

How to Correct Sentence Fragments

A **fragment** is a group of words punctuated like a sentence but lacks at least one of the four requirements of a grammatical sentence:

1. a subject
2. a verb
3. a complete verb
4. a complete thought

1. A **missing-subject fragment** is a group of words that lacks a subject. Which part of the following example is the fragment?

- ❖ I got a C on my assignment. For not correcting the sentence fragments in my paper.

Although the second part has a verb-like word—“correcting”—it may look like a sentence. But, “correcting” is actually a noun (a *gerund*—which results from adding “ing” to a verb. Ex: *cooking, running, licking*) To fix it, we can combine it with the preceding independent clause like this:

- ❖ I got a C on my assignment for not correcting the sentence fragments in my paper.

2. A **missing-verb fragment** is a group of words that lacks a main verb. For example,

- ❖ The statue damaged during the riots.

While “damaged” looks like a verb because of the –ed ending, it’s not because it describes the condition of the statue instead of identifying what the statue did. One way to fix this fragment is to add a **verb** for which the “statue” can be the subject:

- ❖ The statue damaged during the riots **needed** drastic repairs.

Now “damaged during the riots” identifies *which* “statue” needs repairs, and “needed” explains what the “statue” did: it “needed drastic repairs.”

3. An **incomplete-verb fragment** is a group of words that needs a helping verb because the main verb is a present participle (-ing) or a passive verb (-ed or –en), neither of which can stand alone as a main verb. Here’s a fragment caused by a present participle trying to be the main verb by itself:

- ❖ The leaves moving with the wind.

However, fix it by either adding a helping verb (such as “are”) or replacing the –ing verb with a simple past or present form, which *can* stand alone as a main verb:

- ❖ The leaves are moving with the wind. **Or**
- ❖ The leaves moved with the wind. **Or**
- ❖ The leaves move with the wind.

4. An **incomplete-thought fragment** is a group of words that is a dependent clause or a phrase or that has a subject and a verb but needs an object.

Dependent clause fragments:

Some words or phrases used to introduce a subordinate or relative clause may result in a fragment because they cannot stand alone.

Subordinating Conjunctions

after	if, even if
although, though	in order that
as	since
because	so that
before	unless
even though	until
whether or not	while
when, whenever	wherever

Relative Pronouns

who, whom
whose
that
which, whichever
what, whatever
whoever, whomever
<u>Adverbs</u>
where

Notice how the subordinating conjunction in the second part of the following example makes it a fragment despite the presence of a subject (“everyone”) and a verb (“laughed”):

- ❖ It was really embarrassing. Especially after everyone laughed.

Correct this by attaching the subordinate clause to the independent clause:

- ❖ It was really embarrassing, especially after everyone laughed.

Phrase-only fragments:

Here the second part—a present participial phrase—tries to stand alone as a sentence:

- ❖ My son keeps several pets in his room. Including hamsters, mice, and gerbils.

Because the participial phrase is meant to modify a noun—in this case “pets”—we can attach it to the independent clause like this:

- ❖ My son keeps several pets, including hamsters, mice, and gerbils, in his room.

In this next example, the present participial phrase comes first; however, it’s still a fragment:

- ❖ Not thinking we would be late. We left the house around nine.

Because “we” were the ones who were “not thinking,” we can simply attach the participial phrase to the front of the independent clause:

- ❖ Not thinking we would be late, we left the house around nine.

Missing-object fragments:

Some verbs require an object, or a thing or person who receives the action of the verb. Without the object, we have a fragment as in this example:

- ❖ A committee named.

Obviously the reader is left wondering what the “committee named.” In order to complete the thought, add an object:

- ❖ A committee named the new building on campus.

Here’s another example with the same problem:

- ❖ My niece broke.

Again, in order to fix the fragment, all we have to do is add an object, in this case what “my niece broke”:

- ❖ My niece broke the dishes.

How to check a paper for sentence fragments:

- ❖ Read the paper aloud from the first sentence to the last.
- ❖ Read the paper backwards one sentence at a time. Start with the last sentence, then the second to the last, the third to the last, etc.
- ❖ Ask yourself, “Does this sentence have both a subject and a complete verb and does it express a complete thought?”