

SENTENCE FRAGMENTS

A **sentence** is a group of words that contain a subject and a verb and make a complete thought.

A **fragment** is an incomplete sentence. A fragment is a word group that is missing one or more of the criteria necessary for a sentence. It may be missing a subject, a verb, a complete thought, or any combination. Any word group punctuated like sentence but lacking a main clause is a sentence fragment.

Examples of fragments:

1. *To his dismay.*

This word group is a prepositional phrase. The word group is missing a subject, a verb, and a complete thought.

2. *Although doing so was against his better judgment.*

This word group is an adverb clause. Even though this word group contains a subject and a verb, it is missing a complete thought.

The most common types of fragments that people write are the following:

- I. Dependent-word fragments
- II. *Ing* and *to* fragments
- III. Added-detail fragments
- IV. Missing-subject fragments

I. DEPENDENT-WORD FRAGMENTS

Dependent-word fragments are dependent, or subordinate (adjective, adverb, and noun) clauses.

Dependent clauses cannot stand alone as sentences; dependent clauses need to be attached to independent clauses.

Error: *After I learned the price of new cars.* I decided to keep my old station wagon.
(adverb clause telling when)

Correction: After I learned the price of new cars, I decided to keep my old station wagon.

Error: My daughter refused to stop smoking. *Unless I quit also.* (adverb clause telling under what condition)

Correction: My daughter refused to stop smoking unless I quit also.

Error: Bill asked for a loan. *Which he promised to pay back in two weeks.* (adjective clause describing what kind of loan)

Correction: Bill asked for a loan which he promised to pay back in two weeks.

Error: He wanted to know. *Who was going out with her.* (noun clause functioning as the object of to know)

Correction: He wanted to know who was going out with her.

EXERCISE

Turn each dependent-word group into a sentence by adding a complete thought.

EX: Although I arrived to class late.

Although I arrived to class late, I still did well on the test.

1. The little boy who plays with our daughter.

2. If I lend you twenty dollars.

3. The car that we bought.

4. Since I was tired.

5. Before the teacher entered the room.

II.-ING AND TO --- FRAGMENTS

Word groups that begin with *-ing* or *to* are phrases and, by themselves, are missing subject and verbs. These fragments are usually participial, gerund, infinitive, and prepositional phrases.

Error: I plan to work overtime. To get this job finished. (infinitive phrase functioning as an adverb telling why)

Correction: I plan to work overtime to get this job finished.

Error: Sweating under his heavy load. Brian staggered up the stairs to his apartment. (participial phrase functioning as an adjective describing Brian)

Correction: Sweating under his heavy load, Brian staggered up the stairs to his apartment.

EXERCISE

Underline the fragment and attach it to the independent clause.

1. Jack bundled up and went outside on the bitterly cold day. To saw wood for his fireplace.

2. Looking tired and drawn. The little girl's parents sat in the waiting room.

3. Sighing with disgust. Jill switched on her television set.

4. Janet knew that the television picture would be snowy and crackling with static. The house being in a weak reception area.

5. Jabbing the ice with a screwdriver. Bill attempted to speed up the defrosting process in his freezer.

III. ADDED-DETAIL FRAGMENTS

Added-detail fragments lack a subject and a verb. They often begin with one of the following words or phrases: *also, especially, except, for example, including,* and *such as*.

Error: I love to cook and eat Italian food. Especially spaghetti and lasagna.

Correction: I love to cook and eat Italian food, especially spaghetti and lasagna.

Error: The class often starts late. For example, yesterday at quarter after nine.

Correction: The class often starts late; for example, yesterday the class started at a quarter after nine instead of nine sharp.

Error: He failed a number of courses before he earned his degree. Among them, Freshman Composition I, General Psychology, and General Biology.

Correction: He failed a number of courses before he earned his degree. Among the courses that he failed were Freshman Composition I, General Psychology, and General Biology.

EXERCISE

Underline the fragment in each of the selections below. Then, using the method described in parentheses, revise the fragment into a sentence.

1. Nina is trying hard for a promotion. For example, through night classes and a Dale Carnegie course. She is also working overtime for no pay. (Correct the fragment by adding the subject and verbs she is taking.)

2. I could feel Bill's anger building. Like a land mine ready to explode. I was silent because I didn't want to be the one to set it off. (Add the fragment to the preceding sentence.)

3. We went on vacation without several essential items. Among other things, our sneakers and sweat jackets. (Correct the fragment by adding the subject and verb we forgot.)

IV. MISSING-SUBJECT FRAGMENTS

Students write missing-subject fragments because they think the subject in one sentence will apply to the next word group as well. However, the subject, as well as the verb, must be in each word group to make it a sentence.

Error: The truck skidded on the rain-slick highway. But missed a telephone pole on the side of the road.

Correction: The truck skidded on the rain-slick highway but missed a telephone pole on the side of the road.

Error: Michelle ate the many appetizers on the table. And then found that, when the dinner arrived, her appetite had gone.

Correction: Michelle ate the many appetizers on the table. She then found that, when the dinner arrived, her appetite had gone.

EXERCISE

Underline the missing-subject fragment in each section. Then revise to turn the fragment into a sentence by either adding the fragment to the sentence containing the needed subject or by adding the subject to the fragment itself.

1. I tried on an old suit hanging in our basement closet. And discovered, to my surprise, that it was too tight to button.

2. When Mary had a sore throat, friends told her to gargle with salt water. Or suck on an ice cube. The worst advice she got was to avoid swallowing.

3. One of my grade-school teachers embarrassed us with her sarcasm. Also, seated us in rows from the brightest student to the dumbest. I can imagine the pain the student in the last seat must have felt.
