

Run-Ons, Comma Splices and Fragments OH MY!

Run-ons, comma splices and fragmented sentences are the bane of the college student's existence when writing those all too common 2 – 12 page papers. How in the world can one avoid these three issues when Word is supposed to work virtual magic and correct those errors? The answer is that though Word is a very good word processing tool it can, and does, fail on more than one occasion. The evidence is the marks in the text and margins of your paper. So you must be saying at this point, "So what do I do?!" Good question!

Avoid these three common problems by understanding how to properly use punctuation and pay attention to the structure of your sentence. Here's my two cents on the matter: 1) identify the problem and 2) correct it.

Run-Ons

Gosh, how many times have you seen in your academic career "Run-on" in the margins? Your thinking, "I was on a roll!" Just like having a verbal conversation, one must breath in-between sentences. With a run-on sentence, there isn't any punctuation that's in place to separate clauses.

For example: "You make my heart flutter but we can be friends until you dump your boyfriend/girlfriend and want to get serious."

A better way to write this would be: "You make my heart flutter, but we can be friends until you dump your boyfriend/girlfriend and want to get serious."

In the first sentence, you can see that it is long winded continuous making the reader want to take a breath for you. In the second sentence, you can see that by adding the comma after flutter makes you, and your reader, pause for a moment before moving on to finish the sentence being more reflective and understanding.

Comma Splices

Here's what I have to say about comma splices. Comma splicing happens when used in separating to independent, but related, clauses.

For example, here is comma splicing gone wild: "Maverick waves are the best waves to surf, surfing is fun." In the example, I used a comma to join two independent clauses. It is important to remember that independent clauses CAN'T be separated by commas.

Consider adding a conjunction such as: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so. Using a conjunction will separate two independent clauses provided a comma is used before it.

Here is the sentence with a comma and conjunction added: "Maverick waves are the best waves to surf, and surfing is fun." My old friend the semi-colon can also help cure the comma splicing blues.



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The semi-colon, in my humble opinion, is an underutilized and misunderstood punctuation mark. The semi-colon CAN be used to separate independent clauses which are closely related in their meaning; in other words, a continuation of your thought on the matter. The semi-colon is your best friend.

Consider this: “Those Maverick waves are the best waves to surf; therefore surfing is fun.” WOW! So there are transitions that can be used with a semi-colon too? Yes, transitions such as: however, therefore, as a result, consequently, nevertheless, later, in addition, etc.

But remember this one rule about semicolons; they CAN'T be used like conjunctions.

Fragments

You have probably seen squiggly lines under sentences in Word and when you click on it to try and correct the sentence, it says “fragment”. Fragments are incomplete sentences, or rather a not so complete thought with all the proper parts of a sentence.

A fragment may also be missing a subject, a verb, or both; or a fragment may begin with a subordinating conjunction like whenever, since, after, as long as, even though, etc.

An example of a fragment: “Running to class.” Who is running to class? You? A student? The professor? The verb needs the subject in order to show the action. Consider this: “The student is running to class?”

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The following works were used during the creation of this handout: [Run on Sentences Shmoop](#), [Comma Splices Shmoop](#), [Fragments Shmoop](#)

BEWARE of “The Comma Song!” You don’t want that stuck in your head for the rest of the day; no bueno!



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