

Sentence Problems: Run-ons and Fragments

The exercises in Chapter Two are based on the Going for the Look module.

CHAPTER FOCUS:

Common Sentence Problems

This chapter focuses on two common sentence problems: sentences that run together and sentences that are incomplete. Both problems can be confusing for readers. All activities in this chapter are based on Steven Greenhouse’s “Going for the Look.”

Exercise 1: Guided composition

Teaching focus: The purpose of this guided composition activity is to elicit a paragraph on the topic of “Going for the Look” that contains simple, compound, and complex sentences. Using these paragraphs, you can informally diagnose your students’ ability to create complete sentences while avoiding run-ons and fragments. At the end of the unit, your students will edit their paragraphs, applying what they have learned from the chapter. The students will then compare their paragraphs with the original, paying particular attention to sentence boundaries.

Directions to the Teacher

1. Instruct your students to listen as you read the following paragraph at a normal rate of speed. Then ask your students to take notes while you read the paragraph again; emphasize that the notes will be essential when they write their paragraphs. Alternatively, write a series of key words or phrases on the board to guide the students.
2. Ask your students to reconstruct what they heard using their notes or the key words. The students should compare with each other what they have written and make changes as necessary.
3. Collect the paragraphs at the end of the activity and save them. You will return them to your students to edit at the end of the chapter.
4. Discuss the “Noticing Language” sentences.

Hiring a pretty and handsome sales force is a growing trend in American retailing. Stores want to hire workers to project an image. Some stores have been sued for discrimination. While it is not illegal to hire attractive people, it is illegal to discriminate based on age, sex, or ethnicity. Some stores take pride in hiring for diversity. Others seem to hire only blond, blue-eyed, and pretty clerks. They say that hiring trendy young people is simply smart business. Whether it is legal and the right thing to do is a different question.

Noticing Language

What is wrong with the following sentences? How do you know?

1. Hiring a pretty and handsome sales force.
2. Stores want to hire workers to project an image, some stores have been sued for discrimination.
3. Whether it is legal and the right thing to do.

2.1 Run-on Sentences

A sentence must have a main clause with a subject and a verb. It may have more than one main clause (a compound sentence) or a main clause and one or more subordinate clauses (a complex sentence). A run-on sentence occurs when two sentences (two main clauses) are punctuated as though they form a single sentence. There are two types of run-on sentences:

- Two sentences that are joined with *no punctuation*
- Two sentences that are joined with *only a comma*

Both of these situations produce an error: a “run-on sentence.” The following sentences are examples of run-on sentences.

Hiring attractive people isn't illegal discriminating is.

(Two sentences are joined together without any punctuation between them.)

Hiring attractive people isn't illegal, discriminating is.

(Two sentences are joined together with only a comma between them.)

Correcting Run-On Sentences

1. Make a **separate sentence** out of each main clause:
Hiring attractive people isn't illegal. Discriminating is.
2. Combine the clauses with a **comma and a coordinating conjunction**. This method is useful when you have two ideas of equal importance and you want to show the relationship between them:

Hiring attractive people isn't illegal, but discriminating is.

Coordinating conjunctions are *and, for, yet, but, so, or, and nor*.

3. Make one clause a **subordinate clause**. This is an effective way to solve the problem if one of the clauses is less important than the other.

Although hiring attractive people isn't illegal, discriminating is.

Common subordinating words are *because, since, when, whenever, even though, although, though, if, unless, while, before, where, as . . . as, who, which that, whose, and whom*.

4. Combine the clauses with a **semicolon (;)**. This method is effective when the two clauses are very closely related and you don't want to break them up with another word. Be careful to use semicolons only when the ideas are closely related; don't use them simply as an alternative to periods.

Hiring attractive people isn't illegal; discriminating is.

5. Combine the clauses with a **semicolon and a transition word followed by a comma**. This method is also useful when you have two equally important ideas, and you want to show their logical relationship.

Hiring attractive people isn't illegal; however, discriminating is.

Common transition words are *therefore, thus, however, nevertheless, furthermore, consequently, and then*.

(See Chapter Six, Chart 6.3A, for a more complete list of words that connect ideas.)

Exercise 2: Correcting run-on sentences

Directions: Fix the following run-on sentences using the methods outlined above. Choose the most appropriate method to fix each error.

- We have the best-looking college kids working in our store, everyone will want to shop there.
Because we have the best-looking college kids working in our store, everyone will want to shop there.
 - Company officials have an aggressive approach to building their sales force they proudly acknowledge that they hire for looks.
 - Many companies have taken the approach to sophisticated new heights they hire workers to project an image.
 - We want to appeal to college students we concentrate our hiring on certain colleges, fraternities, and sororities.
 - A few managers have objected to hiring inexperienced workers they have been forced to quit.
 - Brand representatives are ambassadors to the brand consumers see them and want to buy the clothes they are wearing.
 - The main focus needs to be on hiring someone who can get the job done projecting an image should not be the focus.
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Correcting Run-On Sentences with Pronoun Subjects

Sometimes run-on sentences occur because the writer does not recognize that pronouns, especially the personal pronoun *it*, and demonstrative pronouns (such as *that*, *these*, and *those*) can be the subjects of sentences.

Incorrect:

Lawsuits have been filed about Abercrombie and Fitch's hiring practices, these may cross over the line and discriminate against minority applicants.

(This sentence is a run-on because the second clause is also a main clause. Its subject is the pronoun *these*, which refers to *practices* in the first clause.)

Correct:

Lawsuits have been filed about Abercrombie and Fitch's hiring practices; these may cross over the line and discriminate against minority applicants.

(Join the two main clauses with a semicolon.)

Lawsuits have been filed about Abercrombie and Fitch's hiring practices because these may cross over the line and discriminate against minority applicants.

(Join them with *because* since the lawsuits are the result of the practices.)

Lawsuits have been filed about Abercrombie and Fitch's hiring practices. These may cross over the line and discriminate against minority applicants.

(Punctuate as separate sentences.)

Exercise 3: Correcting run-on sentences with pronoun subjects

Directions: Underline any pronoun that is a subject in these sentences. Then correct the following run-on sentences using a different option for each sentence.

1. Elizabeth Nil has been offered jobs at Abercrombie's three times, that's what happens because she looks like an Abercrombie model.

Elizabeth Nil has been offered jobs at Abercrombie's three times. That's what happens because she looks like an Abercrombie model.

2. Abercrombie's approach to hiring is aggressive, it's a growing trend in retailing.
3. Companies are openly seeking workers who are good-looking, they are the ones who can best promote the store's clothing.
4. The companies have been skirting the edges of antidiscrimination laws these prohibit discriminating based on race, national origin, gender, age, and disability.
5. Abercrombie's denies that it discriminates, it simply concentrates on hiring at certain colleges, fraternities, and sororities.

2.2 Student Writing

Exercise 4: Editing run-on sentences in student writing

This exercise is based on a student essay on “Going for the Look.”

Directions: Edit by adding punctuation and capital letters or connecting words where needed.

Today’s society, especially in the fashion sector, is driven by trends, what’s in style today can be fashion suicide by next week. Everyone is concerned with being part of the “in-crowd,” being hip, and being accepted. In high schools throughout the nation, you can walk around and see the groups of kids, all dressed alike and even acting the same way then if you look hard enough, you will notice that each of these groups has a leader that the rest can rely on to tell them what is cool, what clothes and styles are in, and what is socially acceptable.

If a person sees a good-looking, confident store attendant, the customer will want to emulate them today’s store managers are insisting on hiring good-looking employees. It has become necessary in today’s market to represent your product as socially acceptable and even capable of raising the customer up a rung on the social ladder, the evidence shows that this works Abercrombie and Fitch, who pride themselves on hiring sales representatives who are fashionable and good-looking, is now one of the leading retailers in the nation.

2.3 Correcting Sentence Fragments

Every sentence must have a *subject* and a *verb* and express a *complete thought*. A sentence that lacks a subject or a verb or does not express a complete thought is a *fragment*.

Common types of fragments

Example

Subordinate clause fragments

Because they want to project an image.

-ing fragments

Hiring pretty and handsome sales associates.

Added detail fragments

Which can lead to discrimination.

Missing subject fragments

In retail sales, can serve as a brand ambassador.

Subordinate Clause Fragments

A clause that begins with a *subordinating word* such as **when, because, although, while,** or **if** cannot stand on its own as a sentence. It must be attached to a main clause so it is part of a complete sentence.

Incorrect: Even though hiring attractive people is not illegal. Discrimination is.

(“Even though” is a subordinating phrase that introduces a subordinate clause. The subordinate clause forms a fragment unless it is joined to a main clause.)

Correct: Even though hiring attractive people is not illegal, discrimination is.

Punctuation note: If the subordinate clause comes at the beginning of the sentence, use a comma before the main part of the sentence. You do not usually need to use a comma if the subordinate clause comes after the main clause.

Exercise 5: Correcting subordinate clause fragments

Directions: Underline the subordinate clauses in each selection. Then correct the fragments by attaching them to the appropriate sentence. Use correct punctuation and capitals.

1. Although the company says it does not discriminate. Some of its Hispanic, Asian, and black job applicants maintained otherwise. They said they were not allowed to work on the sales floor.
Although the company says it does not discriminate, some of its Hispanic, Asian, and black job applicants maintained otherwise.
2. Legal issues are involved. Businesses run the risk of discriminating. When they start hiring based on looks or gender. They need to focus instead on hiring people who can get the job done.
3. But some people think that companies should be able to hire to promote their image. If customers see an attractive person wearing the store's brand. They want to buy it too.
4. Stores are businesses. When it comes to making a profit. Stores have to think about the bottom line.

Correcting *-ing* and *to* Fragments

When an *-ing word* or a *to* phrase appears at or near the start of a word group, a fragment may result. To correct these fragments, you can sometimes add the fragment to a complete sentence.

Incorrect: Hiring people who can be “brand enhancers.” That is necessary and smart.
 (“Hiring” is a noun formed from the verb “hire.” It is a subject and needs to be connected to the sentence that follows, which provides the verb “is.” Eliminate “that” because it refers to “hiring.”)

Correct: Hiring people who can be “brand enhancers” is necessary and smart.

Incorrect: The human resources manager spent two weeks. Trying to find the best person for the job.

(“Trying” is a verbal adjective formed from the verb “try.” It needs to be joined to the sentence that comes before since it completes the verb “spent.”)

Correct: The human resources manager spent two weeks trying to find the best person for the job.

Incorrect: Restaurants sometimes adopt a young, trendy look. To attract customers.

(*To attract* is an infinitive. It must be connected to a sentence with a subject and verb.)

Correct: Restaurants sometimes adopt a young, trendy look to attract customers.

Exercise 6: Correcting *-ing* and *to* fragments

Directions: Underline the fragments in the following items. Rewrite the sentences to eliminate any fragments.

1. Wanting to increase sales, store managers were told. To recruit people with pretty faces.

Wanting to increase sales, store managers were told to recruit people with pretty faces.

or

Store managers, wanting to increase sales, were told to recruit people with pretty faces.

2. Having the best-looking college kids working in the store. That would make everyone want to shop there.
3. To try to sell more merchandise. Stores require attractive sales associates to project their brand with energy and enthusiasm.
4. Experts say there is a growing trend. To hire workers who are sexy, sleek, or simply good-looking.
5. Hiring for looks. That has caused some companies to end up facing lawsuits.
6. Hiring for looks is necessary and smart. At least according to retailers.

Correcting Added Information Fragments

Added information fragments lack a subject and a verb. They usually add a detail to the preceding sentence and often begin with one of the following words.

- such as
- including
- except
- for example
- especially

You can correct an added detail fragment by attaching the fragment to the complete sentence preceding or following it.

Incorrect: The company uses an aggressive approach. For example, recruiting attractive customers as they shop.

Correct: The company uses an aggressive approach; for example, recruiting attractive customers as they shop.

You can embed the fragment in the preceding sentence, changing words as necessary.

Incorrect: They recruited employees based on looks, not on retail experience. Including some of the most popular stores.

Correct: Stores, including some of the most popular ones, recruited employees based on looks, not on retail experience.

You can add a subject, a verb, or both to the fragment to make it a complete sentence.

Incorrect: Image seemed very much in evidence at Water Tower Place. One of Chicago’s most upscale malls, attracting a trendy crowd.

Correct: Image seemed very much in evidence at Water Tower Place. It is one of Chicago’s most upscale malls and attracts a trendy crowd.

Sometimes a subordinate clause with a subject and verb follows a noun that is part of the added information. A fragment is still the result.

Incorrect: The company uses an aggressive approach. An effort that officials proudly acknowledge.

(The added information is not part of a main clause. It needs to be joined to the preceding sentence.)

Correct: The company uses an aggressive approach, an effort that officials proudly acknowledge.

Punctuation note: If the added information follows the main clause, you will usually need to use a comma at the end of the main clause.

Exercise 7: Correcting added information fragments

Directions: Underline the fragment in each of the following items. Use one of the techniques described above to eliminate the fragments. (You should be able to use one of each.)

1. Some chain stores have been accused of discriminating. By race, by age, and by gender. The accusations have provoked a wave of lawsuits.
 2. Some stores have hired employees to project their image. Especially high-end retailers. They believe they need to hire for looks in order to be competitive.
 3. Some businesses have gone too far. For example, a hotel chain that ordered managers to hire trendier workers.
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Correcting Missing Subject Fragments

In this type of fragment, the sentence is missing a subject. To correct the fragment, you can attach the fragment to the preceding sentence (if the verb goes with the subject of the preceding sentence).

Incorrect: The director denied discriminating. But admitted that the company liked to hire people who “looked great.”

Correct: The director denied discriminating but admitted that the company liked to hire people who “looked great.”

You can add a subject to the fragment.

Correct: The director denied discriminating, but he admitted that the company liked to hire people who “looked great.”

Exercise 8: Correcting missing subject fragments

Directions: Underline the fragment in each of the following items. Use one of the techniques described above to make complete sentences. (You should be able to use both.)

1. Employees who don't fit “the look” have been assigned to back rooms. However, are asserting their rights and filing lawsuits.
2. Some young men say that they like to go to stores that hire good-looking gals. And see nothing wrong with hiring for looks.
3. Stores have to change their hiring practices. And focus on competence instead of appearance.

2.4 Student Writing

Exercise 9: Correcting run-ons and fragments in student writing

This exercise is based on a student essay on “Going for the Look.”

Directions: Underline the fragments and correct the run-on sentences and fragments in the following student writing. If you wish to rewrite an entire sentence, put an asterisk at the beginning of the sentence and then rewrite it at the end of the selection.

Hiring for looks is a very sad trend in society, in today's world more than any other time before, sex is pushed on youth. It is nearly impossible to watch a movie or listen to a song. Without seeing or hearing some reference to sex. Casual sex is portrayed as ok, appearing sexy is portrayed as necessary. This focus on sexiness has led people to be very superficial. Too many people base their first impression, and often their entire opinion of a person. On how they look. Few people have the drive anymore. To get to know a person's personality and the depths of their mind before making a judgment.

This superficiality ties back to hiring policy people see a sexy person in a store. And automatically make the assumption that they are perfect. Then, because these beautiful people work in the store. Customers leap to the conclusion that its products must be the reason for their perfection. We need to erase this “fact of life.” If we decide that it isn't necessary to look perfect to be accepted, then stores won't have to hire based on looks to make sales. The change begins with us, we need to care about the real person inside. Not simply the skin-deep outer shell.

Exercise 10: Editing your guided composition

Directions to the Teacher

1. Use an overhead projector or computer to project the original guided composition paragraph and ask your students to read along as you read it out loud.
2. Then project a student paragraph and discuss with the class the differences between the original and the student paragraph (both paragraphs need to be projected simultaneously).
3. Return the student paragraphs and ask your students to edit based on what they've learned by doing the exercises in the chapter. Don't give them access to the original while they are doing this. Direct them to make sure their sentences are complete and correctly punctuated.
4. Ask your students to compare their edited versions with the original.
5. "Debrief" by asking your students what they learned through the comparison and what they can apply to their own writing.

Exercise 11: Editing your own writing

Directions: Choose a paragraph from your essay about "Going for the Look." Underline the fragments and correct the fragments and run-on sentences.

- Put a question mark in the margin next to any sentences that you are unsure about.
- Exchange your paragraph with a partner and discuss the errors. Check with your teacher if you can't agree on an answer.
- Now edit the rest of your essay for sentence run-ons and fragments.

Answer Key

Noticing Language

1. This isn't a complete sentence. We want to know something about hiring a pretty and handsome sales force.
2. This is really two sentences. It expresses two complete ideas and has two subjects and two verbs ("stores want" and "stores have been sued"). It either needs to be punctuated as two sentences with a period after "image," or the two ideas need to be connected (for example, with the word "but").
3. This isn't a complete sentence. The main part of the sentence is missing. Even though it has a subject ("it") and a verb ("is"), it doesn't express a complete idea.

Exercise 2: Correcting run-on sentences

(Possible responses)

1. *Because we have the best-looking college kids working in our store, everyone will want to shop there.*
2. *Company officials have an aggressive approach to building their sales force, and they proudly acknowledge that they hire for looks.*
3. *Many companies have taken the approach to sophisticated new heights when they hire workers to project an image.*
4. *We want to appeal to college students, therefore, we concentrate our hiring at certain colleges, fraternities, and sororities.*
5. *A few managers have objected to hiring inexperienced workers, however, they have been forced to quit.*
6. *Brand representatives are ambassadors to the brand, consumers see them and want to buy the clothes they are wearing.*
7. *The main focus needs to be on hiring someone who can get the job done. Projecting an image should not be the focus.*

Exercise 3: Correcting run-on sentences with pronoun subjects

1. *Elizabeth Nil has been offered jobs at Abercrombie's three times. That's what happens because she looks like an Abercrombie model.*
2. *Abercrombie's approach to hiring is aggressive, and it's a growing trend in retailing.*

3. Companies are openly seeking workers who are good-looking since they are the ones who can best promote the store's clothing.

(The comma should be deleted since the subordinate clause follows the main clause.)

4. The companies have been skirting the edges of antidiscrimination laws, which prohibit discriminating based on race, national origin, gender, age, and disability.
5. Abercrombie's denies that it discriminates; it simply concentrates on hiring at certain colleges, fraternities, and sororities.

Exercise 4: Identifying run-on sentences in student writing

Today's society, especially in the fashion sector, is driven by trends. What's in style today can be fashion suicide by next week. Everyone is concerned with being part of the "in-crowd," being hip, and being accepted. In high schools throughout the nation, you can walk around and see the groups of kids, all dressed alike and even acting the same way. Then, if you look hard enough, you will notice that each of these groups has a leader that the rest can rely on to tell them what is cool, what clothes and styles are in, and what is socially acceptable.

If a person sees a good-looking, confident store attendant, the customer will want to emulate them; therefore, today's store managers are insisting on hiring good-looking employees. It has become necessary in today's market to represent your product as socially acceptable and even capable of raising the customer up a rung on the social ladder. The evidence shows that this works. Abercrombie and Fitch, who pride themselves on hiring sales representatives who are fashionable and good-looking, is now one of the leading retailers in the nation.

Exercise 5: Subordinate clause fragments

1. Although the company says it does not discriminate, some of its Hispanic, Asian, and black job applicants maintained otherwise. They said they were not allowed to work on the sales floor.
2. Legal issues are involved. Businesses run the risk of discriminating when they start hiring based on looks or gender. They need to focus instead on hiring people who can get the job done.

(There is no comma because the subordinate clause follows the main clause.)

3. But some people think that companies should be able to hire to promote their image. If customers see an attractive person wearing the store's brand, they want to buy it too.

(A sentence can begin with a coordinating word such as “but” in all but very formal writing. Beginning a sentence with a coordinating word never creates a fragment.)

4. Stores are businesses when it comes to making a profit. Stores have to think about the bottom line.

(There is no comma because the subordinate clause follows the main clause. Note the use of the indefinite “it” in the idiom “when it comes to [something].” This phrase means “with respect to [something].”)

or

Stores are businesses. When it comes to making a profit, stores have to think about the bottom line.

Exercise 6: *-ing* and *to* fragments

1. Wanting to increase sales, store managers were told to recruit people with a pretty face.
2. Having the best-looking college kids working in the store would make everyone want to shop there.
3. To try to sell more merchandise, stores require attractive sales associates to project their brand with energy and enthusiasm.
4. Experts say there is a growing trend to hire workers who are sexy, sleek, or simply good-looking.
5. Hiring for looks has caused some companies to end up facing lawsuits.
6. At least according to retailers, hiring for looks is necessary and smart.

Exercise 7: Correcting added detail fragments

1. Some chain stores have been accused of discriminating by race, by age, and by gender. The accusations have provoked a wave of lawsuits.

(Attach the fragment. We simply connected the fragment to the sentence that preceded it.)

2. Some stores, especially high-end retailers, have hired employees to project their image. They believe they need to hire for looks in order to be competitive.

(Embed the fragment. The fragment has to be inserted next to the word that it modifies to avoid a dangling modifier.)

3. *Some businesses have gone too far. For example, a hotel chain ordered managers to hire trendier workers.*

(Make a new sentence. In this case, we could make a new sentence by removing the subordinate word “that”.)

Exercise 8: Correcting missing subject fragments

- Employees who don't fit “the look” have been assigned to back rooms; however, they are asserting their rights and filing lawsuits.*
- Some young men say that they like to go to stores that hire good-looking gals. They see nothing wrong with hiring for looks.*
- Stores have to change their hiring practices and focus on competence instead of appearance.*

Exercise 9: Correcting run-ons and fragments in student writing

Hiring for looks is a very sad trend in society. (In) today's world more than any other time before, sex is pushed on youth. It is nearly impossible to watch a movie or listen to a (song without) seeing or hearing some reference to sex. Casual sex is portrayed as ok; (appearing sexy is portrayed as necessary. This focus on sexiness has led people to be very superficial. Too many people base their first impression, and often their entire opinion of a (person, on) how they look. Few people have the drive (anymore to) get to know a person's personality and the depths of their mind before making a judgment.

This superficiality ties back to hiring policy (because) people see a sexy person in a (store and) automatically make the assumption that they are perfect. Then, because these beautiful people work in the (store, customers) leap to the conclusion that its products must be the reason for their perfection. We need to erase this “fact of life.” If we decide that it isn't necessary to look perfect to be accepted, then stores won't have to hire based on looks to make sales. The change begins with (us. We) need to care about the real person (inside, not) simply the skin-deep outer shell.