# Editing to Eliminate Fragments, Run-ons, and Comma Splices

**Fragments, run-ons, and comma splices should be edited from your paper once you have a complete draft. Don't worry about them until your draft is finished. Committing your ideas to paper is the first priority.**

**Fragments:** Formula for sentence composition: Subject + verb = sentence (complete thought).

Question: Which word group is a fragment?

> *Dave believed that Louise was right to go.*
> *Because she did not know what Sam meant.*

Answer: The second word group (everything from "because" to "meant") is a fragment.

Why? Let's analyze the first word group, which **is** a sentence.

> *Dave believed that Louise was right to go.*

The subject is underlined once, and the verb is underlined twice. The thought begins with "Dave believed." What did Dave believe? Something about Louise. What about Louise? That she was right to leave. All questions raised within the sentence are answered.

The second word group, on the other hand, raises questions.

> *Because she did not know what Sam meant.*

This word group has a subject (she) and a verb (did know). It is, nonetheless, a fragment, because it does not express a complete thought. The first word of the sentence is "because," so we know that *something* happened "because Louise did not know…" We are never told what happened, however, so the thought is incomplete, and the word group is a fragment.

This particular fragment is called a **dependent-word** fragment. "Because" refers to something stated either in an imaginary previous sentence or an imaginary following sentence. The easiest way to correct a fragment like this is to make it part of the sentence to which it belongs.

> *David believed that Louise was right to go because she did not know what Sam meant.*
> *(Or)*
> *Because she did not know what Sam meant, she was confused.*

Word groups that begin with words such as *because, unless, while,* etc. are often fragments because they usually refer to information not contained within the word groups themselves. Other common kinds of fragments are **added-detail** fragments and **missing-subject** fragments.

Added-detail fragments lack a subject and a verb.

*The class often starts late. For example, yesterday at quarter after nine instead of at nine sharp. Today the class started at five after nine.*

Missing-subject fragments, appropriately enough, lack a subject.

*The truck skidded on the rain-slick highway. But missed a telephone pole on the side of the road.*

**Run-Ons and Comma Splices:**

Once you have become familiar enough with the look and feel of a true sentence to eliminate fragments from your writing, you will have a fairly simple job eliminating run-ons. A "run-on" is, simply, two sentences joined under the punctuation of a single sentence.

*Parents just don't understand well if they do they don't act like it.*

Either there is no punctuation at all between the two thoughts--where there ought to be a period or a semi colon--or there is only a comma. Run-ons of the second variety are called comma splices.

*Our father was a madman in his youth, he would do anything on a dare.*

Run-ons can be corrected very simply.

1.  Use a period and a capital letter to break the two complete thoughts into separate sentences:

    *My grades are very good this semester. My social life rates only a C.*

2.  Use a comma plus a joining word (and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet) to connect the two complete thoughts:

    *My grades are very good this semester, but my social life rates only a C.*

3.  Use a semicolon (but sparingly—semicolons draw attention to themselves) to connect the two
    complete thoughts:

    *My grades are very good this semester; my social life rates only a C.*

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