

Fused Sentences, Comma Splices, and Sentence Fragments

This handout covers fused sentences (also known as run-on sentences), sentence fragments, and comma splices. We've included these issues in one place because they all deal with the same subject: figuring out where one sentence ends and the next begins.

Two sentences can be correctly separated in four ways:

With a period:

The dog was massive. He weighed over fifty kilograms.

With a semicolon:

The dog was massive; he weighed over fifty kilograms.

With a comma followed by a coordinating conjunction indicating the relationship between the two clauses:

The dog was massive, and he weighed over fifty kilograms.

In some cases, a colon is appropriate. If the first clause anticipates the second, or the second clause explains the first, you could use a colon.

The dog was massive: he weighed over fifty kilograms.

Errors occur when the two sentences are improperly joined or separated. A **comma splice** occurs when the two main clauses (i.e., sentences) are separated with a comma but without a coordinating conjunction.

The dog was massive, he weighed over fifty kilograms.

A **fused sentence** (or **run-on sentence**) occurs when there is no punctuation at all between the two clauses.

The dog was massive he weighed over fifty kilograms.

Notice how the main clauses sit without any punctuation, coordinating or subordinating conjunctions.

**Read it aloud. You might hear how the two clauses run together and muddy each other's meaning.*

A **sentence fragment** occurs when the words between two periods lack either a subject or a verb.

No one got along with Jesse. Her only friend who came to the party.

Here, the period separates the main clause (*No one got along with Jesse*) from a noun-phrase (*Her only friend who came to the party*). Because the noun in the second phrase does not do anything, it is not an independent

clause and should not be separated with a period. Instead, the writer should have used a comma to indicate that Jesse is her only friend who came to the party.

No one got along with Jesse, her only friend who came to the party.

Because verbs become components in adjective or noun phrases, sentence fragments sometimes sound like complete sentences.

It was a horrifying experience. One that she'll always remember.

The clause beginning with *One* should be linked to the preceding independent clause with a comma, not separated by a period. The comma allows it to act as a noun phrase in opposition to *experience*.

It was a horrifying experience, one that she'll always remember.