

# Broken Sentences!

The fragment, the unfinished thought, the run-on, the comma splice, and the comma/conjunction error.

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As we have learned, a sentence (also known as an *independent clause*) has to have three parts:

1. **A subject** - whom or what the sentence is about.
2. **A predicate** - a verb that tells what the subject did or tells us something about the subject.
3. A sentence has to **express a complete thought**.

But sometimes students create groups of words that *look* like complete sentences (*independent clauses*), but they violate one or more of the rules above so they are not sentences. Here are the big four to watch out for.

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## The Sentence Fragment (F)

A sentence fragment occurs when a group of words contains a subject but no predicate or a predicate with no subject. In both cases, the group of words do not express a complete thought and are not considered complete sentences (*independent clauses*).

1. The man driving the big garbage truck. (No predicate.)
2. The doctor behind the counter looking at the chart. (No predicate.)
3. An abnormally large wolf with dark gray fur. (No predicate.)
4. Wandered aimlessly around the crowded mall. (No subject.)
5. Hoped for an excellent turnout. (No subject.)
6. Rocketed down the ski slope at over eighty miles per hour. (No subject.)

**The Fix!** Add the part that's missing.

1. The man driving the big garbage truck **stopped at our house**.
2. The doctor behind the counter looking at the chart **nodded slowly**.
3. An abnormally large wolf with dark gray fur **growled at the hunter**.
4. **The little girl** wandered aimlessly around the crowded mall.

5. The event organizers hoped for an excellent turnout.
6. Lindsay Vonn rocketed down the ski slope at over eighty miles per hour.

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## The Unfinished Thought (UT)

Unfinished thoughts are one of the most common errors in middle school writing. They are not complete sentences (*independent clauses*) because they do not express a complete idea - something is missing. UTs are called *dependent clauses* because they are groups of words that can't make sense on their own - they need to be attached to an *independent clause* to complete their meaning.

The key to finding unfinished thoughts in your writing is to look for “**dependent marker words**.” These dependent marker words have technical names, but we won't worry about that for now. The main dependent marker words that you'll run across are **after, although, as, as if, because, before, even if, even though, if, in order to, since, though, unless, until, whatever, when, whenever, whether, and while**. Passages that start with those words indicate that you are dealing with a *dependent clause* and those passages *must* be attached to an *independent clause*.

Here are some examples of unfinished thoughts (*dependent clauses*):

1. After we went to the party.
2. Even though it was raining.
3. Because of her fear of heights.
4. If our plane doesn't land soon.
5. Until my parents come home.

**Fix #1!** Attach the *dependent clause* to the beginning of an independent clause.

When you attach the dependent clause to the BEGINNING of the sentence, then you MUST use a comma!

1. After we went to the party, we stopped for something to eat.
2. Even though it was raining, we still had a good time at the picnic.
3. Because of her fear of heights, Lori hated roller coasters.
4. If our plane doesn't land soon, we are going to miss our connecting flight.
5. Until my parents come home, I am not allowed to have friends over.

**Fix #2!** Attach the *dependent clause* to the end of an independent clause. When you attach the dependent clause to the END of the sentence, then you NEVER use a comma!

1. We stopped for something to eat **after we went to the party.**
2. We still had a good time at the picnic **even though it was raining.**
3. Lori hated roller coasters **because of her fear of heights.**
4. We are going to miss our connecting flight **if our plane doesn't land soon.**
5. I am not allowed to have friends over **until my parents come home.**

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## **The Run-on (or fused) sentence (RO)**

Although a run-on sentence sounds like it's just a really long sentence, that's not the case. Run-ons can be *really* short. A run-on sentence is when two independent clauses (sentences) are incorrectly connected. Run-ons express more than one complete thought and need to be fixed.

1. We took our dog to the park he had a blast with the other dogs.
2. The community pool was crowded we decided to come back later.
3. Kyle went to Cedar Point he rode Millenium Force five times.
4. My coach is awesome she played for Duke University.
5. Wasps built a hive on my house it is the size of a basketball.

**Fix #1!** Place a period at the end of the first independent clause. Capitalize the beginning of the second independent clause.

1. We took our dog to the park. He had a blast with the other dogs.
2. The community pool was crowded. We decided to come back later.
3. Kyle went to Cedar Point. He rode Millenium Force five times.
4. My coach is awesome. She played for Duke University.
5. Wasps built a hive on my house. It is the size of a basketball.

**Fix #2!** If the content of the two independent clauses are closely related, place a semicolon (;) at the end of the first independent clause. DO NOT capitalize the beginning of the second independent clause.

1. We took our dog to the park; he had a blast with the other dogs.
2. The community pool was crowded; we decided to come back later.
3. Kyle went to Cedar Point; he rode Millenium Force five times.
4. My coach is awesome; she played for Duke University.
5. Wasps built a hive on my house; it is the size of a basketball.

**Fix #3!** Use a comma and one of the FANBOY conjunctions (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so). (Note: The examples below are a little clunky because you usually use this fix when the independent clauses are longer. They're correct, but they sound a little choppy.)

1. We took our dog to the park, **and** he had a blast with the other dogs.
2. The community pool was crowded, **so** we decided to come back later.
3. Kyle went to Cedar Point, **and** he rode Millenium Force five times.
4. My coach is awesome, **and** she played for Duke University.
5. Wasps built a hive on my house, **and** it is the size of a basketball.

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## The Comma Splice (CS)

**A comma splice is very much like a run-on. The difference is that this error occurs when you incorrectly join two independent clauses (sentences) using ONLY a comma.** *The fixes for this problem are exactly the same as the fixes for the run-ons.*

1. Sarah loved to play her piano, performances made her nervous.
2. The football team had to watch film, they gathered in the common area.
3. The lettuce looked awful, it must have been old.
4. A road crew placed orange cones, traffic squeezed together and slowed down.
5. A cute bunny munched on the grass, he ate a bunch of roses.

The fixes all applied at once:

1. Sarah loved to play her piano, performances made her nervous.
  - a. Fix 1: Sarah loved to play her piano. Performances made her nervous.
  - b. Fix 2: Sarah loved to play her piano; performances made her nervous.
  - c. Fix 3: Sarah loved to play her piano, but performances made her nervous.
2. The football team had to watch film, they gathered in the common area.
  - a. Fix 1: The football team had to watch film. They gathered in the common area.
  - b. Fix 2: The football team had to watch film; they gathered in the common area.
  - c. Fix 3: The football team had to watch film, so they gathered in the common area.

3. The lettuce looked awful, it must have been old.
    - a. Fix 1: The lettuce looked awful. It must have been old.
    - b. Fix 2: The lettuce looked awful; it must have been old.
    - c. Fix 3: The lettuce looked awful, so it must have been old.
  
  4. A road crew placed orange cones, traffic squeezed together and slowed down.
    - a. Fix 1: A road crew placed orange cones. Traffic squeezed together and slowed down.
    - b. Fix 2: A road crew placed orange cones; traffic squeezed together and slowed down.
    - c. Fix 2: A road crew placed orange cones, so traffic squeezed together and slowed down.
  
  5. A cute bunny munched on the grass, he ate a bunch of roses.
    - a. Fix 1: A cute bunny munched on the grass. He ate a bunch of roses.
    - b. Fix 2: A cute bunny munched on the grass; he ate a bunch of roses.
    - c. Fix 3: A cute bunny munched on the grass, and he ate a bunch of roses.
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## The Comma/Conjunction error (CC)

A comma/conjunction error actually looks like Fix #3 for run-ons and comma splices. **When you use Fix #3, you use a comma and one of the FANBOY conjunctions, BUT, when you use a comma and a FANBOY, you absolutely must have an independent clause on both sides of that comma/conjunction.** If you have an independent clause on only one side of the sentence, then you have a CC error.

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**Example:** Our team won the tournament, and we celebrated with ice cream.  
*This sentence is correct. There is an independent clause on each side of the CC.*

**Example:** Our team won the tournament, and celebrated with ice cream.  
*This sentence is INCORRECT. There's not an independent clause on the right side.*

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**Example:** The kid broke the window, but he didn't take responsibility for it.  
*This sentence is correct. There is an independent clause on each side of the CC.*

**Example:** The kid broke the window, but didn't take responsibility for it.  
*This sentence is INCORRECT. There's not an independent clause on the right side.*

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**Example:** Olivia cut the neighbor's lawn, and she earned \$30.  
*This sentence is correct. There is an independent clause on each side of the CC.*

**Example:** Olivia cut the neighbor's lawn, and earned \$30.  
*This sentence is INCORRECT. There's not an independent clause on the right side.*

**Fix #1!** Add the part that's missing, which is usually the subject of the second clause.

**Example:** Our team won the tournament, and **WE** celebrated with ice cream.

**Example:** The kid broke the window, but **HE** didn't take responsibility for it.

**Example:** Olivia cut the neighbor's lawn, and **SHE** earned \$30.

**Fix #2!** Drop the comma to create a sentence with a compound verb.

**Example:** Our team won the tournament and celebrated with ice cream.

**Example:** The kid broke the window but didn't take responsibility for it.

**Example:** Olivia cut the neighbor's lawn and earned \$30.