

Fragments (and How to Correct Them)

Grammar Term(s) Defined:

Subject: typically, the word or group of words in a sentence that is performing the action of the verb (e.g. **I** wrote the paper). In passive sentences (e.g. **The paper** was written by me), the subject receives the action of the verb.

Verb: a word that expresses an action (write, think, speak) or state of being (is, has)

Dependent Clause: a group of words that contains both a subject and a verb, and also begins with either a relative pronoun (who, which, that, etc.) or subordinating conjunction (because, while, although, etc.). A dependent clause on its own cannot be a complete sentence.

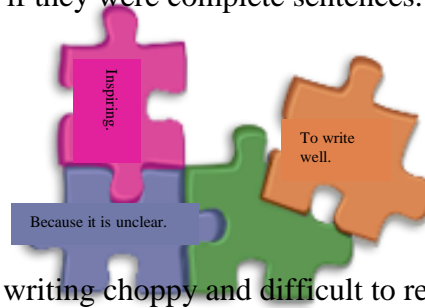
What is a sentence fragment?

Fragments are parts of a sentence that are written as if they were complete sentences. Here are some examples:

Such as books and articles.

Because of the syllabus requirements.

That has required a study schedule.



So what?

Fragments can confuse your readers and make your writing choppy and difficult to read. They can cause you to receive a lower grade on your papers. Worst of all, they may lead a reader to question the quality of your ideas.

How do I correct fragments?

The first step in correcting fragments is to recognize them. There are two main types of fragment errors:

First, a fragment occurs when the “sentence” does not contain both a subject and a verb:

*Experts recommend that students take short breaks. **While studying.***

*Also, finding a comfortable and bright place to study is important. **And a good time.***

You can correct this type of fragment by looking at the sentences before and after it to see where it fits best:

Experts recommend that students take short breaks while studying.

Second, a fragment occurs when a dependent clause is presented as if it were a complete sentence. Here are some examples:

Which make studying easier.

Because their time is organized.

Although they have many responsibilities.

Okay, but how do I recognize a dependent clause?

Two types of words make a clause dependent: relative pronouns (“which,” “that,” etc.) and subordinating conjunctions (“although,” “while,” “because,” etc.) You can enter a Google search for “relative pronouns” and “subordinating conjunctions” to see a longer list of examples for each type of word.

Even if you don’t remember these terms, you can recognize a dependent clause by its function: a dependent clause gives information about a noun, a verb, or the rest of the sentence. Here are some examples:

The book **that he read yesterday** has many notes in the margins. (Dependent clause describes the book.)

While he was reading the book, the electricity went off. (Dependent clause describes something that was happening when the electricity went off.)

He went on reading **because he was prepared for emergencies with a flashlight**. (Dependent clause describes the reason he could keep reading.)

Because a dependent clause describes something in the sentence, it cannot be separated from the rest of the sentence. Otherwise, the reader is left wondering, “Does this description go with the previous sentence? Or with the next sentence? Or even with a sentence that isn’t written here?”

To correct this type of fragment, you may be able to connect it to a sentence that comes before or after it. If it doesn’t fit with either sentence, you will have to write a new one.

Practice Exercises:

Which are fragments?

Because students are busy, although they often make time for extracurricular activities.

Since many students work multiple jobs, they need to set up a study plan.

Such that they know when major assignments are coming up.

A long, overwhelming assignment.

The best time to set up a study plan is at the beginning of the semester.

In this paragraph, which sentences are fragments?

It can be difficult to find fragments in writing. Because people often talk in fragments. They start a sentence and then stop. In the middle to revise what they were going to say. Although fragments are acceptable in speech, they are considered errors in writing. Maybe because it is easier to follow someone who is speaking through gestures and intonation. With writing, the reader only has the words on the page. Those words must be as clear. As possible!

Scroll down to view the answers to the practice exercises.

Because students are busy, although they often make time for extracurricular activities. FRAGMENT

Since many students work multiple jobs, they need to set up a study plan. NOT A FRAGMENT

Such that they know when major assignments are coming up. FRAGMENT

A long, overwhelming assignment. FRAGMENT

The best time to set up a study plan is at the beginning of the semester. NOT A FRAGMENT

One correct version of the paragraph above:

It can be difficult to find fragments in writing because people often talk in fragments. They start a sentence and then stop in the middle to revise what they were going to say. Although fragments are acceptable in speech, they are considered errors in writing. Maybe this is because it is easier to follow someone who is speaking through gestures and intonation. With writing, a reader only has the words on the page. Those words must be as clear as possible!