



Figure 1 The Writing Center and Academic Resource Center logo

FRAGMENTS I

Fragments are a common mistake that many writers make at some point in their writing. Fortunately, they are easily fixed by following a few basic rules. This handout will show some of the ways that fragments can be avoided.

A *sentence* must have both a *subject* and a *predicate*. The *subject* is what the sentence is about, generally who or what performs the action. The *predicate* is the rest of the sentence, which must contain a *verb* (or action) that is performed by the subject.

For example:
John bakes on Sundays.

In this case, 'John' is the subject and 'bake on Sundays' is the predicate. John performs the action, which is baking. This is a complete sentence.

**A sentence always stands by itself.
A fragment never stands by itself.**

What is a fragment?

A *fragment* occurs when a sentence lacks a *subject*, *predicate*, or *both*. A fragment does not stand alone because one of the components of the sentence is missing. *Simple fragments* are the easiest to find during revision. *Simple fragments* usually lack an obvious subject, verb, or both. *Complex fragments* are not so easily found because they mimic sentences very closely. *Complex fragments* can come from subordinate clauses, verbal phrases, appositives, compound predicates, unconnected lists, and expressions that introduce an example. For more information on complex fragments, please see the Fragments II handout.

Simple Fragments

Below are some examples of simple fragments and how to correct them.

- *Example of a missing subject:*

Ate his ice cream too quickly.

Who ate his ice cream too quickly? This fragment can be fixed by adding a *subject*.

Joe ate his ice cream too quickly.

- *Example of a missing predicate:*

The man riding his bicycle.

What did the man riding his bicycle do? This fragment can be fixed by making riding the main verb or by adding a verb.

The man *is* riding his bicycle.

The man riding his bicycle *is* late for work.

- *Example of a missing subject and predicate:*

In the kitchen.

Who was in the kitchen? *What* was done in the kitchen? “In the kitchen” is a prepositional phrase that lacks a subject and a verb. This fragment can be fixed by adding a subject and a verb or by using “in the kitchen” as an *introductory phrase* to make a complete sentence

Sally was in the kitchen.

Bob made cookies in the kitchen.

In the kitchen there are milk and cookies.

Use the following self-test to see if your sentences have fragments.

- *Is there a verb?*

If yes, go on to the next question. If no, you have a fragment!

- *Is there a subject?*

If yes, go on to the next question. If no, you have a fragment!

Exercise:

For the following exercises try to first determine whether or not the following sentences are complete. If not, revise the sentences so that they are complete.

1. The school won the science contest.
2. Harder and harder.
3. Seems a very strange thing to do.
4. The brown and white spotted dog.
5. "Once upon a time," which is the way all good fairy tales begin, a ten-foot-tall dragon.
6. Through the open window, I.
7. Tumbled over and over after falling down the steep cliff.
8. Ilia, the main character in the newly-released and award-winning film.
9. Ran the last play and therefore won the Bowl game.

(Roth 329-30)

This handout is based on the following texts:

Roth, Audrey J. The Elements of Basic Writing with Readings. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1994. 326-330.

Hacker, Diana and Wanda Van Goor. Bedford Basics: A Workbook for Writers. Boston: Saint Martin's, 1994. 137-140.

All of the above texts are available in The Writing Center.

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