DLA: Avoiding Fragments and Run-Ons

The key to avoiding fragments and run-ons is understanding what makes a sentence. A sentence needs a subject and a verb, and it needs to be a complete thought.

Step 1: Find the verb.

You can find the verb in the sentence by changing the time, so the word or words that change is the verb.

For example:
My parents worked hard to give my sister and I opportunities.

Time test to find verb: put a “next year” in front of the sentence.

Next year, my parents _________ hard to give my sister and I opportunities.

You know the word(s) that changes tense is the verb. Double underline the verb.

Step 2: Find the subject.

You can find the subject by asking the following questions:

• Point to the verb with your finger, and ask yourself, who or what is doing that? Or who or what is that talking about?

• Who or what is the subject/focus of the sentence?

For example:
My parents worked hard to give my sister and I opportunities.

From the time test, we know what the verb is. Now we can ask who is doing that, and find the subject. Underline the subject.
EXERCISE #1:

Directions: Underline the subject and double underline the verb.

1. My father believes in the benefits of exercise.
2. I am passionate about creating documentaries.
3. Maintaining our Mexican heritage is still important for my family.
4. Chocolates are fruits, and potatoes are vegetables according to my grandmother.
5. According to Jeff Yang by 2020, 20% of Asians in the U.S. will be multiracial.

What’s a fragment (frag)?

Fragments occur when you don’t have a subject or you don’t have a verb or it’s not a complete thought; it’s a dependent clause.

Sometimes a fragment is missing a subject or a verb.

For example:

Ran across the street.

All the students in the college.

Sometimes it has a subject and verb, but it’s still not a complete thought.

For example:

When the cat ran across the street.

If all the students in the college are in class.

Hint: Beware of subordinating conjunctions (more on that soon)!
EXERCISE #2:

Directions: Mark S for sentence or F for fragment.

___ I walked a mile.

___ Watching television makes me hungry.

___ Although I am very tired.

___ First of all, the library is closed on holidays.

___ I got into a car accident, which is why I am late.

What’s a run-on sentence (RO)?

Run-on sentences occur when you punctuate two or more sentences as if they were one sentence. When you put a comma between them, there is still an error because commas do not grammatically separate two complete sentences. Why do run-together sentences occur? Because people think that two closely related ideas must be the same sentence.

For example:

I did not join the gang I was afraid of getting into trouble in school.

I rebelled against my father, my family got very angry with me.

These are run-on sentences because each one has two grammatically complete ideas, with two subjects and two verbs. (The second one can also be called a comma-splice error.)
Ways to correct run-together sentences:

1. Put a period between the sentences, and capitalize the first letter of the second sentence.

   I rebelled against my mother. My family got very angry with me.

2. Put a semi-colon between the two sentences. The first letter of the second sentence is always lower case after a semi-colon.

   I rebelled against my mother; my family got very angry with me.

3. The third and the best way to correct run-on sentences is to use a logical joining word in between them.

   I rebelled against my mother, and my family got very angry with me.
   I rebelled against my mother although my family got very angry with me.

Coordinating conjunctions:

There are only 7 coordinating conjunctions. The easiest way to remember them is with the silly word made up of the first letter of each, FANBOYS. Punctuate sentences joined by coordinating conjunctions with a comma before the coordinating conjunction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conjunction</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FOR</td>
<td>shows a cause relationship.</td>
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<td>AND</td>
<td>shows an addition relationship.</td>
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<tr>
<td>NOR</td>
<td>shows the addition of negatives.</td>
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<tr>
<td>BUT</td>
<td>shows a contrast relationship.</td>
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<tr>
<td>OR</td>
<td>shows an alternative relationship.</td>
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<tr>
<td>YET</td>
<td>shows a contrast relationship.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SO</td>
<td>shows a result relationship.</td>
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Subordinating Conjunctions:

Besides helping you fix run-on sentence errors, subordinators can help you make your thoughts more clear on the page. You’ll see how fragments might occur if these aren’t used properly.

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<th>Cause:</th>
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<th>So that</th>
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<tr>
<th>Other common subordinators:</th>
<th>As if</th>
<th>As though</th>
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<td>Whether</td>
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Sentences:

Even though my family got very angry with me, I rebelled against my mother.

I rebelled against my mother even though my family got very angry with me.

Fragments:

Since I had been running all day.

Unless I took a fifteen-minute break when my coworker arrived.
EXERCISE #3:

DIRECTIONS: Use a subordinating or a coordinating conjunction to join as indicated.

1. Jacob Lawrence’s art takes its themes from African American art, ____________ it also reflects experiences common to everyone. (coordinator)

2. Reading at the library is usually a quiet activity, ______________ his painting “The Library” portrays a lively scene. (coordinator or subordinator)

3. In his rendition the vertical and horizontal lines and the bright colors create strong energy, ___________ the library looks more like a place to celebrate. (coordinator)

4. _______________the hands of the people in the painting stand out, they suggest that this community has a strong connection to learning and to each other. (subordinator)

5. _______________ the color palette that Jacob Lawrence has chosen is reminiscent of African textiles, his painting may also get us to think about our heritage. (subordinator)
Exercise #4:

Try using what you know about coordinators and subordinators to correct frags and RO errors or just to make your ideas/sentences more clear and sophisticated.

On August 12, 2003, I left for Marine basic training, my mother and father both had tears in their eyes both gave me a hug. Which I was surprised about because my father didn’t often show affection. Initially, my parents did not want me to join the military, especially the Marines. I had to sit down with them on several occasions and explain why I wanted the Marines, I told them that I wanted the challenge that they were the toughest. My father finally told me more about his military experience in Vietnam during these conversations. I knew he was shot in the leg four times. I did not know he was in prison for thirteen years. My parents finally agreed to my wished, after a lot grueling yet exciting training, on November 15, 2003 I became a United States Marine, I returned home to see my father had a smile on his face he was proud of me. Even though I had to do a lot of work to convince my parents and of course my service. I found it all to be worthwhile. I can now focus on my studies and my goal of becoming a pharmacist.

List the strategies you’ve learned today: