



Figure 1 The Writing Center and Academic Resource Center logo

## FRAGMENTS II

Simple fragments can usually be easily fixed once a writer learns to check each sentence for a subject and a verb. But, there are other types of fragments that are a little tougher to identify and correct because they follow a different set of rules than simple fragments. This handout will help to answer some of the questions and provide solutions for helping to avoid complex fragments.

Can you find a complex fragment by asking the question, “Does this sentence have a subject and a verb?”

The answer is: **MAYBE!** In a simple sentence, this rule is usually true, but when you have a more complex sentence, this rule may not help you find a fragment.

### Common Causes of Complex Fragments

- A group of words with a subject and an –ing verb can still be a fragment.

Fragment: *Some of the athlete’s running in the Olympics.*

Complete Sentence: *Some of the athlete’s are running in the Olympics.*

The above fragment *has* a subject and a verb, but it’s still a fragment. **Whenever a sentence has an –ing verb, it must also have a helping verb** (was, is, are, were, etc.).

- A group of words that contains a complete sentence, but begins with a subordinator can be a fragment.

Fragment: *Although we were going to dinner for Bill’s birthday.*

Complete Sentence: *Although we were going to dinner for Bill's birthday, we were still going to have another party for him on the weekend.*

In this case, "although" is a subordinator, or a word that makes an independent clause

into a dependent clause. When a subordinator is used, the dependent clause must be

used in conjunction with a comma and an independent clause to make a complete

sentence. **Some popular subordinators are: when, until, after, before,**

**however,**

**while, because, since, though, if, so that, so, and where.**

- A group of words that contains a complete sentence, but begins with a coordinating conjunction can be a fragment.

Fragment: *So the dog ran away with the spoon.*

Complete Sentence: *The farmer ate all the bones, so the dog ran away with the spoon.*

Coordinating conjunctions act like subordinators. Since the sentence begins with a coordinating conjunction, this group of words becomes a dependent clause. To turn this clause into a sentence, the writer could add an independent clause and a comma before the coordinating conjunction. See the **Coordinating Conjunctions** handout for more information on them.

- A group of words that contains a complete sentence, but begins with a relative pronoun (that, who, whose, whom, which, when, etc.) can be a fragment.

Fragment: *That he should have been told first.*

Complete Sentence: *Everyone agreed that he should have been told first.*

In this example, the use of a **relative pronoun** at the beginning makes this phrase a dependent clause. In order to make this a complete sentence, the writer can either remove the word “That” or add information before it to clear up the meaning.

The above examples are some of the most common causes of complex fragments, but there are certainly other reasons that a sentence might end up being a fragment:

### More Causes of Complex Fragments

<b>Verbal phrases</b> may be fragments:	
<b>Participial phrases</b> (when verb phrases act as adjectives)	<i>Fragment: Jumping as high as he could</i>  <i>Complete Sentence: The boy, jumping as high as he could, grabbed the ball.</i>
<b>Gerund Phrases</b> (when –ing verb phrases act as a subject or object)	<i>Fragment: Rolling in the grass</i>  <i>Complete Sentence: Rolling in the grass made him itch.</i>
<b>Infinitive Phrases</b> (verb phrases contain “to” and another verb acting as a noun, adjective, or adverb)	<i>Fragment: To be or not to be</i>  <i>Complete Sentence: To be or not to be is the question.</i>

There are *still more* common causes of fragments that you can look for in your writing. Phrases that help writers create complex sentences can be also be causes of complex fragments, if they aren’t used correctly.

### Still More Causes of Fragments

<b>Parenthetical Phrases, or Appositives</b> may be fragments	These are phrases used to add supplemental information and usually interrupt the flow of a sentence.	<i>Fragment: Tom, a doctor</i>  <i>Complete Sentence: Tom, a doctor, is very tall.</i>
<b>Unconnected lists</b> are fragments	What information does your list belong to?	<i>Fragment: Onions, tomato, and garlic</i>

		<i>Complete Sentence: Tomato sauce has three main ingredients: onions, tomato, and garlic.</i>
<b>Expressions that introduce an example</b> may be fragments.	Such as, for example, as in, like, etc.	<i>Fragment: For example, a fish.</i>  <i>Complete Sentence: There are many good pets, for example, a fish.</i>
<b>Prepositional Phrases</b> may be fragments.	See the <b>Prepositions</b> handout for more information about prepositional phrases.	<i>Fragment: At the park.</i>  <i>Complete Sentence: There was a game at the park.</i>

### **Exceptions to the Rule**

Everybody knows that any good rule has to have a couple of exceptions. Rules that govern fragments are no different. People use fragments all the time when they speak.

Can you imagine having to speak in complete sentences every time you had a conversation, especially when you could answer a question in just a word or two?

Probably not.

But, when we write, there are rules that we have follow so that our writing makes sense. Of course, there are exceptions to this rule, too. So, every writer wants to know, **“When can I use fragments and get away with them?”**

These are some common places where fragments are allowed in writing, even though it’s still important to make sure that what you write will make sense to anyone who is going to read it:

- **Imperatives** – When a writer gives a command, the subject is usually implied, and therefore, a sentence without a subject can be considered complete.  
*Ex: Throw me the ball.* (The implied subject is “You.”)
- **Creative Writing** – Author’s use fragments all the time for emphasis or to imitate speech. When you’re writing a story, fragments can be a great tool, once you know how to use them correctly.

- **Advertising** – Fragments are used in advertising for the same reasons as when they're used in creative writing.
- **Informal Situations** – When you're writing a letter to a friend, or a journal entry, or any other type of informal exercises, usually it's acceptable to use fragments in your writing.

Finally, a writer should be able to check for fragments in their own writing. But how?

One way to evaluate your writing is to read it slowly and carefully. Ask yourself, "If I made this statement to a stranger, would the statement make sense on it's own?" If no, then you might have a fragment.

Another great way to check for fragments is to see if you can turn the statement into a yes/no question.

Sentence	Yes/No Question	Fragment?
John, the pastor at my church.	Did John, the pastor at my church?	This question doesn't make sense, so we have a <b>fragment</b> .
John, the pastor at my church, makes great barbeque ribs.	Does John, the pastor at my church, make great barbeque ribs?	This is a question we can answer. It's <b>not a fragment</b> .

### Exercises:

**For the following exercises, try first to determine whether or not the following sentences are complete. If not, revise the sentences so that they are complete. If the exercises begin as complex sentences, try and fix them so that they remain so.**

1. Geraldine, the runner in the green jumpsuit jogging the track.
2. However, the meeting still went well, according to the head of the company.
3. Which is the first thing that he thought of when he built the castle, he thought.
4. So, I called my other friend to ask him the same question.

5. Riding a horse is the most fun activity that anyone can do in his or her spare time.
6. To drive from New York to Los Angeles, and to go to a Dodger game, and to sit in the outfield seats.
7. Such as you could only see at the original IceCapades.
8. Rudy, a twelve-year-old girl, loved playing football and beating up her brothers.
9. A rubber ducky, two pieces of string, twenty-four paper clips, a monkey wrench, and your mother's blessing.
10. Around four o'clock, and close to the school they used to go to when they were kids.

**This handout is based on the following websites:**

- "Common Causes of Sentence Fragments." St. Cloud State University: Literacy Education Online. 02 Feb. 2005. <<http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/punct/fragmentcauses.html>>.
- "Fragments." Big Dog's Grammar. 02 Feb. 2005. <<http://aliscot.com/bigdog/fragments.htm>>.
- "The Grammar Outlaw." Acadia University English Department. 02 Feb. 2005. <<http://ace.acadiau.ca/english/grammar/fragment.htm>>.
- "Sentence Fragments." Capital Community College. 02 Feb. 2001. <<http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/fragments.htm>>.
- "Sentence Fragments." UIUC Center for Writing Studies. 02 Feb. 2005. <[http://www.english.uiuc.edu/cws/wworkshop/grammar/sentence\\_fragments.htm](http://www.english.uiuc.edu/cws/wworkshop/grammar/sentence_fragments.htm)>.
- "Verbals and Verbal Phrases." UIUC Center for Writing Studies. 02 Feb. 2005. <[http://www.english.uiuc.edu/cws/wworkshop/grammar/verbals\\_and\\_verbal\\_phrases.htm](http://www.english.uiuc.edu/cws/wworkshop/grammar/verbals_and_verbal_phrases.htm)>.

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