

SENTENCE FRAGMENTS

A sentence fragment is a part, or piece, of a sentence placed by itself as if it were a complete sentence. The fragments appearing most frequently are either phrases or dependent clauses.

PHRASE FRAGMENTS

Through the door.
Driving to New York.
To learn her fate.
The dry, baked earth.

DEPENDENT CLAUSE FRAGMENTS

When she left him.
Although it rained.
That he could defeat the Zorf.
Who broke the bank at Monte Carlo.

When should a student use a fragment? When speaking, not when writing for school. (That, by the way, is a fragment.) Although sometimes used very effectively by professional writers, especially journalists and novelists, sentence fragments should be avoided in academic writing. Some fragments confuse the reader, but more importantly, most instructors consider them to be "against the rules." What follows are more sentence fragments:

Fragment made from an appositive

The hillside was covered with horses of many colors. Chestnuts, bays, roans, paints, and an occasional palomino.

Corrected

The hillside was covered with horses of many colors—chestnuts, bays, roans, paints, and an occasional palomino.

Fragment made from a prepositional phrase

The Lost Chipmunks Motel was at the end of a winding asphalt road. On the north side of the lane.

Corrected

The Lost Chipmunks Motel was at the end of a winding asphalt road on the north side of the lane.

Fragment made from a participial phrase

The two runners pulled away from the pack and raced across the finish line together. Winning in record time.

Corrected

The two runners pulled away from the pack and raced across the finish line together, winning in record time.

Fragment made from an infinitive phrase

After months of patiently waiting, I finally received permission from my parents. To travel across Europe during the summer.

Corrected

After months of patiently waiting, I finally received permission from my parents to travel across Europe during the summer.

Fragment made from a relative pronoun clause

After many years of hard work at low pay, he finally received a grant. Which made possible the continuation of his private research.

Corrected

After many years of hard work at low pay, he finally received a grant which made possible the continuation of his private research.

CORRECTING FRAGMENTS: THREE METHODS

1. Attach the fragment to the sentence in front of it--if the two parts make sense together.

FRAGMENT The Soviet MIG appeared suddenly, circled twice, and set down. Braking with parachutes. (Participial Phrase)

CORRECTED The Soviet MIG appeared suddenly, circled twice, and set down, braking with parachutes.

2. Attach the fragment to the sentence that follows it--if the two parts make sense together.

FRAGMENT Japan's largest department store. Mitsukoshi even sells \$60,000 Rolls-Royces. (Appositive Phrase)

CORRECTED Japan's largest department store, Mitsukoshi even sells \$60,000 Rolls-Royces.

3. Develop the sentence fragment into a complete sentence that can stand by itself.

FRAGMENT The train sped on. The bridge ahead swept away by the flood. No one aboard the train knew what awaited them around the curve. (One verb is missing.)

CORRECTED The train sped on. The bridge ahead had been swept away by the flood. No one aboard the train knew what awaited them around the curve.

Source: Frew, Robert. Write: Preparing for Success in English Composition. Palo Alto, California: Peek Publications.

Exercise I

Directions: Each of the 15 items in this self-test is in two parts. In the spaces to the right of each item, indicate whether each part is a fragment (F) or sentence (S).

Examples:

a. Not really knowing what to do. So running away from home.

F F _____

b. I studied for hours. Preparing myself for the next test.

S F _____

c. We jogged around the park. We covered five miles in 40 minutes.

S S _____

- 1. Startled by the loud noise of the engine. I dropped the wrench and jumped out of the way. _____
- 2. George was standing on the corner. Watching all the cars go by. _____
- 3. Rex gathered some dry twigs. And tried to start a fire for us. _____
- 4. All of us waited at the door. To let the man in the wheelchair by. _____
- 5. Written by a Black poet. Who had spent many years in the ghetto. _____
- 6. I have wanted to drive a race car. For as long as I can remember. _____
- 7. Even though Mr. Harvey is more than seventy years old. He enjoys watching young, active children. _____
- 8. She gave me her phone number. So I could call her later. _____
- 9. Without spilling a drop on the driveway. Jill drained the oil from her car. _____
- 10. Our instructor gave us a mid-semester test. Which was not as difficult as we had expected. _____
- 11. Merely by giving him a gentle tap with a newspaper. Skippy can be controlled quite easily. _____
- 12. He grinds his teeth only during his sleep. Never while studying or watching TV. _____
- 13. Ms. Barns has a very low, soft voice. She plans to use an amplifier during her speech. _____
- 14. He asked me to check my figures with the clerk. The usual procedure in matters of this sort. _____
- 15. After a long day of hard classes. A student needs a good rest. _____

ANSWERS: 1. FS 5. FF 9. FS 13. SS
2. SF 6. SF 10. SF 14. SF
3. SF 7. FS 11. FS 15. FS
4. SF 8. SF 12. SF

Exercise II

Directions: If a group of words does not make a complete thought, place an X beside it and rewrite it as a sentence in the space provided.

1. When the rest of the class rushed out into the sunshine.
2. Up in the library, I ran through the required chapters in the two different books, and they differed on several points.
3. The opinion that when times are thoroughly bad a wise man will merely stand by the wall.
4. But we have gone to the other extreme and are so obsessed with the idea of society as a whole that it no longer seems quite respectable to seek even intellectual or spiritual self-improvement.
5. Being young and discovering the wonderful charm of night, night away from houses, night moving along country roads, noiseless silken wood roads, black bumpy roads of pastures and farms, and the soft, misty, sweet-smelling roads with old wooden bridges where we stopped to listen to the gentle Ipswich River.
6. A second reason for wishing to be philosophic is that mistaken beliefs do not, as a rule, enable you to realize good purposes.
7. The movement of a concept or an image from the mind of the speaker to the mind of the listener.
8. If there is no excuse for blurring and meandering in conversation, there is even less excuse for it in written forms of communication.
9. The middle classes defended not only their purses and property but also their women better than the barons.
10. A well-known incident in one of Moliere's plays in which the author makes the hero express unbounded delight on being told that he has been talking prose during the whole of his life.

ANSWERS: 1. X 2. ✓ 3. X 4. ✓ 5. X 6. ✓ 7. X 8. ✓ 9. ✓ 10. X

Exercise III

Directions: Place a check mark beside each group of words that makes a complete thought. If a group of words does not make a complete thought, place an X beside it and rewrite it as a sentence in the space provided.

1. Mary, with great curiosity, cautiously pushed open the door of the cellar.

2. That he was right. John, being quite sure that he was right.
3. The mayor's acceptance of the current status quo and his repudiation of any attempt at change.
4. The clouds, massing on the horizon, gave warning that a storm was approaching.
5. Although the dress came from Goodwill, it looked quite fashionable.
6. The large, overstuffed chairs that someone had pushed in the corner.
7. That a penny earned is no longer a penny saved is a sad but true alteration of that old saying.
8. The largest cities of the U.S.--New York, Chicago, Los Angeles--cultured as they are, with industries and fashion centers.
9. Emerson's essay "The American Scholar" in which the truly educated person brings the intellectual world and daily life into harmony.
10. The old writer, like all of the people in the world, having a great many notions in his head.

ANSWERS: 1. ✓ 2. X 3. X 4. ✓ 5. ✓ 6. X 7. ✓ 8. X 9. X 10. X

Exercise IV

Directions: Correct the fragments in the following paragraph.

The weary group paused to rest their animals before they climbed the long hill in front of them. Leather created as one of the men twisted in his saddle. To look back the way they had come. Across miles of dry, brown grass. A horse twitched at a fly. A trickle of sweat rolled down Molly's neck. Under her faded cotton dress. She looked around at the faces powdered with dust. And streaked with sweat. No one spoke. After awhile, Jim gave the signal and the little group began to move. A dog that had flopped in the scant shade of the main wagon scuttled out just in time. Looking put upon. Molly straightened in the saddle and took a deep breath. Determined not to show how tired she was. The sensitive bay mare quickened her pace. Until she had come abreast of Jim and the others. Molly looked straight ahead. Trying to concentrate on the dusty track before her. Instead of the rough cotton chafing her skin. And the dust caking her face. As they neared the crest of the hill, Molly leaned forward in the saddle. The bay mare gathered her legs under here. And ran the rest of the way to the top. Suddenly, spread out before her, Molly saw a watered green valley. Poised at the top of the ridge, she saw the horses and wagons winding up the steep trail behind her in a churning cloud of dust. While below her lay a brilliant green meadow. Dotted with cottonwoods a willow-lined stream curving across it.

