

Correcting Sentence Fragments

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will explain how to identify sentence fragments and how to correct them. Specifically, we discuss the following elements:

1. Fragments
2. Identifying Fragments
3. Fixing Fragments

1. Fragments

A sentence is made up of a subject plus a verb plus a full thought. So a sentence fragment is just a fragment, a scrap of a sentence. It's a phrase or a clause that does not meet all the criteria of a sentence. Most of the time, these fragments are missing the subject. But sometimes they'll be missing the verb instead.

↪ **EXAMPLE** See how there's a verb and part of a thought, but the subject is missing? Who wanted to cross the bridge?

Wanted to cross the bridge.

A common fragment sentence will be a dependent clause punctuated as if it were a full sentence. It may have a subject and a verb, but the complete thought is missing. That word "because" is your clue that not everything is here.

Because the river was frozen.

These **sentence fragments** are important to spot in your writing. Why? Because they can confuse your reader with unclear, half-formed ideas.



TERM TO KNOW

Sentence Fragment

A phrase or clause that does not meet all the criteria of a sentence

2. Identifying Fragments

To identify a sentence fragment, ask yourself questions about a suspect sentence. These questions will help you sort out if a sentence is a fragment or complete:

- Does this sentence have a subject?
- Does this sentence have a verb?
- Does this sentence form a complete thought?

Since all complete sentences will include a subject, a verb, and a full thought, if you find yourself answering no to any of those questions, well, then you've got a fragment sentence.

What if you've asked yourself all three questions and you still aren't sure? Then you can use this trick. When you read your sentence, tack on the phrase, "it is true that," to the beginning of that sentence. If the sentence still makes sense, then it's complete. If it doesn't, then you know you have a fragment.

It is true that + sentence

IN CONTEXT

Does this sentence have a subject? Yes, the cow. Does it have a verb? Again, yes, jumped. And is this a full thought? Yes. So if we add, it is true that, to the beginning it's still going to make sense. And that means that all signs are pointing to a complete sentence.

The cow jumped over the moon.

It is true that the cow jumped over the moon.

How about this one? All that has changed is the word "when," so you know there is a subject and a verb. Is it a full thought? No. You can see that when you try your trick out, it doesn't make any sense.

when the cow jumped over the moon.

It is true that when the cow jumped over the moon.

3. Fixing Fragments

If your sentence is missing a subject or a verb, then all you have to do is add one in. Let's try a sentence like that and see if we can fix it.

IN CONTEXT

What are you missing? Do you see a subject? Yes, the cow. And wow, there's a lot of information in the sentence. Do you see any action? No. You're missing the verb. So you can make this sentence complete by adding in a verb. How about "sat"?

The big, brown cow in the field of grass.

*The big, brown cow **sat** in te field of grass.*

Here's another. You have a verb ("ate") and a noun ("spoon"), which could be the subject. But, is the spoon doing the eating? No, so that is your clue that you're missing the subject. It's complete by adding the word "she."

Ate the soup with a spoon.

***She** at the soup with a spoon.*

Here's another kind of fragment, which is a dependent clause. You have a subject and a verb, but the word "because" signals that this is meant to complete a thought that isn't all here. When you have a dependent clause punctuated like a sentence, it's a fragment.

You'll see this happen when the independent clause either follows or leads the dependent sentence fragment in a paragraph. To correct this, you just need to pair this fragment sentence with an independent clause to make it complete.

If you really wanted to, you could remove the subordinating conjunction (the word "because"), and then the dependent clause will be complete. "She was hungry" is an independent clause, a full sentence.

Because she was hungry.

She served herself soup. She was hungry.

She served herself soup because she was hungry.



SUMMARY

This tutorial demonstrated various ways a sentence can be **fragmented**. You learned how to **identify fragments** by asking yourself three questions:

- Does this sentence have a subject?
- Does this sentence have a verb?
- Does this sentence form a complete thought?

Once identified, **fragments can be easily fixed** by adding in the missing verb, subject, or removing a subordinating conjunction such as as the word "because."

Source: this work is adapted from sophia author martina shabram.



TERMS TO KNOW

Sentence Fragment

A phrase or clause that does not meet all the criteria of a sentence.