A sentence is made up of words; a statement is made in words. . . . Statements are made, words or sentences are used.

—John Langshaw Austin, British philosopher (1911–1960)

LESSON SUMMARY
How do we distinguish between complete sentences and sentence fragments, run-ons, and comma splices? Read this chapter to find out.

Begin your study of complete sentences by looking at the Problem paragraph that appears on the next page. Underline the groups of words that form complete sentences. See if you can distinguish them from the fragments, run-ons, and comma splices included in the paragraph. Then check your work against the Solution paragraph, also on the next page, where the complete sentences are underlined.
AVOIDING FAULTY SENTENCES

Problem
Just the other day, I came home from work as excited as I had ever been. The night before, someone from Publisher's Clearinghouse had called. To tell me that I would be receiving a prize package worth potentially millions of dollars. I was so excited because, unlike other offers, this really sounded legitimate, it sounded to me as though I might really win something this time. I hastily opened the mailbox. Hoping to find the promised envelope. There it was. Between the Life magazine and the Fingerhut catalog. The promised letter. When I finally finished reading the entire mailing. I realized my chances were really no better with this contest than they had been for any other contest I had entered in the past and I was disappointed that I had spent so much time reading all of the material then I threw it all in the recycling basket and went to bed. Dejected.

Solution
Just the other day, I came home from work as excited as I had ever been. The night before, someone from Publisher's Clearinghouse had called. To tell me that I would be receiving a prize package worth potentially millions of dollars. I was so excited because, unlike other offers, this really sounded legitimate, it sounded to me as though I might really win something this time. I hastily opened the mailbox. Hoping to find the promised envelope. There it was. Between the Life magazine and the Fingerhut catalog. The promised letter. When I finally finished reading the entire mailing. I realized my chances were really no better with this contest than they had been for any other contest I had entered in the past and I was disappointed that I had spent so much time reading all of the material then I threw it all in the recycling basket and went to bed. Dejected.

Complete Sentences
A complete sentence is a group of words that meets all three of the following criteria:

1. It has a verb (a word or phrase that explains an action, such as want, run, take, give, or a state of being, such as am, is, are, was, were, be). Many sentences have more than one verb. The verbs in the following sentences are highlighted for you.

   Examples:
   - Bob and Alexandra both want a promotion.
   - Yurika drafted a memo and sent it to the sales department.
   - Herbert and Tan are the chief operators in this department.

2. It has a subject (someone or something that performs the action or serves as the main focus of the sentence). As with verbs, many sentences have more than one subject.

   Examples:
   - Bob and Alexandra both want a promotion.
   - Yurika drafted a memo and sent it to the sales department.
   - Herbert and Tan are the chief operators in this department.

3. It expresses a complete thought. In other words, the group of words has a completed meaning. Sometimes, a group of words has both a subject and a verb but still does not express a complete thought. Look at the following examples. The subjects and verbs are highlighted to make them easier to identify.
Complete sentences (also called independent clauses):

- I left an hour earlier than usual.
- Our team finished its year-end evaluation.
- Roger tried to explain his position.

Sentence fragments (also called dependent clauses):

- If I left an hour earlier than usual.
- When our team finished its year-end evaluation.
- Whenever Roger tried to explain his position.

These words can be used as subordinating conjunctions:

- after
- although
- as
- because
- before
- if
- once
- since
- than
- that
- though
- unless
- until
- when
- whenever
- wherever

Sentence Fragments

In the last set of examples, you may have noticed that each fragment is longer than the similar complete sentence. The groups of words are otherwise the same, except the fragments have an extra word at the beginning. These words are called subordinating conjunctions. If a group of words that would normally be a complete sentence is preceded by a subordinating conjunction, you need something more to complete the thought. These subordinate or dependent clauses need something more to complete their meaning; therefore, they depend on an independent clause, a group of words that by itself could form a complete sentence. Examine how the fragments have been rewritten here to express a complete thought.

If I left an hour earlier than usual, I would be able to avoid rush hour.

When our team finished its year-end evaluation, we all took the next day off.

Whenever Roger tried to explain his position, he misquoted the facts.

Sometimes, a subordinating conjunction is a phrase rather than a single word:

- as if we didn’t already know
- as though she had always lived in the town
- as long as they can still be heard
- as soon as I can finish my work
- even though you aren’t quite ready
- in order to proceed more carefully
- so that all of us understand exactly

Subordinate clauses are only one type of sentence fragment. Look at the questions in the table that follows. For each question, choose the group of words that forms a complete sentence and put the corresponding letter in the box to the right. See if you notice any similarities among the groups of words that are fragments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORD GROUP A</th>
<th>WORD GROUP B</th>
<th>?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. We are ready for the next task.</td>
<td>Washing the car.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Seeing the plane arrive.</td>
<td>Heather’s family rushed to the gate.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Broken after years of use.</td>
<td>The receptionist finally got a new phone.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. We saw Andrea sitting all by herself.</td>
<td>Imagining what Florida was like in March.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
AVOIDING FAULTY SENTENCES

The complete sentences are 1. A, 2. B, 3. B, and 4. A. The fragments are simply phrases. They do not contain a subject or a verb. If you combine the two sets of words, both will be part of a complete sentence. See how this is done in the following examples. With some of the sentences, all you need is a comma. With others, you must add extra words to incorporate the phrase into the rest of the sentence.

1. We are ready for the next task, which is washing the car.
2. Seeing the plane arrive, Heather's family rushed to the gate.

Now look at this table. In each set, one of the options is a complete sentence. The other is a fragment. Put the letter of the complete sentence in the box at the far right. See if you notice any similarities among the fragments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORD GROUP A</th>
<th>WORD GROUP B</th>
<th>?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. About the way he combs his hair.</td>
<td>I've noticed something very strange.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. My aunt is a respiratory therapist.</td>
<td>A person who helps people rebuild their lungs and circulatory system.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Benjamin saw a piece of key lime pie.</td>
<td>His favorite type of dessert.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. And tried to sell popcorn and candy.</td>
<td>We went door to door.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. During the rest of the afternoon.</td>
<td>Everything went smoothly.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Icy roads and hazardous weather.</td>
<td>We couldn't make the deadline.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. In the parking ramp near our building.</td>
<td>I was fortunate to find a parking spot.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. And saw the picture of our company's new owner.</td>
<td>We read the morning paper.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. We traveled through the desert all night.</td>
<td>Without seeing a single car or building.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. We walked all over downtown.</td>
<td>And applied for part-time jobs at theaters.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of the fragments are phrases that can easily be incorporated into a complete sentence using the independent clause with which they are paired. Try to do this yourself. Compare your sentences with the versions that follow.

Look at sentences 1, 5, 7, and 9. The fragments in these sentences were nothing more than phrases separated from the independent clauses. All you need to do is add the fragment to the complete sentence in a spot where it fits. No punctuation or additional words are needed.

1. I've noticed something very strange about the way he combs his hair.
   5. Everything went smoothly during the rest of the afternoon.
   7. I was fortunate to find a spot in the parking ramp near our building.
   9. We traveled through the desert all night without seeing a single car or building.

Now examine sentences 2 and 3. These fragments are phrases that explain or further identify something in the complete sentence. Such phrases are called *appositive* phrases. All you need to do is place a comma after the word being explained or identified, and then add the appositive phrase.

2. My aunt is a respiratory therapist, a person who helps people rebuild their lungs and respiratory system.
   3. Benjamin saw key lime pie, his favorite type of dessert.

Take a look at sentences 4, 8, and 10. In these sentences, the fragment is a verb (action) separated from the independent clause or the complete sentence. All that is required is to add the fragment to the sentence.

4. We went door to door and tried to sell popcorn and candy.
   8. We read the morning paper and saw the picture of our company's new owner.
   10. We walked all over downtown and applied for part-time jobs at theaters.

Finally, look at the remaining sentence, 6. In this sentence, extra words are needed to add the fragment to the sentence.

6. We couldn't make the deadline because of the icy roads and hazardous weather.
Run-On Sentences

An independent clause is a group of words that could be a complete sentence all by itself. A run-on sentence is one in which independent clauses have been run together without punctuation (a period, semicolon, or comma).

Examples:

Lynn moved from Minneapolis her job was transferred.
The concert seemed unending it lasted almost until midnight.
We got some gas then we headed off to Omaha.

All three examples can be corrected quite easily in one of three ways:

1. By adding a period and a capital letter.

Lynn moved from Minneapolis. Her job was transferred.
The concert seemed unending. It lasted almost until midnight.
We got some gas. Then we headed off to Omaha.

2. By adding a comma and a conjunction (and, but, or, for, nor, yet, so). Sometimes, you have to change the order of the words.

Lynn’s job was transferred, so she moved from Minneapolis.
The concert seemed unending, for it lasted almost until midnight.
We got some gas, and then we headed off to Omaha.

3. By turning one of the independent clauses into a dependent clause. To do this, you need to add a subordinating conjunction where it fits in the sentence. This can usually be done in two different ways: by rewording the clauses or by using different subordinating conjunctions. Remember the list of subordinating conjunction you saw earlier in this lesson?

Lynn moved from Minneapolis because her job was transferred.
When her job was transferred, Lynn moved from Minneapolis.
Since the concert lasted almost until midnight, it seemed unending.
The concert seemed unending because it lasted until almost midnight.
After we got some gas, we headed off to Omaha.
We headed off to Omaha after we got some gas.

Practice

Choose the complete sentence. Watch for fragments as well as run-ons. Answers are at the end of the lesson.

1. a. The puppy chewed on everything. And ruined my favorite shoes.
b. The puppy chewed on everything and ruined my favorite shoes.

2. a. Julie is a loyal friend. She helps whenever she is needed.
b. Julie is a loyal friend she helps whenever she is needed.

3. a. Paula bought a new car in February she picked it up only last week.
b. Paula bought a new car in February. She picked it up only last week.
4. a. Lisa lost five pounds. After only one week on the new diet.
   b. Lisa lost five pounds after only one week on the new diet.

5. a. You can register for the class in the office on the second floor.
   b. You can register for the class. In the office on the second floor.

6. a. Samantha needs a few more days to finish the report it is more involved than she anticipated.
   b. Samantha needs a few more days to finish the report. It is more involved than she anticipated.

7. a. My sister's new friend Lisa came for dinner. And she brought her mom's famous chocolate cream pie for dessert.
   b. My sister's new friend Lisa came for dinner, and she brought her mom's famous chocolate cream pie for dessert.

8. a. Tanya completed the form she gave it to the receptionist.
   b. Tanya completed the form, and she gave it to the receptionist.

9. a. Louis was eager to see the dentist his toothache was getting worse.
   b. Louis was eager to see the dentist. His toothache was getting worse.

10. a. Jenny looked for a bank that offered better interest rates.
    b. Jenny looked for a bank. Offered better interest rates.

Comma Splices

A comma splice is the last kind of sentence fault you will study today. It is actually a special type of run-on sentence in which a comma is used in place of a semicolon to join two independent clauses without a conjunction. A comma splice can be corrected by putting a semicolon in place of the comma or by adding a conjunction after the comma.

Wrong:
Henry lives across the street, he has been there for 25 years.
Correct:
Henry lives across the street; he has been there for 25 years.
Henry lives across the street, and he has been there for 25 years.

Wrong:
Mary heads the search committee, John is the recorder.
Correct:
Mary heads the search committee; John is the recorder.
Mary heads the search committee, and John is the recorder.

Wrong:
Sid gave demonstrations all summer long, he returned in the fall.
Correct:
Sid gave demonstrations all summer long; he returned in the fall.
Sid gave demonstrations all summer long, but he returned in the fall.
Avoiding Faulty Sentences

Practice

Here is an opportunity to apply what you have learned about complete sentences, fragments, run-ons, and comma splices. In each of the following numbered items, decide whether the group of words is a correctly written sentence or sentences (S), a fragment (F), a run-on sentence (ROS), or a comma splice (CS). Write the label next to each number, and then check your work against the answer key at the end of the lesson. You may recognize some of these sentences from the opening example paragraph. By now, you know how to correct the ones that were not complete sentences.

11. Dr. Anders left detailed care instructions for the patient. A personal friend of his.

12. The night before, someone from Publisher's Clearinghouse had called. To tell me that I would be receiving a prize package worth potentially millions of dollars.

13. I was so excited because unlike the other offers, this really sounded legitimate, it sounded to me as though I might really win something this time.

14. I hastily opened the mailbox. Hoping to find the promised envelope.

15. There it was. The promised letter.

16. Because I couldn't wait to open it to read its contents.

17. The officer responded to the call, he received it at 8:10 P.M.

18. Emily posted the last transaction it was time to close the books for the day.

19. Our new computer system is still not working properly.

20. Even though a computer repair man had looked at the system and deemed it in proper working order.

Rewrite the fragments, run-ons, and comma splices as complete sentences in the following space.