

Identifying Sentence Fragments

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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 or 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.

Wanted to cross the bridge.

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

Because the river was frozen.

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.

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

⇒ EXAMPLE

The cow jumped over the moon.

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.

It is true that the cow jumped over the moon.

⇒ EXAMPLE

when 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.

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.

⇒ EXAMPLE

The big, brown cow in the field of grass.

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 **sat** in the field of grass.*

⇒ EXAMPLE

Ate the soup with a spoon.

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."

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

⇒ EXAMPLE

Because she was hungry.

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.

She served herself soup because she was hungry.

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.

She served herself soup. 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 the word "because."



TERMS TO KNOW

Sentence Fragment

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