What is a sentence fragment?

A **sentence** is a unit of text that contains a **subject** (something performing action) and a **verb** (the action being performed) and expresses a complete thought. A **sentence fragment** occurs when your sentence either:

-Lacks a subject. **Example: Sitting on the porch.** (who or what is doing the "sitting"?)
-Lacks a verb. **Example: The cat on the porch.** (what was the cat doing?)
-Does not express a complete thought. **Example: Because the cat was sitting on the porch.** (what happened next?)

Most sentence fragments occur for the third reason: the sentence does not express a complete thought. This happens when you begin a sentence with a **subordinating word**. **Examples of subordinating words include: because, since, while, and although.** There are many more subordinating words; with experience, you will learn to detect them on your own.

When you begin a sentence with a subordinating word, you turn that sentence into a **subordinate clause**, also referred to as a **dependent clause**. Here are some more examples of dependent clauses:

Since I had studied hard.
While I was waiting for the bus.
Although I already ate dinner.

Read these out loud and you'll notice that these are all incomplete thoughts: they leave the reader wondering, "What comes next?" As you can see, dependent clauses cannot stand alone as sentences; as the name suggests, they *depend* on an **independent clause**. An independent clause is a unit of text that consists of a subject and a verb AND that expresses a complete thought. Here are some examples:

I passed the test.
My friend came walking by.
I was still hungry.

Notice how all of these contain a subject and a verb, AND they all express complete thoughts. As you can see, independent clauses are always complete sentences.

How do we join dependent clauses to independent clauses?

Now that you know you have a dependent clause, you need to find a way to join it to an independent clause. There are a couple of ways you can do this:

1. Put the dependent clause in front of an independent clause and place a comma between them. Examples:

   Since I had studied hard, I passed the test.
   While I was waiting for the bus, my friend came walking by.
   Although I already ate dinner, I was still hungry.

2. Put the dependent clause behind an independent clause. In this case, do not use a comma between them. Examples:

   I passed the test since I had studied hard.
   My friend came walking by while I was waiting for the bus.
   I was still hungry although I already ate dinner.

What is a run-on sentence?

A **run-on sentence** (sometimes called a **fused sentence**) occurs when you place two independent clauses next to each other without putting punctuation between them. Examples:

I studied hard I passed the test.
I was waiting for the bus my friend came walking by.
I already ate dinner I was still hungry.

Read these out loud and you may sense that we need some punctuation somewhere. Notice how each of these sentences actually consists of two separate independent clauses:

I studied hard | I passed the test
I was waiting for the bus | My friend came walking by
I already ate dinner | I was still hungry

Recall that all independent clauses are already complete sentences. Therefore, to fix these, we could simply place a period between them so that they stand alone as two separate sentences. However, we may wish to use other types of punctuation to join the independent clauses together into one single sentence.

How do we join two independent clauses?

In addition to simply making the clauses two separate sentences, you have several options for joining independent clauses:

1. Place a comma and a coordinating conjunction between them. The most common coordinating conjunctions are and, but, or, and so. Choose the conjunction that makes the most sense for your clauses. Examples:

    I studied hard, so I passed the test.
    I was waiting for the bus, and my friend came walking by.
    I already ate dinner, but I was still hungry.

    Note: Using only a comma to join two independent clauses is an error called a **comma splice**. Remember that you need BOTH the comma and the conjunction.

2. Place a semicolon between them. The semicolon provides "softer" punctuation than the period and is especially useful for demonstrating cause and effect (i.e., one clause came about as the result of the other clause). Examples:

    I studied hard; I passed the test.
    I was waiting for the bus; my friend came walking by.
    I already ate dinner; I was still hungry.

3. Use a **conjunctive adverb** to join them, in which case you precede the conjunctive adverb with a semicolon and follow it with a comma. Conjunctive adverbs are useful when you want the softer punctuation that the semicolon provides but want to make it more clear to your reader how the two clauses relate to each other. Examples:

    I studied hard; therefore, I passed the test.
    I was waiting for the bus; meanwhile, my friend came walking by.
    I already ate dinner; however, I was still hungry.