

## Revising: Fragments and Run-On Sentences

Correct grammar and usage will not by themselves make you a better writer; however, errors in grammar and usage may stigmatize you as a writer. Errors in sentence boundaries-fragments, run-on sentences-are among the most stigmatizing and may suggest incompetence or carelessness.

### Fragments

A *fragment* is a grammatically incomplete sentence. Sometimes an expression is a fragment because it lacks a subject and/or a tensed verb that agrees with the subject (e.g. a verb form like *run, runs, ran, have run*, etc., as opposed to a verb form like *to run* or *running*, which does not carry tense or agreement with a subject). At a minimum, a grammatical sentence must have a subject and a tensed verb that agrees with it. Other times an expression is a fragment because it starts with a subordinating word that makes it dependent on a main sentence (e.g. *after, although, because, since, when*); these expressions cannot stand by themselves, without a main sentence.

Chomsky gave an inspiring lecture. His best lecture ever on universal grammar. (the fragment lacks a tensed verb agreeing with a subject)

Jane is very unhappy at MIT. Because she has become interested in sociolinguistics. (the fragment starts with a subordinating word that makes it dependent on a main sentence)

The best place to study linguistics. In my opinion it is not MIT but Stanford.  
(the fragment lacks a tensed verb agreeing with a subject--the infinitive verb *to study* carries no tense or agreement)

### Ways to Correct a Fragment

- Use a comma instead of a period to connect the fragment to the main sentence.

Chomsky gave an inspiring lecture, his best lecture ever on universal grammar.  
Jane is very unhappy at MIT, because she has become interested in sociolinguistics.

- Add a subject and/or a tensed verb agreeing with it, making the fragment a complete sentence.

Chomsky gave an inspiring lecture. It was his best lecture ever on universal grammar.

- Integrate the two sentences in an alternative, sensible way, tightening up the wordiness.

In my opinion, the best place to study linguistics is not MIT but Stanford.

## Run-On Sentences

A *run-on sentence* is a sentence comprised of two sentences connected with no punctuation at all or with only a comma (the proverbial *comma splice*).

Jane used to study linguistics at MIT she attends Stanford now.

Jane used to study linguistics at MIT, she attends Stanford now.

## Ways to Correct a Run-On Sentence

- Place a period or a semicolon between the sentences. If the relationship between the two sentences is weak, you might also want to add a transitional word or expression (e.g. *consequently, however, thus, as a result*).

Jane used to study linguistics at MIT. However, she attends Stanford now.

- Place a comma and a coordinating word (*and, but, for, nor, or, so, yet*) between the sentences.

Jane used to study linguistics at MIT, but she attends Stanford now.

- Subordinate the first sentence with a subordinating word (e.g. *after, although, because, since, when*) and place a comma between the two elements.

Although Jane used to study linguistics at MIT, she attends Stanford now.

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