



Fragments

To be grammatically complete, a sentence must have a subject, verb, and present a complete thought. A **sentence fragment** is *part* of a sentence presented as if it were a *complete* sentence. Fragments are considered grammatically unacceptable because they only present a "fragment" of a thought, thus confusing the reader and making communication ineffective. There are two major types of sentence fragments: **Phrase Fragments** and **Dependent Clause Fragments**.

Phrase Fragments: This type of fragment lacks a subject (person, place, or thing), a verb (action/state of being), or both. This error often occurs when the fragment is actually an extension of a previous or following sentence.

Strategy: Begin by considering what the fragment lacks and how its ideas relate to those in the sentences before and after it. Then either connect the fragment to one of its surrounding sentences, or add the missing subject or verb.

Solution 1: **Connect the fragment to a surrounding sentence if the fragment is an extension of that idea.**

Note: A sentence must contain at least one independent clause (complete sentence) to be complete. That is, you must connect the fragment to a complete sentence to correct the fragment.

Fragment: George skips lunch every day. To go swimming. *"To go swimming" is a fragment because it does not have a subject or a true verb.*

Revised: George skips lunch every day to go swimming.

Solution 2: **Add the missing subject or verb to the sentence.**

Fragment: Also needs a family counselor. (Missing Subject) *Who or What needs a family counselor?*

Revised: *The Johnson family* also needs a family counselor.

Fragment: The new policy of health care coverage on the basis of hours worked each week. (Missing verb) *What does the new policy do?*

Revised: The new policy *provides* health care coverage on the basis of hours worked each week.

Be careful! *Verbs in the —ing form (running, throwing, etc.) and the infinitive form (to run, to throw, etc.) can never act alone as the verb in a sentence. They require a helping verb to make the verb complete. Without the helping verb, your sentence will be considered a fragment.*

Fragment: The car speeding down the road.

Revised: The car *was* speeding down the road

Dependent Clause Fragments: A dependent clause (also known as a subordinate clause) is a word group that has a subject and a verb but can't stand alone as a sentence because it begins with a subordinating word (look at the list of common subordinators on the back of this handout). If a dependent clause is punctuated as a sentence, it is a fragment because it does not express a complete thought.

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Fragment: When the cat ran under the car. *This dependent clause is a fragment because the word "when" makes the statement unable to stand on its own.*

Revised: The cat ran under the car. *or* When the cat ran under the car, it got squashed.

Strategy: This type of fragment can easily be identified because it will feel like something has been left out—you'll find yourself wanting more information. For example, readers of the above fragment will find themselves asking "What happened when the cat ran under the car?" There are two basic ways to correct this type of fragment.

Solution 1: **Join the dependent clause to an independent clause (complete sentence) before or after it.** As in the case below, this type of fragment often occurs when the dependent clause is actually an extension of the previous or following sentence.

Fragment: Anna likes to dance in ballet productions. Because she likes the attention it brings her. *"Because she likes the attention it brings her" is a fragment because it is a dependent clause. It needs to be joined to an independent clause to be part of a complete sentence.*

Revised: Anna likes to dance in ballet productions because she likes the attention it brings her.

Solution 2: **Remove the dependent word.** Because dependent clauses have subjects and verbs, the dependent word is often the only thing keeping the sentence from conveying a complete thought.

Fragment: Anna likes to dance in ballet productions. *Because* she likes the attention it brings her.

Revised: Anna likes to dance in ballet productions. She likes the attention it brings her.

The Exception: Commands and some requests might look like fragments, but they're not. In these statements, the subject "You" may not be written, but it is implied.

Example: Sit down! = (You) sit down!

Subordinating words

after	even though	that	whenever	who
although	ever since	though	whereas	whom
as	how	unless	wherever	whose
as if	if	until	whether	why
because	since	what	which	where
before	so that	whatever	whichever	
even if	than	when	while	

Key Terms

Dependent or Subordinate Clause: A word group that contains a subject, a verb, and begins with a subordinating word. It does not present a complete thought. Instead, it ***depends*** on being joined with an independent clause to be complete.

Independent clause: A word group that contains a subject, a verb, and presents a complete thought.

*This handout was adapted with permission from a similar one used by Columbia College's Academic Achievement Center.

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