other *and* held hands wherever they went.

1. **Dependent Clause Fragments**

Unlike phrases, which lack either a subject or a full verb, **clauses** contain both a subject and a full verb. Clauses may be **independent** (expressing a complete thought and able to stand alone as a sentence) or **dependent** (not expressing a complete thought and, therefore, not able to stand alone). A dependent clause (often called a **subordinate clause**) begins with a word that signals the clause’s reliance on something more for completion. Such introductory words may take the form of **subordinating conjunctions** or **relative pronouns**.

If you punctuate a dependent clause as though it were a complete sentence, the result is a **dependent clause fragment** (identified by italics in the example):

**Fragment** *Because my parents wanted to be with their children at bedtime.* They arranged to leave their late-shift jobs a few minutes early.

* 1. How to Correct Dependent Clause Fragments

There are two main ways to correct dependent clause fragments. When using the strategies, you may need to reword sentences slightly to maintain smoothness.

**1. Connect the fragment to the preceding or following full sentence, adding a comma if needed:**

**Fragment** I thought both my car and I would be demolished. *When the motorcycle hit me from behind*.

**Correct** When the motorcycle hit me from behind, I thought both my car and I would be demolished. [fragment attached, with a comma, to beginning of preceding sentence]

*or*

I thought both my car and I would be demolished when the motorcycle hit me from behind. [fragment attached, without a comma, to end of preceding sentence]

**Fragment** *Although the clean-up crews tried to scrub the oil-coated rocks thoroughly.* Many birds nesting on the rocky shore are bound to die.

**Correct** Although the clean-up crews tried to scrub the oil-coated rocks thoroughly, many birds nesting on the rocky shore are bound to die. [fragment attached, with a comma, to beginning of following sentence]

*or*

Many birds nesting on the rocky shore are bound to die, although the cleanup crews tried to scrub the oil-coated rocks thoroughly. [fragment attached, with a comma, to end of following sentence]

* **Guidelines for Using Commas with Dependent Clauses**

If a dependent clause with a subordinating conjunction (like *when* or *although*) precedes the full sentence, the dependent clause is followed by a comma (as in the first and third corrected sentences above). If a dependent clause follows the full sentence, it isn’t preceded by a comma. The exception is dependent clauses beginning with such words as *although* and *though*—words that show contrast. When such clauses follow a fullsentence, they are preceded by a comma (as in the fourth corrected sentenceabove). When connecting a relative clause to a full sentence, you set *off* the *relative clause* with a comma if the clause is **nonrestrictive** (that is, if it is *not essential* to thesentence’s meaning)

**Fragment** As a child, I went to the mountains with my parents. *Who never relaxed long enough to enjoy the lazy times there*.

**Correct** As a child, I went to the mountains with my parents, who never relaxed long enough to enjoy the lazy times there.

Note that in the corrected version there’s a comma between the independent and relative clauses because the relative clause (*who never relaxed long enough to enjoy* *the lazy times there*) is nonrestrictive. In other words, it isn’t needed to identify the writer’s parents.

* **Take a look, though, at the following:**

**Fragment** As a child, I went to the mountains with the family. *Who lived next door*.

**Correct** As a child, I went to the mountains with the family who lived next door.

In this case, the relative clause (*who lived next door*) is needed to identify which family is being referred to; that is, the clause is **restrictive** (*essential*) and, therefore, is *not* set off with a comma.

When a relative clause beginning with *that* is attached to a nearby sentence, no comma is used between the relative and independent clauses:

**Fragment** My uncle got down on his hands and knees to rake away the dry leaves. *That he felt spoiled the beauty of his flower beds*.

**Correct** My uncle got down on his hands and knees to rake away the dry leaves that he felt spoiled the beauty of his flower beds.

**2. Remove or replace the dependent clause’s first word:**

**Fragment** The typical family-run farm is up for sale these days. *Because few small farmers can compete with agricultural conglomerates*.

**Correct** The typical family-run farm is up for sale these days. Few small farmers can compete with agricultural conglomerates.

Practice: Correcting Sentence Fragments

Correct any phrase and dependent clause fragments that you find in the following sentences. Be careful, though; some of the sentences may not contain fragments, and others may contain more than one.

1. Even though there must be millions of pigeons in the city. You never see a baby pigeon. It makes you wonder where they’re hiding.

2. Children between the ages of eight and twelve often follow teenagers’ trends. And look up to teens as role models. Mimicking their behavior in frequently disconcerting ways.

3. The student’s dorm room looked like a disaster area. Heaps of dirty clothes, crumpled papers, and half-eaten snacks were strewn everywhere. Keeping the room neat was obviously not a priority.

4. My grandfather likes to send off-beat greeting cards. Like the one with a picture of a lion holding on to a parachute. The card reads, “Just wanted to drop you a lion.”

5. About a year ago, my mother was unexpectedly laid off by the restaurant. Where she had been hired five years earlier as head chef. The experience made her realize that she wanted to go into business for herself.

1. **Comma Splices and Run-on Sentences**

A **comma splice** occurs when a comma is used to join, or splice together, two complete thoughts, even though a comma alone is not strong enough to connect the two independent clauses. A **run-on**, or **fused sentence** occurs when two sentences are connected, or run together, without any punctuation to indicate where the first sentence ends and the second begins.

* **Three Common Pitfalls:** Following are three situations that often lead to comma splices or run-on sentences and ways to correct these sentence errors.

**1. When the second sentence starts with a personal or demonstrative pronoun:**

The following are **personal pronouns:** *I, you, he, she, it, we,* and *they. This, that, these,* and *those* are **demonstrative pronouns.**

**Comma Splice** The college’s computerized billing system needs to be overhauled, *it billed more than a dozen students twice for tuition*.

**Run-on** Lobsters are cannibalistic and will feed on each other *this is one reason they are difficult to raise in captivity*.

**2. When the second sentence starts with a transition:** Some common **transitions** include the words *finally, next, second,* and *then*.

**Comma Splice** You start by buttering the baking dish, *next you pour in milk and mix it well with the butter*.

**Run-on** The dentist studied my X rays *then she let out an ominous sigh*.

**3. When two sentences are connected by a transitional adverb:** Some of the most common **transitional adverbs** are shown on the next page.

**Transitional Adverbs**

Accordingly furthermore meanwhile still also however moreover therefore anyway indeed nevertheless thus besides instead nonetheless consequently likewise otherwise

**Comma Splice** We figured the movie tickets would cost about five dollars, *however, we forgot to calculate the cost of all the junk food we would eat*.

**Run-on** Fish in a backyard pond will thrive simply by eating the bugs, larvae, and algae in the pond *nevertheless, many people enjoy feeding fish by hand*.

* 1. How to Correct Comma Splices and Run-on Sentences

There are four strategies for eliminating comma splices and run-on sentences from your writing.

**1. Place a period, question mark, or exclamation point at the end of the first sentence and capitalize the first letter of the second sentence:**

**Comma Splice** Our team played badly, *we deserved to lose by the wide margin we did*.

**Correct** Our team played badly. We deserved to lose by the wide margin we did.

**Run-on** Which computer do experts recommend for the average college student *which system do experts consider most all-purpose?* They seldom agree.

**Correct** Which computer do experts recommend for the average college student? Which system do experts consider most all-purpose? They seldom agree.

**2. Use a semicolon (;) to mark where the first sentence ends and the second begins:**

**Comma Splice** In the eighteenth century, beauty marks were considered fashionable, *people even glued black paper dots to their faces*.

**Correct** In the eighteenth century, beauty marks were considered fashionable; people even glued black paper dots to their faces.

**Run-on** Many men use hairstyling products, facial scrubs, and cologne *however, most draw the line at powder and eye makeup*.

**Correct** Many men use hairstyling products, facial scrubs, and cologne; however, most draw the line at powder and eye makeup.

Note that when the second sentence starts with a transitional adverb (such as *however* in the last corrected sentence above), a *comma* is placed *after* the transition.

**3. Turn one of the sentences into a dependent clause:**

**Comma Splice** The camping grounds have no electricity, *however, people flock there anyway*.

**Correct** *Although* the camping grounds have no electricity, people flock there anyway.

**Run-on** The highway was impassable *it had snowed all night and most of the morning*.

**Correct** The highway was impassable *because* it had snowed all night and most of the morning.

**4. Keep or add a comma at the end of the first sentence, but follow the comma with a coordinating conjunction.** The following words are **coordinating conjunctions:** *and, but, for, nor, or, so, yet*.

**Comma Splice** Well-prepared and confident, I expected the exam to be easy, *it turned out to be a harrowing experience*.

**Correct** Well-prepared and confident, I expected the exam to be easy, but it turned out to be a harrowing experience.

**Run-on** Last election we campaigned enthusiastically *this year we expect to be equally involved*.

**Correct** Last election we campaigned enthusiastically, *and* this year we expect to be equally involved.

Practice: Correcting Comma Splices and Run-on Sentences

Correct any comma splices and run-ons that you find in the following sentences. Be careful, though; some commas belong just where they are.

1. Since the town appeared to be nearby, they left the car on the side of the road and started walking toward the village, they soon regretted their decision.

2. With unexpected intensity, the rain hit the pavement, plumes of heat rose from the blacktop, making it difficult to drive safely.

3. Plants should be treated regularly with an organic insecticide, otherwise, spider mites and mealy bugs can destroy new growth.

4. Have you ever looked closely at a penny, do you know whether Lincoln faces right or left?

4See pages 549–550 for a list of words that introduce dependent clauses.

5. The library’s security system needs improving, it allows too many people to sneak away, with books and magazines hidden in their pockets, purses, or briefcases.

1. **Faulty Parallelism**

Words in a pair or in a series should be placed in parallel (matching) grammatical structures. If they’re not, the result is **faulty parallelism**.

**Faulty Parallelism** After the exam, we were *exhausted, hungry,* and *experienced depression*.

In the preceding sentence, three items make up the series. However, the first two items are adjectives (*exhausted* and *hungry*), whereas the last one is a verb plus a noun (*experienced depression*).

Words that follow correlative conjunctions (*either* . . . *or, neither* . . . *nor, both* . . . *and, not only* . . . *but also*) should also be parallel:

**Faulty Parallelism** Every road into the city is either *jammed* or *is closed* for repairs. Here, *either* is followed by an adjective (*jammed*), but *or* is followed by a verb (*is*).

* 1. How to Correct Faulty Parallelism

To correct faulty parallelism, *place words in a pair or in a series in the same grammatical structure*.

**Faulty Parallelism** *After the car baked in the sun for hours, the steering wheel was hot, the seats were sticky, and there was stuffiness in the air*.

**Correct** After the car baked in the sun for hours, the steering wheel was hot, the seats were sticky, and the air was stuffy.

*or*

**Correct** After the car baked in the sun for hours, the steering wheel was hot, the seats sticky, and the air stuffy.

**Faulty Parallelism** *Parents are either too permissive or they are too strict*.

**Correct** Parents are either too permissive or too strict.

*or*

**Correct** Parents either are too permissive or are too strict.

*or*

**Correct** Either parents are too permissive, or they are too strict.

Practice: Correcting Faulty Parallelism

Correct any faulty parallelism that you find in the following sentences. Be careful, though; not every sentence contains an error.

1. The professor’s tests were long, difficult, and produced anxiety.

2. Medical tests showed that neither being allergic to dust nor seasonal hay fever caused the child’s coughing fits.

3. The hairstylist warned her customers, “I’m a beautician, not a magician.

This is a comb; it’s not a wand.”

4. The renovated concert hall is both beautiful and it is spacious.

5. My roommates and I are not only learning Japanese but also Russian.