

Sentence Boundary Errors

Sentence boundary errors consist of run-on sentences, comma splices, and sentence fragments.

Run-on Sentences

Contrary to popular belief, run-on sentences are not sentences that are simply too long. Run-on sentences are independent clauses that have been fused together with no punctuation. An independent clause is a word group that does or could stand alone as a sentence.

Here are some examples of run-on sentences:

I can think back to those good times when all that mattered was having fun I can also remember the times when I was so worried about my life that I had trouble sleeping.

I thought it was no big deal he had left before and always came back within the same week.

Nothing in life is set in stone it is always changing.

The following are corrected versions of the sentences above:

I can think back to those good times when all that mattered was having fun. I can also remember the times when I was so worried about my life that I had trouble sleeping.

I thought it was no big deal; he had left before and always came back within the same week.

Nothing in life is set in stone: it is always changing.

Comma Splices

Comma splices are two or more independent clauses joined by a comma without a coordinating conjunction.

Here are some examples of sentences containing comma splices:

They showed me my bunk, I unpacked my suitcase on the floor.

A string holds up the blimp to the roof, every night someone climbs all the way to the top of the building to untie and wrestle the blimp in.

In the mornings, we would have training periods and personal studies, in the afternoons, we would have book tables set up for donation and coffee corners for relaxed conversation.

The following are corrected versions of the sentences above:

After they showed me my bunk, I unpacked my suitcase on the floor.

A string holds up the blimp to the roof. Every night someone climbs all the way to the top of the building to untie and wrestle the blimp in.

In the mornings, we would have training periods and personal studies. In the afternoons, we would have book tables set up for donation and coffee corners for relaxed conversation.

To correct run-on sentences or comma splices, you have four choices:

- 1) Use a comma and a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, for, nor, so, yet).
- 2) Use a semicolon if the sentences are closely related (or, if appropriate, a colon or a dash).
- 3) Make the clauses into separate sentences.
- 4) Restructure the sentence, perhaps by subordinating one of the clauses (*After they showed me my bunk*).

Sentence fragments

Sentence fragments are incomplete sentences, typically dependent clauses. Dependent clauses cannot stand by themselves.

Below are examples of sentence fragments:

Which is another lost American dream.

Whether that means studying or partying.

Leaving me to take care of my two younger brothers.

Many times a sentence fragment may simply be attached to a nearby sentence. The sentences below are examples of this:

What about falling in love, having children, being married and growing old with someone for sixty-something years, which is another lost American dream?

These decisions vary from choosing one's friends to choosing how to spend one's free time, whether that means studying or partying.

My mother and father spent twenty-hour days at the hospital, leaving me to take care of my two younger brothers.

Another way to fix a fragment is to make it a complete sentence. See the example below:

To have your home taken away from you (fragment).

To have your home taken away from you can be a devastating blow.