Combining Sentences: Correct Punctuation of Phrases and Clauses

Sentence boundary problems—run-on sentences, fragments, and comma splices—are some of the most prevalent and most serious grammatical problems affecting student writing. These errors often occur in conjunction with unresolved composition problems. Failing to make appropriate connections between ideas, for instance, can lead to sentence fragments as well as a choppy style. Similarly, making “lazy” connections (overusing “and” or “but,” using conjunctive adverbs like “however” without regard to their meaning) can lead to run-ons or comma splices while also obscuring the logical connections between your ideas.

Different readers may assume different connections, or none at all, between these three sentences about my grandfather.

- My grandfather is 80 years old.
- He weighs nearly 300 pounds.
- He plays tennis every Saturday.

By combining these sentences in different grammatical forms, the writer can specify the exact logical connections as well as create a more meaningful and sophisticated style. For instance, the writer could emphasize one fact over the others by subordinating the other ideas in a subordinate (or dependent) clause.

- Although my grandfather is 80 years old and weighs nearly 300 pounds, he plays tennis every Saturday. (emphasizes grandpa’s surprising athleticism)
- Even though my grandfather is 80 years old and plays tennis every Saturday, he still weighs nearly 300 pounds. (emphasizes grandpa’s obesity in spite of his advanced age and high activity level)

The writer may also choose to use two independent clauses, joining them with either a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) or a conjunctive adverb.

- My 80-year-old grandfather weighs nearly 300 pounds, but he still plays tennis every Saturday. (coordinating conjunction “but”—along with a comma—joins two independent clauses)
- My 80-year-old grandfather weighs nearly 300 pounds; nevertheless, he still plays tennis every Saturday. (conjunctive adverb “nevertheless”—along with semi-colon and comma—shows relationship between two independent clauses)

Another option would be to create a relative clause (introduced by a relative pronoun like who, that, or which).

- My grandfather, who is 80 years old and weighs nearly 300 pounds, plays tennis every Saturday.
- My grandfather, who plays tennis every Saturday, is 80 years old and weighs nearly 300 pounds. (Notice how the emphasis is changed, depending on which pieces of information are put into the relative clause)

Or you could try opening with a participial phrase:

- Weighing nearly 300 pounds, my 80-year-old grandfather plays tennis every Saturday.

The combinations are almost endless; explore the choices and see what you can say!