

Proofreading Skills Tutorial:

Tutorial #1:
Sentence Fragments

Identifying Sentence Fragments
Correcting Sentence Fragments
Proofreading for Sentence Fragments

Writing Center
English 800 Center

All notes and exercises can be done on separate sheets of paper, which you should bring to your conference with an instructor in the center.

As you work through the tutorial, make sure to see an instructional aide at the front desk in the Writing Center or English 800 Center if you have any questions or difficulties.

Sentence Fragments

Before you begin this tutorial, we recommend that you complete the *Introductory Tutorial: Recognizing Verbs and Subjects*. This tutorial on sentence fragments will demonstrate strategies for:

1. **identifying sentence fragments (incomplete sentences)**
2. **correcting sentence fragments**
3. **proofreading for sentence fragments.**

As you do this tutorial and learn about different types of sentence fragments, be sure to notice the kinds of fragments that your teacher has pointed out in your writing. That way, you can learn how to proofread your own essays more effectively.

Before we describe sentence fragments and how to fix them, let's review some information that is so basic you might have forgotten it.

What is a sentence?

Sentences are the building blocks of writing. To improve your writing, you must understand the sentence and its two main parts, the verb and the subject.*

A complete sentence is not only a group of words with a capital letter at the beginning and a period at the end. A **complete sentence** must also always:

- have a subject
- have a verb
- be a complete idea. (That is, it can stand alone and makes sense by itself.)

Some sentences can be very short, with only a few words expressing a complete idea, like this:

Julia wants a new car.

This is a complete sentence because it meets all three requirements—it has a subject (“Julia”), it has a verb (“wants”), and it is a complete idea (that is, “Julia wants a new car.”).

A **sentence fragment** is missing one or more of these three requirements; it is a group of words that is incorrectly punctuated as a complete sentence.

*Note: If you need to review how to identify a verb and subject, see the *Introductory Tutorial: Recognizing Verbs and Subjects*.

Part One: Identifying Sentence Fragments (Incomplete Sentences)

Consider the two groups of words below:

Students in the Writing Center.

Students work in the Writing Center.

In your own words, explain the difference between these two groups of words.

As you have probably noticed, the first group of words is not a complete idea or sentence. That is, we don't know who the students are or what they are doing. The second group of words, however, is different. We know that the students in the Writing Center are working. This group of words has a subject ("Students"), a verb ("work"), and a complete idea.

To find out if a group of words is a complete sentence, you can use this trick. Add ***Is it true that*** before the words. If the question does not make sense, the group of words is a sentence fragment. If the question does make sense, the group of words is a complete sentence.

Consider the examples below.

Is it true that students in the Writing Center?

Is it true that students work in the Writing Center?

The first question above does not make sense. It does have a subject ("students"). But it does not have a verb, and it is not a complete idea. It is a **sentence fragment**.

However, the second question *does* make sense. It has a subject and a verb and *is* a complete idea. Therefore, "Students work in the Writing Center." is a **complete sentence**.

<p>Principle I. To find out if a group of words is a complete sentence, add <i>Is it true that</i> before the words. If the question makes sense, the group of words is a complete sentence.</p>

Exercise 1

Instructions: Using Principle I, identify each group of words below as a sentence or fragment. On a separate piece of paper, write an “S” if the group of words is a complete sentence, or write an “F” if the group of words is a sentence fragment. The first two are done for you.

- F** _____ 1. after waiting two hours in the rain for the bus
Is it true that after waiting two hours in the rain for the bus?
The question doesn't make sense; it is a sentence fragment.
- S** _____ 2. I arrived at school soaking wet
Is it true that I arrived at school soaking wet?
The question makes sense, and it is a complete sentence.
- _____ 3. especially in the morning
- _____ 4. after I arrived late to my Italian class
- _____ 5. my teacher threw me out of class
- _____ 6. although I had studied with my friends for the exam
- _____ 7. if I don't pass this course
- _____ 8. I want to transfer to a four-year university next spring
- _____ 9. filling out college applications is hard work
- _____ 10. a big, long application with lots of questions

Exercise 2

Instructions: Using Principle I, identify any sentence fragments in the paragraph below by underlining them. You can see below how to apply Principle I to the first four groups of words in the paragraph.

Is it true that everyone has some kind of bad habit?

The question makes sense; it is a complete sentence and should *not* be underlined.

Is it true that even those who think they are perfect?

The question doesn't make sense; it is a sentence fragment and should be underlined.

Is it true that some habits can get you into trouble?

The question makes sense; it is a complete sentence and should *not* be underlined.

Is it true that while others simply annoy other people?

The question doesn't make sense; it is a sentence fragment and should be underlined.

Now it's *your* turn to find and underline the rest of the sentence fragments in this paragraph. The first few fragments have been corrected for you. Hint: your grammar checker will not find all of the fragments below.

1 Everyone has some kind of bad habit. 2 Even those who think they are perfect.
3 Some habits can get you into trouble. 4 While others simply annoy other people. My habit is always being late. A habit that drives my husband crazy. Because he is always early. I have tried several techniques for being more on time. Techniques that might seem a little strange. One strategy was to set all the clocks in my house ahead of the real time. Except that I set each clock ahead a different amount of time. As a result, not one clock in the house showed the exact time. A situation which was really confusing for everyone. Not to mention my husband who got very angry. After that strategy failed, I tried changing the times of the appointments I had in my datebook calendar. Trying to fool myself by making every appointment fifteen minutes earlier. Sometimes, however, I had to change the time of the appointment. When I called up to change the time, I got confused about the real appointment time. A mistake which made me look really silly. I have a new strategy. One that I think will actually work. From now on I am going to stop whatever I am doing ten minutes before I have to leave.

Part Two: Correcting Sentence Fragments

Look back at the groups of words that you underlined in the paragraph above. As you may have noticed, the writer sometimes just added a period too soon, before the idea was completely finished. In fact, many sentence fragments follow the complete sentences to which they logically belong.

Principle II. To correct a sentence fragment, connect it to the complete sentence to which it logically belongs. Note that most fragments come after the sentences to which they should be attached.

Consider the following sentence and sentence fragment:

Everyone has some kind of bad habit. Even those who think they are perfect.

“Even those who think they are perfect” (sentence fragment) is a logical part of the previous complete sentence “Everyone has some kind of bad habit” since it gives more information about everyone.

To correct this sentence fragment, you can connect it to the previous complete sentence because they have a logical relationship. That is, the fragment simply provides additional detail about people and their bad habits:

Everyone has some kind of bad habit, even those who think they are perfect.

Now consider another sentence and sentence fragment:

Some habits can get you into trouble. While others simply annoy other people.

“While others simply annoy other people” (sentence fragment) is a logical part of the previous complete sentence, “Some habits can get you into trouble.”

To correct this sentence fragment, you can connect it to the previous sentence because they have a logical relationship. That is, the fragment provides additional detail about different types of “habits”:

Some habits can get you into trouble while others simply annoy other people.

Exercise 3

Instructions: In the paragraph below, correct the sentence fragments that you identified in Exercise 2. Using Principle II, join the fragments to the sentences that they logically relate to. The first few fragments have been corrected for you. Remember that your grammar checker will not find all the fragments for you.

Everyone has some kind of bad habit. Even those who think they are perfect. Some habits can get you into trouble. While others simply annoy other people.

Everyone has some kind of bad habit, even those who think they are perfect. Some habits can get you into trouble while others simply annoy other people.

My habit is always being late, a habit that drives my husband crazy. Because he is always early. I have tried several techniques for being more on time. Techniques that might seem a little strange. One strategy was to set all the clocks in my house ahead of the real time. Except that I set each clock ahead a different amount of time. As a result, not one clock in the house showed the exact time. A situation which was really confusing for everyone. Not to mention my husband who got very angry. After that strategy failed, I tried changing the times of the appointments I had in my datebook calendar. Trying to fool myself by making every appointment fifteen minutes earlier. Sometimes, however, I had to change the time of the appointment. When I called up to change the time, I got confused about the real appointment time. A mistake which made me look really silly. I have a new strategy. One that I think will actually work. From now on I am going to stop whatever I am doing ten minutes before I have to leave.

Part Three: Proofreading for Sentence Fragments

Here are some strategies for identifying and correcting sentence fragments, techniques that will help you proofread your essays more effectively.

- In proofreading your essays or paragraphs, look at every group of words that begins with a capital letter and ends with a period. After you add ***Is it true that***, do the words make sense? If they do, the group of words is a complete sentence.
- If the group of words is a sentence fragment, look at the sentence that comes before it AND the one that follows. The sentence fragment should be attached to one of them. To which complete sentence does the fragment logically belong? Attach the fragment to that sentence.
- In general, when you are proofreading, be sure to look for only one type of error at a time. Otherwise, it is easy to miss your mistakes. It always helps to read your writing out loud when looking for sentence fragments. When you do this, you can often recognize when a group of words sounds incomplete. Some people also feel that it is easier to spot fragments if they read the passage aloud starting backwards: first, the last sentence; then, the next-to-last; and so on.

Now that you know how to proofread for sentence fragments, you can practice these strategies in the final exercises.

Exercise 4

Instructions: Using these proofreading strategies, identify and underline any sentence fragments in the following paragraph. Then, join the fragments to the sentences to which they logically belong.

Takumi, a bank teller, loves to listen to jazz. Especially to jazz on a local listener-sponsored radio station with the call letters KCSM. Takumi listens to KCSM almost all day. Driving to work, driving home from work, and at home in the evening. Even in the shower. Takumi recently learned that some of the announcers on this radio station were actually broadcasting arts students at the College of San Mateo. An idea which was very surprising to him, because he thought all the announcers were established professionals. Takumi loved KCSM so much that he decided to enroll at the College of San Mateo. A small community college on the Peninsula in the San Francisco Bay Area. And to major in broadcasting arts. During the radio station's fall membership drive, he decided to make a \$100 donation. An amount that was a financial hardship for him. Because he didn't earn much money as a bank teller. Takumi also decided to take voice lessons. Something his father agreed to finance. Takumi loves his classes at the college and can't wait to become a student announcer. And eventually quit his job at the bank.

Exercise 5

Instructions:

1. Review an essay where your teacher has graded and marked your sentence fragments (or FRAGs). Are there any similarities in your fragments? For example, fragments often begin with the words *which*, *who*, *that*, or *where*. Knowing what to look for during proofreading can make it easier to find your sentence fragments.
2. Look back at the principles and exercises in this tutorial and make notes on a separate sheet of paper. You will bring these notes and the essay to your conference.
3. Make an appointment for a conference with an instructor in the Writing Center (18-104) or English 800 Center (18-102). To make this appointment, stop by the Centers or call (650) 574-6436. During this appointment, the professor will make sure you understand the concepts covered in this tutorial, answer any questions that you might have, review your answers to these exercises, and check to see if you can incorporate the skill into your writing.

Reminder:

For this appointment, bring

- any notes about the tutorial that you have taken
- your completed tutorial exercises
- and the essay