

Effective Sentence Structure

Getting the Idea

Sentence structure is the grammatical arrangement of words in a sentence. Each structure results in a different type of sentence. Read the chart below.

Sentence Type	Definition	Example
simple	a sentence consisting of one independent clause , or a clause that can stand on its own as a sentence	Talia is a great soccer player.
compound	a sentence consisting of two or more independent clauses, usually joined by a comma and a coordinating conjunction (<i>and, but, for, so, or, nor, yet</i>)	Talia is a great soccer player, but sometimes she makes mistakes on the field.
complex	a sentence consisting of one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses , sometimes joined by a subordinating conjunction (for example: <i>when, although, if, since, because, until</i>)	Talia sometimes makes mistakes because she tries too hard. Although Talia is a great soccer player, she makes mistakes.

A **sentence fragment** is an incomplete sentence punctuated as a complete sentence. Read the following examples:

Pam's inconsistent answers she was lying.

Realized Pam was lying.

Because Pam's answers were inconsistent.

To determine if a sentence is a fragment, ask yourself three questions. Does the sentence have a verb? The first sentence needs to tell *what inconsistent answers does*, for instance, *proved*. Does the sentence have a subject? The second sentence does not tell *who* realized Pam was lying. Does the sentence begin with a subordinating conjunction but not express a complete thought? The third sentence does not tell what happened *because* Pam's answers were inconsistent. Here is one way to revise the fragments above:

Because Pam's answers were inconsistent, Joel realized she was lying.

Thinking It Through 1

Read the following examples. Write them correctly on the lines provided. Add missing subjects or verbs and any other words necessary to correct the sentence fragments. If the sentence is correct, write “correct as is.”

1. Starved Rock State Park a popular tourist attraction near Utica, Illinois.

Hint This sentence is missing a key part of speech.

2. If you spend inadequate time on your research project.

Hint The sentence leaves the reader wondering what will happen *if*.

3. Fulfilled the requirements of the course with remarkable ease.

4. Since you refuse to acknowledge that you may be incorrect in this matter.

5. Born in Galesburg, Illinois, George Ferris the amusement park attraction that bears his name.

6. Kwanzaa, an African American holiday, was created by Maulana Karenga in 1966.

A **run-on sentence** is two independent clauses, or complete sentences, that are joined together without the proper punctuation or connecting word.

Run-on sentences come in a few varieties. For example, a **fused sentence** occurs when the independent clauses of a run-on sentence flow together without any punctuation.

Ryan took first prize in the contest he celebrated with his family.

The run-on can be corrected in a few ways. For example:

Ryan took first prize in the contest. Later he celebrated with his family.

Ryan took first prize in the contest, and later he celebrated with his family.

After taking first prize in the contest, Ryan celebrated with his family.

A **comma splice** occurs when the independent clauses of a run-on sentence are joined with only a comma.

Venus is the brightest object in the sky after the sun and moon, it is sometimes called “the Evening Star.”

Apply similar methods to correct this sentence. For example, you can add a **coordinating conjunction** after the comma.

Venus is the brightest object in the sky after the sun and moon, **so** it is sometimes called “the Evening Star.”

You can also insert a period or **semicolon** between the independent clauses.

Venus is the brightest object in the sky after the sun and moon; it is sometimes called “the Evening Star.”

Finally, you can change one of the independent clauses into a dependent clause.

Sometimes called “the Evening Star,” Venus is the brightest object in the sky, after the sun and moon.

Thinking It Through 2

Read the following sentences. Write them correctly on the lines provided. If the sentence is correct, write “correct as is.”

1. Stacy was unhappy with the compromise, however, the alternative was worse.

Hint The word *however* is not a coordinating conjunction.

2. Margo could buy another computer the pictures were irreplaceable.

Hint What should be added to separate the two independent clauses properly?

3. Chicago has easy access to the Mississippi River and the Great Lakes this makes it a major transportation hub.

4. Jurgis forgot his lines on opening night, his ability to improvise saved the play.

5. The scientist’s preliminary findings were inconclusive, so he did the tests again.

6. Credibility is a vital characteristic of a good journalist without it, his or her work is compromised.

Lesson Practice

This passage contains mistakes. Use the Reading Guide to help you find the mistakes.

Reading Guide

A sentence fragment does not express a complete thought.

Run-ons, comma splices, and fused sentences join independent clauses without a coordinating conjunction or correct punctuation.

Which sentence in the last paragraph is a sentence fragment?

Dragons

- 1 (1) One of the most intriguing mythological beasts is the dragon. (2) In some cultures, the dragon is a positive symbol the ancient Greeks and Romans, for example, thought dragons knew Earth's secrets. (3) Not everyone, however, believed that dragons were benevolent. (4) Early Europeans viewed the dragon as a threat—a nemesis to fear and vanquish. (5) Early narrative poems, such as *Beowulf*, tell about such fearsome creatures. (6) Men who could destroy dragons were lauded for their heroism and courage.
- 2 (7) One culture that has traditionally honored the dragon is the Chinese. (8) Among the Chinese, the dragon is a symbol of prosperity and good fortune. (9) Like the ancient Greeks and Romans. (10) They view the dragon as generous, heroic, divine, and wise. (11) In Chinese mythology, the four main Dragon Kings, who are brothers, appear as water creatures. (12) They have snakelike bodies covered with the scales of a fish, they also have two pairs of sharp claws and antlers. (13) Unlike Western dragons, Dragon Kings do not have wings.
- 3 (14) Each Dragon King governs one of the four seas—the East China Sea, the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the North Sea. (15) The Dragon Kings are in charge of the weather. (16) They can be benevolent and make it rain but they will unleash floods and typhoons if angered.
- 4 (17) Dragon Kings are not your typical dragons. (18) They live in crystal palaces and have armies of fish, crab, and shrimp to patrol their body of water. (19) When the need arises. (20) Dragon Kings can assume human shape.

Answer the following questions.

1. Which sentences should be combined to correct the sentence fragment?
 - A. sentences 5 and 6
 - B. sentences 7 and 8
 - C. sentences 9 and 10
 - D. sentences 11 and 12

2. Which is the BEST way to revise sentence 2?
 - A. Insert a period between *symbol* and *the*, and change *the* to *The*.
 - B. Insert a comma between *symbol* and *the*.
 - C. Add the word *and* after *symbol*.
 - D. Move *for example* to the end of the sentence.

3. Which sentence in paragraph 2 is a comma splice?
 - A. sentence 8
 - B. sentence 10
 - C. sentence 11
 - D. sentence 12

4. Which is the BEST way to correct sentence 16?
 - A. They can be benevolent and make it rain however they will unleash floods and typhoons if angered.
 - B. They can be benevolent and make it rain; but they will unleash floods and typhoons if angered.
 - C. They can be benevolent and make it rain. But they will unleash floods and typhoons if angered.
 - D. They can be benevolent and make it rain, but they will unleash floods and typhoons if angered.