

# 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.*