

## Beware of Three Common Errors

### *Sentence Fragments*

A fragment is part of a sentence, but it is not a sentence because a fragment is not a complete thought. Here are some fragments:

*When John ran across the field.*

*After Mary skipped across the field.*

*Because her self-esteem was not based on winning a race.*

Notice that if we just skip the first word in each of these three examples, what remains is a complete thought that could be a sentence. What makes a fragment is not its length; what makes a fragment is its lack of completeness—the manner in which it leaves the reader confused as to what exactly is happening.

### *Run-on or Fused Sentences*

A run-on or fused sentence is made up of two or more complete thoughts that are jammed together without the help of any conjunctions or punctuation.

*John ran across the field Mary skipped she didn't need to win.*

*John ran across the field and Mary skipped along.*

Not only is this sentence hard to understand because we don't know where to pause, but its meaning is unclear without the help of some conjunctions:

*When John ran across the field, Mary skipped, for she didn't need to win.*

*John ran across the field, and Mary skipped along.*

### *Comma Splice Sentences*

A comma splice sentence uses commas but doesn't use either coordinating or subordinating conjunctions:

*John ran across the field, Mary skipped, she didn't need to win.*

While the reader knows when to pause, we don't fully understand the meaning of the ideas in the sentence.

*John ran across the field, but Mary skipped because she didn't need to win.*

## Sentence Structure



### -Five Golden Rules for a Sentence-

1. A sentence must have an initial capital letter.
2. A sentence must contain an action (a verb).
3. A sentence must have a subject (a noun or pronoun).
4. A sentence must be a complete thought, making sense by itself.
5. A sentence must have a closing punctuation mark.

Of these five sentence rules, the one that is most frequently not understood is rule four. For many people, it is hard to recognize a complete thought. See the example below:

*When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for a people to advance from that subordination in which they have hitherto remained, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the equal and independent station to which the laws of nature and of nature's god entitle them,*

This part of the opening to the Declaration of Independence is not a sentence even though it is very long. It is not a complete thought until we add these additional words: *a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the change.*

*Jesus wept.*

This famous verse from the Bible (John 11:35) is actually a sentence even though it only has two words because it is a complete thought with a verb and subject.

Learning to recognize complete thoughts comes with time and experience.

## Only Four Types of Sentence Structure:

### SIMPLE SENTENCE

A simple sentence has only one complete thought:

*John ran.*

Even if I add a few more words describing *John* and *ran*, the sentence is still a simple sentence:

*Tricky John ran across the field.*

Even if John is joined by *Mary*, and they run *and* skip across the field, the sentence is still considered only one thought:

*Tricky John and Mary ran and skipped across the field together.*

This simple sentence now has two actors and two actions, but the sentence is still considered one thought. The sentence has a compound subject and verb, but it is not a compound sentence.

### COMPOUND SENTENCE

A compound sentence is two complete thoughts connected by a *comma* and a *conjunction*:

*John ran across the field, but Mary skipped across the field.*

Seven coordinating conjunctions can be used to join two complete thoughts: **For And Nor But Or Yet So**. The first letter of these seven words is the acronym *fanboys*.

**John ran across the field, FOR Mary skipped across the field.**

**John ran across the field, AND Mary skipped across the field.**

**John didn't run across the field, NOR did Mary skip across.**

**John ran across the field, BUT Mary skipped across the field.**

**John ran across the field, OR Mary skipped across the field.**

**John ran across the field, YET Mary skipped across the field.**

**John ran across the field, SO Mary skipped across the field.**

### COMPLEX SENTENCE

In a complex sentence, we have one complete thought and at least one incomplete thought. The incomplete thought begins with a **subordinate conjunction**. There are many subordinating conjunctions, but the most common include the following:

**When While After Although Before Because If Though Since**

These conjunctions can start a sentence or help end it:

*WHEN John ran across the field, Mary skipped across the field.*

*John ran across the field AFTER Mary skipped across the field.*

The part of the sentence that begins with the subordinating conjunction is considered subordinate to the main idea of the sentence.

Notice that when the subordinating conjunction starts the sentence, a comma is used at the end of the subordinate idea. However, when the subordinating conjunction appears after the main idea, no comma is needed.

### COMPOUND/COMPLEX SENTENCE

The most complicated type of sentence is one that combines the compound and complex sentence structures. A compound/complex sentence looks like this:

*John ran across the field, BUT Mary skipped across BECAUSE her self-esteem was not based on winning a race.*

A compound/complex sentence has at least one independent clause before or after two or more dependent clauses.

John ran across the field—**independent** (can stand alone)

But Mary skipped across—**dependent** (cannot stand alone)

Because her self-esteem was not based on winning a race—**dependent** (cannot stand alone)