

Clauses, Fragments & Run-Ons

A study guide for building complete, correct sentences

GRADE 9
Study Guide

Use this guide whenever you're unsure whether a sentence is **complete**, **correct**, or **punctuated the right way**. Each topic explains the idea in plain language, shows examples, and gives you a quick way to check your own writing.

Learn It

The rule, in plain words

See It

Worked examples

Tip / Trick

Shortcuts to remember

Watch Out

Common mistakes

What's Inside

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The Big Picture — How These Ideas Fit Together

A Complete Sentence

is built from...

a **subject** (who/what)

a **predicate** (the verb half)

a **verb** that may act on a **direct object**

Sections 1, 2 & 6

is made of clauses...

independent — can stand alone

dependent — needs help

joined with **FANBOYS** or other connectors

Sections 3 & 5

can go wrong as...

fragment — too little

run-on — too much, badly joined

comma splice — a run-on with just a comma

Sections 4 & 5

1 What Makes a Complete Sentence

"Is this really a sentence?"

Big idea: A complete sentence needs **all 5 parts**. If even one is missing, it isn't complete.

LEARN IT • THE 5 PARTS

#	Part	What it does	Ask yourself...
1	Subject	Names who or what the sentence is about	Who or what?
2	Predicate	The verb half — tells what the subject does or is	What happens?
3	Capital letter	Marks the start of the sentence	Does it start with a capital?
4	End punctuation	Marks the end: period (.), question mark (?), or exclamation point (!)	Does it end correctly?
5	A complete thought	Makes sense by itself — nothing is left hanging	Would a reader say "... and?"

SEE IT • A SENTENCE, TAKEN APART

T	he hungry puppy	chewed my new shoe	.
CAPITAL	SUBJECT	PREDICATE	END MARK

Does it make sense on its own? **Yes** — we know who did what. ✓ **Complete thought**

SEE IT • COMPLETE VS. NOT COMPLETE

Example	What's missing?	Complete?
The bus arrived late.	Nothing — all 5 parts	✓
Did you finish your essay?	Nothing — questions count too	✓
Watch out!	Nothing — the subject is an understood (you)	✓
the bus arrived late.	Capital letter	✗
My sister plays the cello	End punctuation	✗
Ran across the field.	Subject (Who ran?)	✗
The students in the back row.	Predicate (What did they do?)	✗
Because the bus was late.	A complete thought (...then what?)	✗

TIP A group of words can have a subject *and* a verb and **still** not be complete. "*Because the bus was late*" has both (*bus / was*), but the word *because* leaves you waiting. That's what Section 3 is all about.

2 Subjects & Predicates

"Who did it, and what did they do?"

Big idea: Every sentence splits into two halves — the **subject** (who/what) and the **predicate** (the verb half).

LEARN IT

Subject

The noun or pronoun the sentence is **about**. The **complete subject** includes all the words that describe it.

Simple Subject

Just the **one key noun or pronoun** inside the complete subject — nothing else.

Predicate

The **verb half** of the sentence. It tells what the subject **does** or **is**, plus the words that go with the verb.

SEE IT • SPLITTING SENTENCES IN TWO

Blue = complete subject • (circled) = simple subject • Green = predicate

Complete Subject	Simple Subject	Predicate
The small (boy) with muddy boots	boy	jumped into the puddle.
Our school's (library)	library	opens at 7:30 every morning.
(She)	She	is the fastest runner on the team.
The (coach) of the soccer team	coach	blew her whistle.
Several hungry (students)	students	waited in the cafeteria line.

How to Find Them — 3 Steps

TRICK

- 1 **Find the verb first.** Look for the action or state-of-being word. *The coach of the soccer team blew her whistle.*
- 2 **Ask "Who or what ___?"** using that verb. *Who blew? → The coach of the soccer team = complete subject.*
- 3 **Strip away the describing words** to find the simple subject. Cross out *the* and *of the soccer team* → **coach**.

WATCH OUT • TRICKY SUBJECTS

Situation	Example	The subject is...
Prepositional phrase in the way	The box <i>of old photos</i> is heavy.	box — never a word inside "of..."
Commands	Close the door, please.	(you) — understood, not written
Questions	Did your brother call?	brother — flip it: "Your brother did call."
Starts with There / Here	There are three cats outside.	cats — "there" is never the subject
Compound subject	Maya and Leo built a robot.	Maya and Leo — two simple subjects

3 Independent & Dependent Clauses

"Can it stand alone?"

Big idea: A **clause** is a group of words with a subject *and* a verb. Some clauses can stand alone; some can't.

LEARN IT

Independent Clause

Conveys a **complete thought**. It can stand alone as its own sentence.

Think: an adult who can live on their own.

The team celebrated.

Dependent Clause (also called a subordinate clause)

Does **not** express a complete thought. It must be attached to an independent clause.

Think: a child who depends on a parent.

after they won the game...

SEE IT • CLAUSES WORKING TOGETHER

- ▶ After they won the game, **D** the team celebrated **I**.
- ▶ I stayed inside **I** because it was raining **D**.
- ▶ The book that you lent me **D** was amazing **I**. (a dependent clause can sit in the middle)
- ▶ Jordan smiled **I** when he saw his grade **D**.

Signal Words That Start Dependent Clauses

When a clause begins with one of these words, it usually becomes **dependent**. Learn to spot them!

Meaning	Subordinating conjunctions	Example
Time	after, before, when, whenever, while, until, since, as soon as	<i>until the movie starts</i>
Cause / reason	because, since, as	<i>because my phone died</i>
Condition	if, unless, once, as long as	<i>unless it snows</i>
Contrast	although, though, even though, whereas	<i>although the test was hard</i>
Describing a noun	relative pronouns: who, whom, whose, which, that	<i>the girl who won the race</i>

COMMA RULE

Dependent clause **FIRST** → use a comma.

When the bell rang, we left.

Dependent clause **SECOND** → usually no comma.

We left when the bell rang.

Bonus: 4 Sentence Types Built From Clauses

Type	Recipe	Example
Simple	1 independent	The dog barked.
Compound	2+ independent	The dog barked, and the cat ran.
Complex	1 independent + 1+ dependent	When the dog barked, the cat ran.
Compound-Complex	2+ independent + 1+ dependent	When the dog barked, the cat ran, and the bird flew away.

CHECK YOURSELF Independent (I) or dependent (D)?

- although it rained all day
- the game was canceled
- if you study tonight
- Maya finished her essay
- since our team won the title
- the library closes at eight

Answers: 1. D (although) • 2. I • 3. D (if) • 4. I • 5. D (since) • 6. I

4 Sentence Fragments

"Something's missing."

Big idea: A fragment is a **piece** of a sentence dressed up like a whole one.

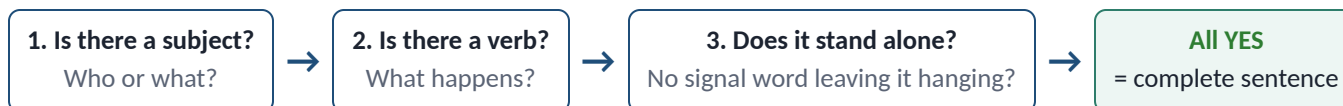
LEARN IT

A **fragment** is any group of words punctuated as a sentence (capital letter + end mark) that **fails to express a complete thought**. It's usually missing a subject, a predicate, or it's a dependent clause left on its own.

SEE IT • 4 COMMON TYPES & HOW TO FIX THEM

Type	Fragment	Fixed	How it was fixed
Missing a subject	✗ Laughed at the video.	✓ Carlos laughed at the video.	Added who
Missing a predicate	✗ The girl on the bus.	✓ The girl on the bus waved at me .	Added what she did
Dependent clause alone	✗ Because I overslept.	✓ I was late because I overslept.	Attached an independent clause
Phrase alone (no subject or verb)	✗ Such as pizza and tacos.	✓ I like fast food , such as pizza and tacos.	Joined it to the sentence before
-ing word with no helper	✗ Running down the hall.	✓ Maya was running down the hall.	Added a subject + helping verb

How to Spot a Fragment — The 3-Question Test



If the answer to **any** question is **no**, you have a fragment.

TRICK • READ IT OUT LOUD Say the words by themselves, as if you walked up to a friend and said only that. If your friend would respond "**Who did?**" or "**...and then what?**", it's a fragment.

"After we ate dinner." → "...and then what?" **Fragment** "Stop!" → makes sense (you) stop. **Sentence**

WATCH OUT

- **Length doesn't matter.** *"The old brick house on the corner with the bright red door and the tall oak tree."* is long — but still a fragment (no predicate).
- **Short can be complete.** *"I ran."* and *"Go!"* are complete sentences.
- **Fragments often follow the sentence they belong to.** *I love the beach. **Especially in July.*** → **I love the beach, especially in July.**

CHECK YOURSELF Sentence (S) or fragment (F)?

1. The cat slept on the windowsill.
2. After we ate dinner.
3. The book with the torn cover.
4. Nobody answered the phone.
5. Such as apples and grapes.
6. Tomorrow I will visit my aunt.

Answers: 1. S • 2. F (dependent clause) • 3. F (no predicate) • 4. S • 5. F (phrase) • 6. S

5 Run-On Sentences & FANBOYS

"Too much, not joined right."

Big idea: A run-on is the **opposite** of a fragment — two complete thoughts crammed together without the right "glue."

LEARN IT

A **run-on** is two independent clauses together in one sentence **without punctuation or a conjunction**.

Fused Sentence (no punctuation at all)

✗ I love soccer my brother loves basketball.

Comma Splice (only a comma)

✗ I love soccer, my brother loves basketball.

A comma alone is too weak to hold two independent clauses together.

SEE IT • 4 WAYS TO FIX A RUN-ON

#	Fix	Example	Best when...
1	Split it with a period	I love soccer. My brother loves basketball.	the ideas are separate
2	Add a comma + FANBOYS word	I love soccer, but my brother loves basketball.	you want to show how the ideas connect
3	Use a semicolon (;)	I love soccer; my brother loves basketball.	the ideas are closely related
4	Make one clause dependent	Although I love soccer, my brother loves basketball.	one idea is more important

FANBOYS — The 7 Coordinating Conjunctions

F A N B O Y S

These seven words can join two independent clauses. **Put a comma before them** when they do.

Letter	Word	Job	Example
F	for	gives a reason (= because)	She wore a coat, for it was freezing.
A	and	adds more information	Ben made the salad, and Lia set the table.
N	nor	adds a second "not"	He didn't call, nor did he text.
B	but	shows a contrast	The test was long, but it was easy.
O	or	shows a choice	We can walk, or we can take the bus.
Y	yet	shows a surprising contrast	He studied all night, yet he felt unprepared.
S	so	shows a result	It started to rain, so we went inside.

WATCH OUT · "HOWEVER" IS NOT FANBOYS

Words like *however*, *therefore*, *then*, and *also* can't join clauses with just a comma.

- ▶ ✗ I studied, however I failed.
- ▶ ✓ I studied; **however**, I failed.

WATCH OUT · NO COMMA NEEDED

If FANBOYS joins two **verbs** (not two clauses), skip the comma.

- ▶ ✓ Kayla studied hard **and** passed.
- ▶ ✓ Kayla studied hard, **and** she passed.

TRICK · THE COVER-UP TEST Cover the conjunction with your finger. If **both sides** could be complete sentences on their own, you're joining two independent clauses → use a comma before the FANBOYS word.

6 Transitive & Intransitive Verbs

"Does the action land on something?"

Big idea: Some verbs pass their action to an object (**transitive**). Others don't (**intransitive**).

LEARN IT**Transitive Verb**

A verb that **does** affect an object in the sentence. The action **transfers** to something or someone.

Maria **threw** the ball.

Intransitive Verb

A verb that does **not** affect an object. The action stops with the subject.

Maria **laughed**.

Direct Object

The noun or pronoun the verb **moves to or directly affects**. Only transitive verbs have one.

Maria threw the **ball**.

Memory hook: **trans-** means "across" (like *transfer*) — the action goes **across** to an object.

SEE IT · FOLLOWING THE ACTION

Maria

SUBJECT

threw

TRANSITIVE VERB



the ball.

DIRECT OBJECT

Maria

SUBJECT

laughed.

INTRANSITIVE VERB

✗ no object

The "What? / Whom?" Test

TRICK

- 1 Find the verb.
- 2 Ask: "[subject] [verb] what?" or "[verb] whom?"
- 3 Got an answer? That word is the **direct object**, and the verb is **transitive**. No answer? The verb is **intransitive**.

Sentence	Ask...	Answer	Verb type
Dad baked cookies.	baked <i>what</i> ?	cookies → direct object	Transitive
Dad called me after school.	called <i>whom</i> ?	me → direct object	Transitive
Priya ainted a colorful mural.	painted <i>what</i> ?	mural → direct object	Transitive
The baby slept for hours.	slept <i>what</i> ?	no answer — "for hours" tells <i>how long</i>	Intransitive
The sun rises in the east.	rises <i>what</i> ?	no answer — "in the east" tells <i>where</i>	Intransitive
The package arrived yesterday.	arrived <i>what</i> ?	no answer — "yesterday" tells <i>when</i>	Intransitive

WATCH OUT

- **Some verbs can be both** — it depends on the sentence. *Jada sings*. (intransitive) vs. *Jada sings the anthem*. (transitive). Same with *read*, *write*, *eat*, *play*, *run*.
- **Objects of prepositions don't count.** In "*We walked to the park*," *park* follows *to* — so it is **not** a direct object, and *walked* is intransitive.
- **Linking verbs** (*is*, *am*, *are*, *was*, *seem*, *become*) connect the subject to a description — they don't take a direct object. *She is a pilot*.

CHECK YOURSELF Transitive (T) or intransitive (I)? Name the direct object if there is one.

1. Ella kicked the ball.
2. The children laughed loudly.
3. We visited our grandparents.
4. The runners raced around the track.
5. Jamal read a mystery novel.
6. The puppy slept all afternoon.

Answers: 1. T (ball) • 2. I • 3. T (grandparents) • 4. I (track follows "around") • 5. T (novel) • 6. I

5 Parts of a Complete Sentence

1. Subject
2. Predicate
3. Capital letter
4. End punctuation (. ? !)
5. A complete thought

Subject & Predicate

- **Subject** = who/what the sentence is about
- **Simple subject** = just the key noun/pronoun
- **Predicate** = the verb half
- Find the verb → ask "Who/what ___?"

Clauses

- **Independent** = complete thought, stands alone
- **Dependent (subordinate)** = not complete, needs help
- Signal words: *because, although, when, if, since, after, before, while, unless, until, who, which, that*
- Dependent first → **comma**

Fragments

- Punctuated like a sentence, but **not a complete thought**
 - Test: Subject? Verb? Stands alone?
 - Fix: add what's missing, or attach it to a nearby sentence
- ✗ Because I overslept. ✓ I was late because I overslept.

Run-Ons

- Two independent clauses with **no punctuation or conjunction**
- **Comma splice** = joined with only a comma

4 fixes:

1. Period
2. Comma + FANBOYS
3. Semicolon
4. Make one clause dependent

FANBOYS

For — reason	But — contrast
And — adds	Or — choice
Nor — adds "not"	Yet — surprise contrast
So — result • Use a comma before when joining two clauses	

Verbs & Direct Objects

Transitive — acts on an object
Dad baked cookies.

Intransitive — no object
The baby slept.

Direct object — answers "verb what?" or "verb whom?"

Before You Turn It In — Quick Proofreading Checklist

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Every sentence has a subject and a verb. | ☐ No sentence starts with <i>because/when/if</i> and stops there. |
| ☐ Every sentence starts with a capital and ends with . ? or ! | ☐ No two complete thoughts are joined with only a comma. |
| ☐ Commas come before FANBOYS words that join two clauses. | ☐ A comma follows any dependent clause that starts a sentence. |

Clause — A group of words with a subject and a verb.

Comma splice — A run-on where two independent clauses are joined with only a comma.

Complete subject — The simple subject plus all the words that describe it.

Complete thought — An idea that makes sense on its own without needing more information.

Complex sentence — One independent clause plus at least one dependent clause.

Compound sentence — Two or more independent clauses joined correctly.

Coordinating conjunction — One of the seven FANBOYS words (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) that join equal parts.

Dependent clause — A clause that does not express a complete thought and cannot stand alone. Also called a **subordinate clause**.

Direct object — The noun or pronoun that receives the action of a transitive verb; answers "what?" or "whom?"

End punctuation — The mark that ends a sentence: period, question mark, or exclamation point.

FANBOYS — A memory trick for the seven coordinating conjunctions.

Fragment — A group of words punctuated as a sentence that fails to express a complete thought.

Fused sentence — A run-on with no punctuation between two independent clauses.

Independent clause — A clause that conveys a complete thought and can stand alone as a sentence.

Intransitive verb — A verb that does not act on an object.

Linking verb — A verb (is, seem, become) that connects the subject to a description instead of showing action.

Phrase — A group of related words that is missing a subject, a verb, or both.

Predicate — The verb half of the sentence; tells what the subject does or is.

Prepositional phrase — A phrase that starts with a preposition (in, on, at, of, to) — its noun is never the subject or direct object.

Relative pronoun — A word (who, whom, whose, which, that) that starts a dependent clause describing a noun.

Run-on sentence — Two independent clauses together in one sentence without correct punctuation or a conjunction.

Simple subject — The single key noun or pronoun the sentence is about.

Subject — The noun or pronoun that the sentence is about.

Subordinating conjunction — A word (because, although, when, if) that makes a clause dependent.

Transitive verb — A verb that acts on (affects) an object in the sentence.

Understood subject — The unwritten "you" in a command, like "(You) Close the door."