**Sentence Fragment**

**A/ Sentence Fragment**

An error to avoid in paragraph writing is the **sentence fragment**. A **sentence** must contain a subject and a verb and must be able to stand alone as a complete idea. A **sentence** **fragment** is incomplete. It lacks a subject, a verb, or both—or it does not stand alone as a complete idea.

A sentence fragment can also be defined as a group of words punctuated like a sentence but lacking an independent clause.

Because it lacks an independent clause, a sentence fragment is just a piece of a sentence. Here are some examples:

**Sentence fragments**: Running along the beach.

Even though the movie won an Oscar.

These so-called sentences are actually frauds: they begin with a capital letter and end with a period, but they lack an independent clause.

The previous two examples might have appeared in the following contexts:

**Sentence fragments:**

I finally found that stray dog. Running along the beach.

Marie absolutely refused to go to the theater. Even though the movie had won an Oscar.

To correct a sentence fragment, either connect it to an independent clause or add a subject and a verb to convert it to an independent clause.

* **Fragments connected to independent clauses:**

I finally found that stray dog running along the beach.

Marie absolutely refused to go to the theater even though the movie had won an Oscar.

* **Fragments converted to independent clauses:**

I finally found that stray dog. It was running along the beach.

Marie absolutely refused to go to the theater. The movie had won an Oscar.

Of the two types of changes shown, most readers would prefer the connection of the fragment to an independent clause. That solution provides smoother writing, avoiding the choppiness that results from converting each fragment to its own independent clause. More important, however, the first solution increases coherence: connecting the fragment to an independent clause links the thought of the fragment to the thought of the independent clause.

**Here are six common fragments and ways to correct them.**

**1. Dependent Clause Fragments**

A dependent clause fragment often starts with a subordinating conjunction like *although, because, if, when*, and so on.

**Complete sentence**: 1. Sam decided to major in psychology.

**Fragment:** 2. After his sister was diagnosed with anorexia.

This fragment can be corrected in two ways:

* 3. Sam decided to major in psychology after his sister was diagnosed with anorexia.
* 4. Sam decided to major in psychology. His sister was diagnosed with anorexia.

In sentence 3, the fragment is combined with the sentence before.

In sentence 4, the fragment is changed into a complete sentence.

**2. Relative Clause Fragments**

**Complete sentence**: 1. Mrs. Costa is a popular history professor.

**Fragment:** 2. Who never runs out of creative ideas.

This fragment can be corrected in two ways:

* Mrs. Costa is a popular history professor who never runs out of creative ideas.
* Mrs. Costa is a popular history professor. She never runs out of creative ideas.

**3. -*ing* Fragments**

**Complete sentence** a. James can be seen every morning.

**Fragment:** b. Running a mile or two before breakfast.

This fragment can be corrected this way:

* James can be seen on the track every morning, running a mile or two before breakfast.
* James can be seen on the track every morning. He runs a mile or two before breakfast.

**4. Prepositional Phrase Fragments**

**Complete sentence**: a. A huge telescope in West Virginia scans for signs of life.

**Fragment**: b. On stars twenty to thirty light years away.

This fragment can be corrected

* A huge telescope in West Virginia scans for signs of life on stars twenty to thirty light years away.
* A huge telescope in West Virginia scans for signs of life. **Its target is** stars twenty to thirty light years away.

**5. Infinitive Phrase Fragments**

**Complete sentence** Lauri has always wanted to become a biologist.

**Fragment**: To protect the environment.

Lauri has always wanted to become a biologist and to protect the environment.

Lauri has always wanted to become a biologist. **Her goal is** to protect the environment.