

## Sentence Fragments

To be a complete sentence, a group of words must contain a subject and a verb. It must also express a complete thought—in other words, it must make sense by itself. A **fragment** is *less than a sentence* because it lacks a subject, lacks a verb, or does not express a complete thought.

This chapter describes the most common types of fragments: dependent-word fragments, *-ing* and *to* fragments, added-detail fragments, and missing-subject fragments.

### Dependent-Word Fragments

Although dependent-word fragments contain a subject and a verb, they do not express a complete thought. To complete the thought, they depend on another statement, usually one that comes after the fragment. For instance, below is a word group that starts with the dependent word *because*. The incomplete thought it expresses is completed in the statement that follows it.

Because there was a mosquito in the room. I could not fall asleep.

The dependent-word group is a fragment because it does not express a complete thought. It leaves the reader expecting something more. The writer must follow through in the same sentence and tell what happened because there was a mosquito in the room. In the sentence below, the writer has corrected the fragment by completing the thought in one sentence:

Because there was a mosquito in the room, I could not fall asleep.

Here is a list of some common dependent words:

Dependent Words				
after	even if	since	until	wherever
although	even though	so that	what	whether
as	how	that	when	which
because	if	though	whenever	while
before	in order that	unless	where	who

Whenever you begin a statement with a dependent word, make sure that you complete your thought. Look

at the following examples:

Although we had eaten a full meal. We still ordered dessert. The rum cake was irresistible.  
Some people are victims of migraine headaches. That force them to lie motionless in bed for many hours.

The word groups that begin with the dependent words *although* and *that* are fragments. Neither word group expresses a complete thought. The reader wants to know *what happened* although a full meal had been eaten and *what forces* people to lie motionless in bed for many hours.

A common way to correct a dependent-word fragment is to connect it to the sentence that comes before or after it. For example,

Although we had eaten a full meal, we still ordered dessert. The rum cake was irresistible. Some people are victims of migraine headaches that force them to lie motionless in bed for many hours. Medications do not offer much relief.

**Punctuation note** Put a comma at the end of a dependent-word group that starts a sentence. (See the first example above.)

### Practice 1

The dependent-word fragment is underlined in each of the following. Then it is corrected on the lines provided. **Corrections may vary.**

1. When the hometown baseball team won the World Series. Two million people showed up at the victory parade.  
When the hometown baseball team won the World Series, two million people showed up at the victory parade.
2. Because smoke detectors are so important to a family's safety. Their batteries should be checked often.  
Because smoke detectors are so important to a family's safety, their batteries should be checked often.
3. After the children washed the family car. They had a water fight with the wet sponges.  
After the children washed the family car, they had a water fight with the wet sponges.
4. Please hang up the damp towel. That you just threw on the floor.  
Please hang up the damp towel that you just threw on the floor.

### -Ing And To Fragments

When *-ing* or *to* appears at or near the beginning of a word group, a fragment may result. Consider example:

Cliff sat by the telephone for hours. Hoping that Lisa would call.

The first statement is a complete sentence. However, the second word group is not a complete thought, so it cannot stand on its own as a sentence.

Consider the following example as well:

To balance their checkbooks without making mistakes. Many people use pocket calculators.

The second statement is a complete sentence. But the first word group lacks a subject and verb *and* fails to express a complete thought.

There are two ways to correct *-ing* and *to* fragments:

- a Connect an *-ing* or a *to* fragment to the sentence it explains.

Cliff sat by the telephone for **hours**, **hoping** that Lisa would call.

To balance their checkbooks without making **mistakes**, **many** people use pocket calculators.

- b Create a complete sentence by adding a subject and a verb to the fragment. To do so, revise the material as necessary.

Cliff sat by the telephone for hours. **He hoped** that Lisa would call.

Many people use pocket calculators. **They want** to balance their checkbooks without making mistakes.

## Practice 2

The *-ing* or *to* fragment is underlined in each of the following. Then it is corrected in the lines provided, using one of the two methods given above. **Corrections may vary.**

1. Police officers stood near the corner. Directing people around the accident.  
Police officers stood near the corner. They were directing people around the accident.
2. The magician ran a sword through the box. To prove no one was hiding inside.  
The magician ran a sword through the box to prove no one was hiding inside.
3. Sitting quietly on the couch. The dog didn't look as if he'd eaten my sandwich.  
Sitting quietly on the couch, the dog didn't look as if he'd eaten my sandwich.
4. The restaurant has introduced a new vegetarian menu. To attract diners who prefer not to eat meat.  
The restaurant has introduced a new vegetarian menu. Its purpose is to attract diners who prefer not to eat meat.

## Added-Detail Fragments

Another common kind of fragment often begins with one of the following words: *like*, *including*, *especially*, *also*, *for example*, *for instance*, *except*, *without*, or *such as*.

Almost everyone loves ice cream. Especially vanilla.

Many college students experience a great deal of stress. For instance, about money, grades, and personal relationships.

In the above examples, the second word group lacks both a subject and a verb.

There are two ways to correct an added-detail fragment:

- a Simply add the fragment to the sentence it explains. In most cases, use a comma to set off the fragment from the rest of the sentence.
- Almost everyone loves **ice cream**, **especially** vanilla.

- b** Create a new sentence by adding a subject and verb to the fragment.  
Many college students experience a great deal of stress. For instance, **they worry** about money, grades, and personal relationships.

### Practice 3

The added-detail fragment is underlined in each of the following. Then it is corrected on the lines provided, using one of the two methods given above.

1. Television censors watch out for material that viewers might find offensive. Such as sexual or racial jokes.  
Television censors watch out for material that viewers might find offensive, such as sexual or racial jokes.
2. The children's toys were everywhere. Except in the toy chest.  
The children's toys were everywhere except in the toy chest.
3. All applicants at the company must take a skills assessment test. Also a personality profile test.  
All applicants at the company must take a skills assessment test. They must also take a personality profile test.
4. The film class saw every Dustin Hoffman film. Including his first one, The Graduate.  
The film class saw every Dustin Hoffman film, including his first one, The Graduate.

### Missing-Subject Fragments

Some word groups are fragments because, while they do have a verb, they lack a subject. Here are examples:

The telephone caller kept asking questions. But did not identify herself.  
The children dug a large hole in the grass. And then tried to fill it with water.

There are two ways to correct a missing-subject fragment:

- a** Connect the miss-subject fragment to the sentence it follows.  
The telephone caller kept asking **questions but** did not identify herself.  
The children dug a large hole in the **grass and** then tried to fill it with water.
- b** Create a new sentence by adding a subject to the fragment. Normally, you will add a pronoun standing for the subject of the previous sentence.  
The telephone caller kept asking questions. **She** did not identify herself.  
The children dug a large hole in the grass. Then **they** tried to fill it with water.

### Practice 4

The missing-subject fragment is underlined in each of the following items. Then they are corrected on the lines below, using one of the two methods given above.

1. Our instructor seems strict. But is actually friendly and helpful.  
Our instructor seems strict, but is actually friendly and helpful.
2. A mouse's face popped out of a hole near the sink. Then disappeared quickly.  
A mouse's face popped out of a hole near the sink. Then it disappeared quickly.
3. The nurse brought the patient an extra pillow and a glass of water. But forgot his pain medication.  
The nurse brought the patient an extra pillow and a glass of water. But she forgot his pain medication.
4. The pot of coffee sat on the burner for hours. And became too strong and bitter to drink.  
The pot of coffee sat on the burner for hours and became too strong and bitter to drink.

**Note** Not all word groups beginning with *and*, *but*, *so*, or another joining word are fragments. A sentence beginning with a joining word is grammatically complete—and correct—if both a subject and a verb follow the joining word.