

Sentence Building

Most sentence faults and problems with punctuation are the result of a lack of understanding of how the parts of a sentence fit together.

Parts of a sentence

A quick refresher regarding parts of a sentence:

- **Subjects** do the action or perform the verb of a sentence.
- **Objects** receive the action that the subject performs.
- **Verbs** are the action words or linking words, and they take different tenses to show time.

English has two basic ways of combining words into groups:

- **Phrases** are groups of words without a subject and a verb. They are centred around nouns (in the van, by early morning).
- **Clauses** contain both a subject and a verb and are centred around verbs (she runs the marathon; when he saw the ruins). They have two types: independent and dependent.

Types of clauses

All sentences are constructed from two types of clauses.

1. The **independent clause**, which contains a subject and a verb, and expresses a complete thought:

She decided to walk to the park. (subject=she; verb=decided)

1. The **dependent clause**, which also contains a subject and a verb but does not express a complete thought. Subordinate clauses often begin with words like since, while, although, despite, etc.:

Because it was a sunny day... (subject=it; verb=was)

Combining clauses

Combining clauses is what sentence building is all about.

Joining a dependent clause to an independent clause requires only a comma:

Because it was a sunny day, she decided to walk to the park.

Difficulties arise when two independent clauses are joined together.

- If the writer places no punctuation between them, they become a **run-on** (or fused) sentence.
- If the writer places only a comma between them, they become a **comma splice**.

Both run-on sentences and comma splices are considered incorrect.

To join two independent clauses into one sentence, you'll need one of the following options:

1. Place a semicolon between them.

It was a sunny day; she decided to walk to the park.

2. Place one of the coordinating conjunctions (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) between them.

It was a sunny day and she decided to walk to the park.

3. Place one of the dependent conjunctions (although, since, it, whether, because...) before one of the independent clauses to turn it into a dependent clause; also place a comma between the clauses.

Because it was a sunny day, she decided to walk to the park.