

Common Sentence Errors

Identifying and Fixing the Comma Splice

What is a Comma Splice?

A comma splice is the joining of two main clauses with only a comma.

Example: The wind was blowing, the trees were swaying.

Note that both clauses are sentences on their own, and both make independent points:

- The wind was blowing.
- The trees were swaying.

Identifying Comma Splices

Take a look at the sentence and ask the following question:

Can the clauses separated by the comma stand alone as sentences?

- If the answer is yes, it is most likely a comma splice.

Common Fixes

There are four common ways to fix a comma splice:

(Notice the subtle changes in emphasis and/or meaning with each change.)

1. Use a period to form two independent sentences.
 - The wind was blowing. The trees were swaying.
2. Use a semicolon to separate the clauses.
 - The wind was blowing; the trees were swaying.
3. Follow the comma with a coordinating conjunction that joins the clauses and specifies the relationship between them.
 - The wind was blowing, **so** the trees were swaying.
4. When one idea is of greater importance than the other, the idea of lesser importance can be expressed as a subordinate clause.
 - **Because** the wind was blowing, the trees were swaying.

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Identifying and Fixing Run-on (or Fused) Sentences

What is a Run-on Sentence?

A run-on sentence is two or more main clauses that are joined without punctuation, resulting in a fused sentence.

Example: The cat woke up from its nap it soon turned three circles and fell back to sleep.

Note that there are clauses that are sentences on their own, and that they make independent points:

- The cat woke up from its nap.
- It soon turned three circles and fell back to sleep.

Identifying a Run-on

Take a look at the sentence and ask the following question:

Are there clauses side by side that can stand alone as sentences?

- If the answer is yes, it is most likely a run-on sentence.

Common Fixes

There are four common ways to fix a run-on:

(Notice the subtle changes in emphasis and/or meaning with each change.)

1. Use a period to form two independent sentences.
 - The cat woke up from its nap. It soon turned three circles and fell back to sleep.
2. Use a semicolon to separate the clauses.
 - The cat woke up from its nap; it soon turned three circles and fell back to sleep.
3. Follow the first main clause with a coordinating conjunction that joins the clauses and specifies the relationship between them.
 - The cat woke up from its nap, *but* it soon turned three circles and fell back to sleep.
4. When one idea is of greater importance than the other, the idea of lesser importance can be expressed as a subordinate clause.
 - After the cat woke up from its nap, it soon turned three circles and fell back to sleep.

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Fragments Definition

A **SENTENCE FRAGMENT** fails to be a sentence in the sense that it cannot stand by itself. It does not contain even one **independent clause**. There are several reasons why a group of words may seem to act like a sentence but not have the wherewithal to make it as a complete thought.

- **It may locate something in time and place with a prepositional phrase or a series of such phrases, but it's still lacking a proper subject-verb relationship within an independent clause:**

In Japan, during the last war and just before the armistice.

This sentence accomplishes a great deal in terms of placing the reader in time and place, but there is no subject, no verb.

- **It describes something, but there is no subject-verb relationship:**

Working far into the night in an effort to salvage her little boat.

This is a **verbal phrase** that wants to modify something, the real subject of the sentence (about to come up), probably the *she* who was working so hard.

- **It may have most of the makings of a sentence but still be missing an important part of a verb string:**

Some of the students working in Professor Espinoza's laboratory last semester.

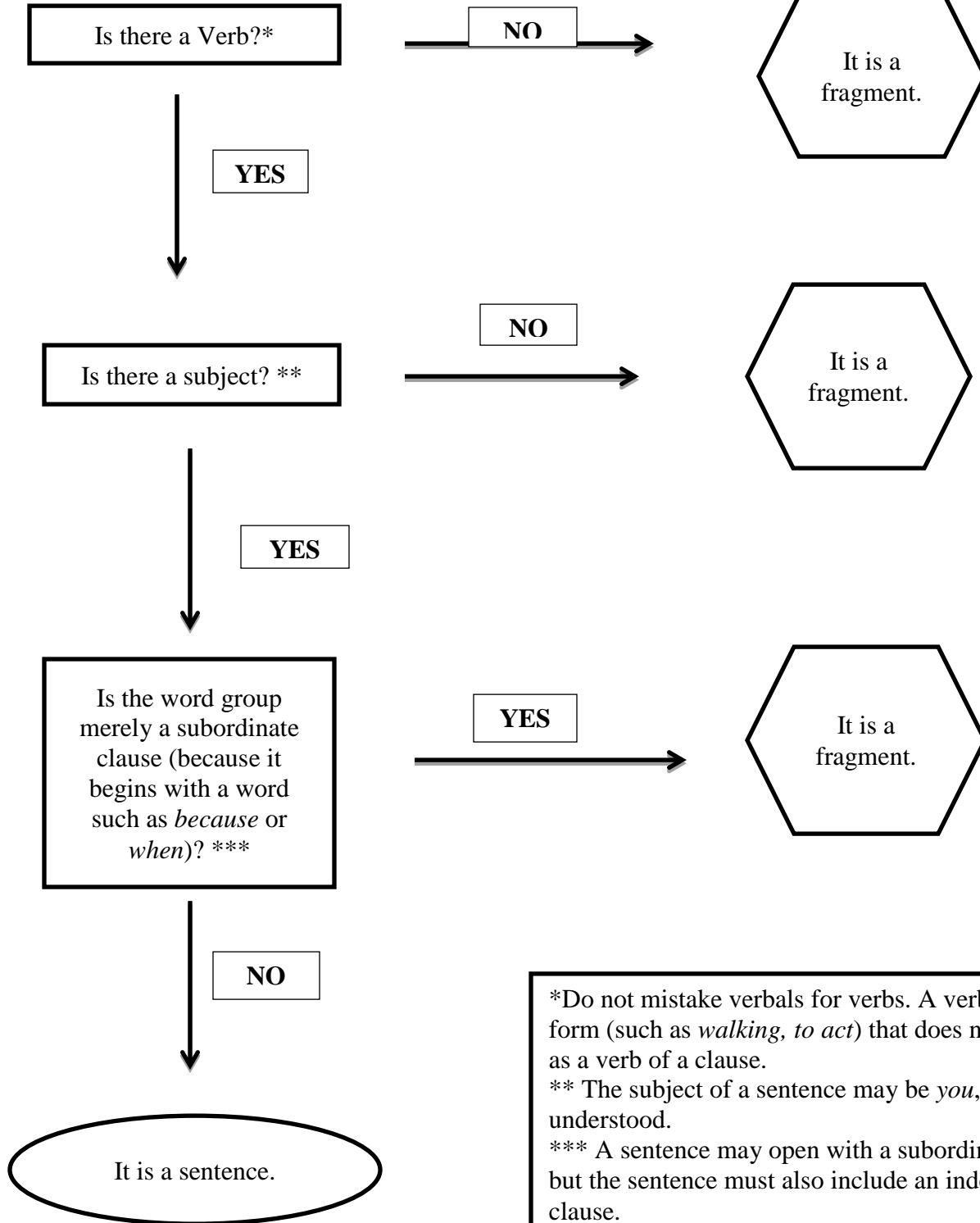
Remember that an *-ing* verb form without an auxiliary form to accompany it can never be a verb.

- **It may even have a subject-verb relationship, but it has been subordinated to another idea by a dependent word and so cannot stand by itself:**

Even though he had the better arguments and was by far the more powerful speaker.

This sentence fragment has a subject, *he*, and two verbs, *had* and *was*, but it cannot stand by itself because of the dependent word (subordinating conjunction) *even though*. We need an independent clause to follow up this **dependent clause**: . . . *the more powerful speaker, he lost the case because he didn't understand the jury.*

Test for Fragments



*Do not mistake verbals for verbs. A verbal is a verb form (such as *walking, to act*) that does not function as a verb of a clause.
** The subject of a sentence may be *you*, understood.
*** A sentence may open with a subordinate clause, but the sentence must also include an independent clause.