

Sentence Fragments and Run-ons

A *sentence* must have a subject (who, what) and a verb (telling what the subject does or is), and must express a complete thought.

A *clause* is a group of words with a subject and a verb.

—An *independent clause* expresses a complete thought, and can stand independently as a sentence

—A *dependent clause* also has a subject and a verb but cannot stand alone as a sentence: it starts with a dependent word such as “after,” “until” that leaves the thought incomplete unless joined to an independent clause.

Ex: (*Although* I hate anchovies on pizza.) = an incomplete thought

Joined to an independent clause: (Although I hate anchovies on pizza, I will eat anything.) = complete sentence

A *phrase* is a group of words lacking either a subject or a verb; phrases are not complete sentences.

Ex: (The man with one black shoe) —no verb
(Limping along the street) — no subject

A *fragment* is not a complete sentence. It is either a phrase or a dependent clause.

Ex: (Before you eat that last slice) —dependent clause
(Which may seem silly) —dependent clause
(Including a tip) —phrase
(While the building burned to the ground) —dependent clause

Exercise: Underline the fragments in the following passage and then make them into complete sentences by joining with independent clauses or adding or deleting words. (Have a tutor check them for you.)

After dinner last night. My dog and I went outside. To scratch our stomachs and listen to the crickets. Suddenly Pip whined and looked up. I looked up at the sky too and saw a fantastic sight. Stars were shooting everywhere. In a cascade of fire. Although I had seen shooting stars, and had read about the Northern Lights. I had never seen them occur at the same time. Or with such intensity, which amazed me. I ran back into the house to get my camera. However, it was too late. By the time I got back outside. The sky was black again.