Fragments

Sample Errors

SAMPLE 1: I entered my apartment and saw an unexpected guest.  
✗ A cat in the middle of my living room.

SAMPLE 2: Philip is really upset.  ✗ Because someone broke a window in his car.

SAMPLE 3: College gives you a whole new perspective.  ✗ Opening your eyes to a new world.

What's the Problem?

A fragment is a group of words that cannot stand alone as a complete sentence but is punctuated as a complete sentence. In English, a subject and a verb and a complete thought are needed for a complete sentence. Many fragments lack a verb, as in Sample 1, or lack a subject, as in Sample 3. A fragment can also be a dependent clause, a clause that does not express a complete thought, as in Sample 2.

What Causes the Problem?

Almost all fragments explain or expand upon an idea in the immediately preceding sentence. Fragments are not easy for writers to spot because they sound normal. In the quick give-and-take of conversation, fragments are a way of clarifying or elaborating on what we have just said without having to stop and reformulate the previous sentence. In formal written language, however, fragments are inappropriate. Readers expect formal writing to be carefully planned.

Diagnostic Exercise

Correct all errors in the following paragraph using the first correction as a model. The number in parentheses at the end of the paragraph indicates how many errors you should find.

My roommate has an annoying habit, not putting anything away. He never picks up his dirty clothes. Until he

has to do his laundry. In the kitchen, there are always dirty dishes on the table. I've asked him to at least put them in

the sink. Where they are out of the way. It is always such a mess. Cups half-full of coffee, cereal bowls with milk in

them, and cruddy silverware. The refrigerator is just as bad. Opening the door is like taking a trip to the jungle. We

really need to do something about it. Because it is really embarrassing when someone visits. (4)

Fixing This Problem in Your Writing
A fragment is almost always a continuation of the preceding sentence. To fix a fragment, we need to separate it from the previous sentence. When a fragment is by itself, isolated from preceding sentences, we are much more likely to notice that it doesn't make sense on its own. Here are three tips that will help you to isolate fragments.

**LIKELY FRAGMENTS TIP:** Most fragments fall into one of these three categories: **Renamers, Adverbs, and -ing Fragments.** If you are aware of what the most common types of fragments are, you are more likely to spot them.

**Renamers.** These fragments rename or explain the last noun in the preceding sentence. Sample I is an example of this type. I entered my apartment and saw an unexpected guest. \( \times \) A cat right in the middle of my living room. The noun cat renames the guest. Another common example of this type begins with which: I got mustard on my shirt. \( \times \) Which I had just gotten back from the cleaners.

**Adverbs.** In this category are adverb clauses that tell when, where, and especially why something happened. Sample 2 is an example of this type: Philip is really upset. \( \times \) Because someone broke a window in his car. The fragment explains why Philip is upset.

**-ing Fragments.** These fragments begin with a verb in the -ing verb form. Sample 3 is an example of this kind of fragment: College gives you a whole new perspective. \( \times \) Opening your eyes to a new world.

**BACKWARD PROOFREADING TIP:** Proofread your paper backward, one sentence at a time. Use one hand to cover up all but the last sentence in each paragraph. See if that sentence can stand alone. If it can, then uncover the next-to-last sentence to see if it can stand alone, and so forth.

Backward proofreading is a standard and quite effective way of identifying fragments. Try it on the three sample sentences at the beginning of this lesson. Knowing what the most likely fragments look like will help you catch them as you edit.

**I REALIZE TIP:** You can put I realize in front of most complete sentences and make a new grammatical sentence. However, when you put I realize in front of a fragment, the result will not make sense.

The I Realize Tip is a particularly handy way to test to see if something is actually a fragment. Here is how it would be applied to each of the three sample fragments:

**TIP APPLIED:** \( \times \) I realize a cat right in the middle of my living room.

**TIP APPLIED:** \( \times \) I realize because someone broke a window in his car.

**TIP APPLIED:** \( \times \) I realize opening your eyes to a new world.

The I Realize Tip will help you to look at potential fragments in isolation from the preceding sentence. Note that this tip works best for sentences that are statements. It does not work for sentences that are in the form of a question (Was my manager here?) or a command (Leave me alone!)

Once you identify a fragment, the easiest way to correct it is to attach it to the preceding sentence. If the fragment is a renamer or an -ing fragment, you will probably need to add a comma. Most adverb fragments will need no punctuation. Below, Sample 1, a renamer, is attached to its preceding sentence with a comma:

**SAMPLE 1:** I entered my apartment and saw an unexpected guest. \( \times \) A cat right in the middle of my living room.

**TIP APPLIED:** I realize I entered my apartment and saw an unexpected guest. \( \times \) I realize a cat right in the middle of my living room.
CORRECTION: I entered my apartment and saw an unexpected guest\textsuperscript{A} cat right in the middle of my living room.

Let's follow the same steps to correct Sample 2.

**SAMPLE 2:** Philip is really upset. \textxmark Because someone broke a window in his car.

**TIP APPLIED:** \textit{I realize} Philip is really upset. \textxmark \textit{I realize} because someone broke a window in his car.

**CORRECTION:** Philip is really upset/ Because someone broke a window in his car.

Another way to correct a fragment is to expand the fragment to a complete sentence. When you find a fragment, decide if the material in the fragment is worth emphasizing. If it is, expand the fragment to a full sentence rather than tuck it away as a part of the preceding sentence. For example, here is how you might rewrite Sample 3 to make the fragment a full sentence:

**SAMPLE 3:** College gives you a whole new perspective. \textxmark Opening your eyes to a new world.

**TIP APPLIED:** \textit{I realize} college gives you a whole new perspective. \textit{I realize} opening your eyes to a new world.

**CORRECTION:** College gives you a whole new perspective. Opening your eyes to a new world.

**Sentence Practice 1**

CORRECTED SENTENCES APPEAR ON PAGE 422.

Find the fragments by using the \textit{I Realize Tip}. Write \text{OK} above each complete sentence. Write \text{frag} above each fragment and identify which of the three types it is: \text{-renamer}, \text{adverb}, or \text{-ing fragment}. Correct the fragment by combining it with the complete sentence next to it.
Lesson 1: Fragments

EXAMPLE:

I started a poem but couldn't finish it. Because I ran out of ideas. 

OK

frag, adverb

I realize I started a poem but couldn't finish it. I realize because I ran out of ideas.

CORRECTION:

I started a poem but couldn't finish it/ Because I ran out of ideas.

1. We heard a noise. A loud, frightful crash.

2. The bull charged. Scattering the crowd in all directions.

3. The winters in western British Columbia are mild. Because the ocean supplies so much warmth.


5. The computer crashed. Two hours of hard work was gone.

Sentence Practice 2

CORRECTED SENTENCES APPEAR ON PAGE 422.

Find the fragments by using the I Realize Tip. Write OK above each complete sentence. Write frag above each fragment and identify which of the three types it is - renamer, adverb, or -ing fragment. Correct the fragment by combining it with the complete sentence next to it.

EXAMPLE:

We gave up. Having lost all confidence.

OK

fray, -ing fragment

I realize we gave up. I realize having lost all confidence.

CORRECTION:

We gave up/ having lost all confidence.

1. A capital offense is a crime punishable by death. A penalty for only the most serious of crimes.

2. Jan plans to become a parapsychologist. Believing a person can communicate with the spirits.
3. I vividly recall September 12, 1999. The day my parents paid a surprise visit to my apartment.

4. Our astronomy class took a field trip to Mount Palomar, California. Which is the site of one of the world's largest telescopes.

5. You should not go to class today. Because you are obviously sick.

Sentence Practice 3

The first line in each of the following pairs is a complete sentence. The second line is a fragment. For each pair, write a new sentence by correctly attaching the fragment to the complete sentence. Use a comma if necessary.

Example: We played softball.

Even though it was raining.

Answer: We played softball/ Even though it was raining.

1. My parents went to Reno.

   Where they lost a little money.

2. Shelly is not feeling well.

   Because she ate six Twinkies for breakfast.

3. Fluoride is added to the water in many cities.

   Although many people believe it to be harmful.

4. Our small start-up company had a poor benefits package until last summer.

   When we were bought by a larger company.

5. The Philippines have been influenced by other countries.

   Including Spain, Japan, and the United States.

Editing Practice 1

Corrected sentences appear on page 422.

Correct all fragment errors in the following paragraphs using the first correction as a model. The number in parentheses at the end of each paragraph indicates how many errors you should find.
Ten percent of Americans suffer from *allergic rhinitis*/*Which*

*is the medical term for hay fever. The most common allergy. Hay fever is triggered by exposure to pollen. Especially grass and weed pollens. Flower pollen rarely causes allergic reactions. Because it is too heavy to float very high or far. (3)*

During the allergy season, many hay fever sufferers take a drug called an *antihistamine*. Hoping to combat sneezing, runny nose, and itchy eyes. However, there are other ways to control allergy symptoms. Such as limiting outside work when the pollen count is high, running the air conditioner in your house and car, and avoiding dust and smoke. (2)

**Editing Practice 2**

CORRECTED SENTENCES APPEAR ON PAGE 423.

Correct all fragment errors in the following paragraphs using the first correction as a model. The number in parentheses at the end of each paragraph indicates how many errors you should find.

Several players have now broken Babe Ruth's long-standing moot records/*Most home runs in a season and most career home runs*. However, Babe may well be the most famous baseball player of all time. Largely because of his personality as much as his baseball playing. He played with an enthusiasm that excited the fans. (1)

Babe's personality frequently made news. Even when his character got him into trouble. In 1922, his behavior resulted in five suspensions, and in 1925 his drinking and quarreling with
management resulted in a $5,000 fine. A huge amount at the time for even well-paid players. He gained even more fame, though, when he turned himself around. Hitting a record sixty home runs in 1927. He had a comeback again in the World Series of 1932. After a September attack of what was thought to be appendicitis, he fought back and played all games in the World Series. In which he batted .333. Even in his retirement, he remained a popular favorite and a spokesperson for the game he loved. (4)

**Editing Practice 3**

Correct all fragment errors in the following paragraphs using the first correction as a model. The number in parentheses at the end of each paragraph indicates how many errors you should find.

Our college installed a new piece of artwork—a statue in front of the library. It is a tribute to the men and women serving in the armed forces. It is a special tribute to veterans of the Vietnam War. A war that greatly divided our country. Part of the cost was paid by donations from alumni. Mostly veterans themselves. The remainder of the cost was paid by a local company. Which has close connections with our school. (4)

**Writing Practice**

On your own paper, write a paragraph describing a local work of art (sculpture, photograph, painting, and so on). In a second paragraph, tell what you like or dislike about it. Use the Editing Checklist to make sure there are no fragments.
Lesson 1: Fragments

Identify Fragments in Your Writing

- Proofread your paper starting at the last sentence and moving to the first, reading one sentence at a time.
- Put *I realize* in front of each word group you think is a sentence. The *I realize* sentence will not make sense if the word group is a fragment.

Correct Fragments in Your Writing

Attach each fragment to the sentence that comes before it or rewrite the fragment to make it a complete sentence.

I realize you can place *I realize* in front of a complete sentence.