

Sentence Boundaries



Think about a complete idea as a bicycle. In order to stay upright, it needs a rider and it needs motion. A bicycle, sitting in place, will fall over if the rider doesn't pedal. A bicycle in motion without a rider will crash.

In the same way, in order to be a complete idea, a sentence needs a verb (motion) and a subject (rider). For example:

My brother Jim chased his bike down the road.

subject → verb

A **fragment** is a sentence that's NOT a complete idea, missing either a verb or a subject.

Chased his bike down the road. Who chased the bike?

My brother Jim.

What did he do?

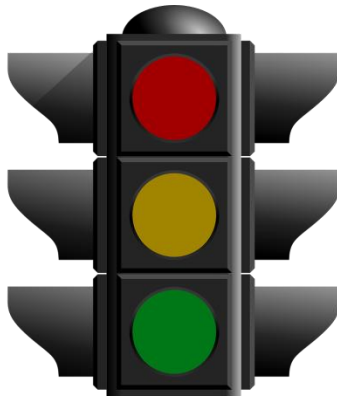
Some fragments might have a verb and subject, but begin with a **dependent marker word**.

As my brother Jim chased his bike down the road.

These dependent marker words include words like: *after, although, as, as if, because, before, even if, even though, if, in order to, since, though, unless, until, whatever, when, whenever, whether, and while.*

***If a sentence starts with one of these words, it needs a second half!**

Commas



Punctuation serves as the traffic signal in our writing, indicating when to go, slow, or stop. Think about the function of commas as a way to tell your reader when to pause for clarity, for emphasis, or for breath!

Commas are useful in the following situations:

1. To separate two **COMPLETE IDEAS** with a connecting word
2. To begin a sentence with **an introductory word or phrase**
3. To set off an **explanation**
4. To break up items in a **list**
5. To introduce and exit **quotations**

Separating Complete Ideas with a Connecting Word

A comma is necessary when a sentence has two or more phrases which are complete ideas. It must also include a connecting word such as: *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*.

*My brother Jim chased his bike down the road, **but** my cousin Brandon just laughed at him.*

If this sentence didn't include the connecting word (but), it would be a **run-on sentence**, even with the comma!

To Begin a Sentence with an Introductory Word or Phrase

If a sentence begins with an introductory word or phrase, put a comma after that word or phrase.

Introductory words could be things like: afterwards, however, furthermore, in other words, meanwhile, still.

They could also be adverbs (ending in -ly), like: quickly, handily, softly, deftly, suddenly, unfortunately.

The same goes for sentence that begins with a phrase that includes a dependent marker word, such as: *after, although, as, as if, because, before, even if, even though, if, in order to, since, though, unless, until, whatever, when, whenever, whether, and while*.

Nimbly, my brother Jim chased his bike down the road.

Meanwhile, my cousin Brandon laughed at him.

As we watched him run, the Wienermobile stopped at the intersection ahead.

To Set off an Explanatory Phrase

Use a comma on either side of a phrase appearing in the middle of the sentence which explains what came before.

My brother Jim, a former Olympic athlete, chased his bike down the road.

The Wienermobile, fresh from a child's birthday party, stopped at the intersection ahead.

To Break Up Items in a List

Commas will be used to break up items in a list. It's safest to use commas between all of the items, including the last one, though some people consider that last comma to be unnecessary.

My brother Jim, my cousin Brandon, and their friend Kenny chased their bikes down the road.

The Wienermobile was spewing exhaust, blasting mariachi music, and tilting slightly to the left.

To Introduce or Exit Quotations

Commas should be used just after a writer introduces a quotation with a word like "said," "wrote," "shouted," etc. In addition, they should be used at the end of a quotation, if the quote isn't a complete idea.

My cousin Brandon said, "oops," as Jim chased his bike down the road.

Comma Splices and Run-On Sentences



A comma splice or run-on sentence is two complete ideas jammed together with an incorrect comma (comma splice) or with no punctuation at all. Complete ideas need sufficient separation.

Tip: look out for a subject pronoun (I, we, he, she, they, it) in the middle of a sentence. This may indicate a comma splice or run-on sentence!

How to fix any comma splice or run-on sentence:

1. Break the idea with a period and start a new sentence
2. Add a comma (,) and a connecting word (for and nor but or yet so)
3. Use a semicolon (;) for closely connected ideas

Break the idea with a period and start a new sentence

Run-On Sentence: *My brother Jim chased his bike down the road we all laughed at him.*

Corrected: *My brother Jim chased his bike down the road. We all laughed at him.*

Add a comma (,) and a connecting word (for and nor but or yet so)

Comma Splice: *My cousin Brandon tried to help him catch the bike, he couldn't see the Wienermobile up around the corner.*

Corrected: *My cousin Brandon tried to help him catch the bike, but he couldn't see the Wienermobile up around the corner.*

Use a semicolon (;) for closely connected ideas

Run-On Sentence: *The Wienermobile hit the runaway bike pieces went flying everywhere.*

Corrected: *The Wienermobile hit the runaway bike; pieces went flying everywhere.*