

What is a “Complete Sentence”?

What elements must a construction have for it to be a complete sentence? Answer: It must have a subject and a predicate.

An example of a simple, complete sentence is “She sleeps.” *She* is the subject; *sleeps* is the predicate. In this instance, the complete predicate is the verb *sleeps*. It can be the predicate all by itself because it is a type of verb called “intransitive,” meaning it doesn’t have to have an object following it.

The other type of verb is “transitive” Transitive verbs require another word, an “object.” For example, in “The boy wants a dog,” *wants* is a transitive verb, and it is part of the predicate. The complete predicate is *wants a dog* because *wants* requires an object, in this case *a dog*.

In addition to being complete sentences, each of the above examples—*She sleeps* and *The boy wants a dog*—are called “independent clauses.”

Sentence Fragments. Without both a subject and a complete predicate, a construction is a fragment: *John Lennon’s molar was sold at auction for thousands of dollars. **Which makes it one of the most famous teeth ever.*** The words in bold face are a sentence fragment; these words are a “subordinate clause,” and *subordinate* clauses are not *independent* clauses: They cannot stand alone.

Similarly, *Because she sleeps* is a subordinate clause. Such clauses are “subordinate” to the independent clause, i.e., the words that make up the complete sentence.

Run-On Sentences/Comma Splices. While sentence fragments *lack* essential elements, run-on sentences (or “fused” sentences) and sentences that contain “comma splices” have too much. They have two independent, stand-alone clauses that are just squished together—usually with a comma, creating a comma “splice”: *It is cold today, go put on a coat.* The writer usually has more than one way to “fix” a run-on sentence. For example, both the following are correct:

- *It is cold today. Go put on a coat.* (A period can separate the two stand-alone sentences.)
- *It is cold today; go put on a coat.* (A semicolon can separate the sentences because the ideas they express are closely related.)

Particularly troublesome are transitional phrases like *however, therefore, moreover, etc.* When these words fall in the middle of two independent, stand-alone sentences, treat them as shown above: Instead of *The company generated a profit, however, it declared bankruptcy*, write:

- *The company generated a profit. However, it declared bankruptcy.* OR
- *The company generated a profit; however, it declared bankruptcy.*