

## Sentence Skills: *Fragments*

In order to be considered a complete sentence, every sentence must contain a **subject** and a **verb**, and must also express a **complete thought**. A group of words that is missing any of these three components is considered a **fragment**. Once you are able to recognize what specific kinds of fragments you write, you will be able to eliminate them from your writing. The most common types of fragments are:

1. Dependent-word fragments
2. *-ing* and *to* fragments
3. Added-detail fragments
4. Missing-subject fragments

### Dependent-Word Fragments:

Phrases and clauses that begin with a *dependent* word are fragments. (*Note: Dependent words are subordinating conjunctions. Many professors will refer to them by this name instead of calling them conjunctions.*) Below is a list of some commonly used dependent words:

after	if, even if	when, whenever
although, though	in order that	where, wherever
as	since	whether
because	that, so that	which, whichever
before	unless	while
even though	until	who, whoever
how	what, whatever	whose

Whenever you decide to start a sentence with any of these dependent words, you must be careful that a fragment is not formed as a result. The word group that begins with the dependent word *After* in the example below is considered a fragment because it does not express a complete thought.

*After I learned the price of new laptops, I decided to keep my old laptop.*

A *dependent statement*—one that begins with a dependent word—cannot stand on its own. It depends on another statement in order to for it to be a complete thought. *After I learned the price of new laptops* is a dependent statement. The reader expects to find out—in the same sentence—what actually *happened after* the writer learned the price of new laptops. The writer must follow through and complete the thought in order to avoid forming a fragment.

To correct a dependent-word fragment, students can attach it to an independent clause, or simply eliminate the dependent word. For example, *After I learned the price of new laptops* can be attached to the independent clause *I decided to keep my old laptop*. Additionally, dependent-word fragments can be corrected by eliminating the dependent word. In our example, *After* is the dependent word. The sentence still makes sense without it: *I learned the price of new laptops*.

Use a comma if the dependent-word group comes at the beginning of the sentence: *After I learned the price of new laptops, I decided to keep my old laptop*. However, commas are generally unnecessary if the dependent-word group comes at the end of the sentence: *I decided to keep my old laptop after I learned the price of new laptops*.

### **-ing and to Fragments:**

Fragments may also result when an *-ing* word appears at or near the start of a word group. These fragments are often missing a subject and/or part of the verb. Note, an *-ing* word can function as a subject (ex: *Swimming is fun*) or as part of a verb (ex: *Look, Mom! I am swimming!*). In order to correct *-ing* fragments, you must first determine what the sentence is missing (subject/verb/complete idea) and what the function of the *-ing* word is in the fragment. Often, these types of fragments can be fixed by attaching the *-ing* fragment to the sentence that comes before or after it, depending upon which makes more sense. An example of an *-ing* fragment would be: *I spent almost two hours on hold when I called the hospital yesterday. Trying to find an answer to my urgent question*. A way to make this sentence grammatically correct could be to move the second part of the word group (the fragment beginning with *Trying*) to the beginning of the word group and connect it with a comma at the end. Thus, the word group becomes the complete sentence: *Trying to find an answer to my urgent question, I spent almost two hours on hold when I called the hospital*.

When *to* appears at or near the beginning of a word group, a fragment often results. For example, the word group *I plan on working overtime. To get this job finished. Otherwise, my boss may get angry with me* is grammatically incorrect, because the middle portion (*To get this job finished*) is an incomplete thought, or fragment. In order to eliminate this fragment, students can add the fragment to the preceding sentence, rewording it as *I plan on working overtime to get this job finished*.

### **Added-Detail Fragments:**

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

To correct these added-detail fragments, attach the fragmented portion of the word group to the complete thought that comes before it. *I love to cook and eat Mexican food. Especially pozole. I make everything by hand* contains the fragment *Especially pozole*, which lacks a verb and complete thought. Attaching the fragment to the first sentence corrects this issue, changing the sentence to *I love to cook and eat Mexican food, especially pozole*.

Adding a subject and a verb to a fragment can also make it a complete sentence. Instead of saying *The class often starts late. For example, yesterday at a quarter past eleven instead of at eleven sharp*, we could eliminate the fragmented portion and say: *The class often starts late. For example, yesterday it began at a quarter past eleven instead of at eleven sharp*.

### **Missing-Subject Fragments:**

Missing-subject fragments are exactly what their name implies: they are fragments in which the subject is missing. People often write missing-subject fragments because they assume that the subject in one sentence will automatically apply to the group of words as well. However, it is important to stress that the subject, as well as the verb, must be in *each* word group in order to make it a complete sentence.

An example of a missed-subject fragment is the following word group: *The vehicle skidded on the oil-slicked highway. But missed a fire hydrant on the side of the road*. The second part of the word group is considered a fragment, as the reader does not know what the subject is that missed a fire hydrant on the side of the road.

In order to eliminate the fragment, the student can attach the fragment to the preceding sentence. The example above would then read *The vehicle skidded on the oil-slicked highway but missed a fire hydrant on the side of the road*. Another way to eliminate the fragment in examples of missing-subject fragments is to add a subject. *Nina sampled each of the appetizers on the table. And then found that, when dinner was served, her appetite had disappeared* lacks a subject in the fragment that begins with *And*. To correct this, the student can simply add a subject: *She then found that, when dinner was served, her appetite had disappeared*.

### **How to Check for Fragments:**

- Read the paper aloud from the *last* sentence to the *first* sentence. Reading it this way will make it easier to see and hear whether each word group you read is a complete thought or a fragment.

- Remember that a **complete sentence** must contain a subject, verb, and a complete thought. Even if a sentence is short, it can still be a complete thought, or *independent clause*, if it contains a subject and verb that express a complete thought. If it is not a complete sentence, meaning that it is not able to “stand on its own,” chances are that the word group is a fragment. Fragments are incomplete sentences.
- If you are wondering whether a group of words is a fragment, ask yourself if it contains a subject, a verb, and expresses a complete thought. If it lacks any of the aforementioned, it might be a fragment.
- Be on the lookout for the four most common fragments detailed above: **dependent-word fragments** (begin with words such as *after, since, when, because, and before*); **-ing or to fragments** (-ing or to near the start of a word group); **added-detail fragments** (begin with words such as *also, especially, such as* and *for example*); and **missing-subject fragments** (verb is present but there is no subject)