

SLAC SENTENCE FRAGMENTS AND COMPLETE SENTENCES AID

Sentence Fragments and Complete Sentences

Thanks go to Julie for the correction about conjunctions!

Fragments, or incomplete sentences, occur quite frequently when we speak, so it's no wonder sentence fragments are often found in formal writing. Consider this example:

"Hey, Sam, do you want to get some lunch?"

"I can't. Too much homework to finish before class."

Sam's response demonstrates the way we use fragmentation in speech. Though the remark includes the verb "finish" and several nouns, the sentence is a fragment. It lacks a subject *and* verb to define the sentence. A corrected response would include a subject and verb:

"I can't. I have too much homework to finish before class."

Learning how we use fragments in our speech will help us avoid sentence fragments in our writing.

Fragments in Writing

Sometimes fragments occur during the editing process, in trying to break up a longer sentence. Consider the following:

"In class today we talked about Byron's poem *Don Juan* and its main characters. Also Byron's own life and how it related to his works."

Again, the second phrase includes several nouns and a verb, but it cannot stand alone. The subject of the first sentence is "we" and the verb "talked." Since the clause is dependant (a clause that makes no sense except when attached to a sentence) it should not form a sentence.

Correcting a Fragment

There are two easy ways to correct a fragment. We'll use the example above to demonstrate each method:

1) Add a [comma](#) and connect the clause to the sentence

"In class today we talked about Byron's poem and its main characters, as well as Byron's own life and how it related to his works."

2) If the sentence becomes too long or wordy, add the necessary subject-verb to the clause, creating a second sentence.

"In class today we talked about Byron's poem and its main characters. We also discussed Byron's own life and how it related to his works."

How to Spot a Fragment

Put each phrase through a simple test:

- Does it have a verb?
- Does it have a subject?
- Can the phrase make sense standing alone (is it a dependent clause or phrase)?

Any phrase that answers "yes" to all three questions is a sentence. If any of the answers are "no," then it is a fragment.

Other hints:

Fragments often start with words like these. Some are prepositions, others are conjunctions, but both are words that normally join other words:

after, although, and, because, before, but, if, though, unless, until, when, where, who, which, and that.

When you see such a word at the beginning of a sentence, check for a proper subject and verb. If you can't find one, the sentence is a fragment.

ex. "We are going to play tennis outside today. Unless it rains."

Remember, even phrases which may have a noun and verb can be fragments if they could not stand alone. "Unless it rains" makes no sense by itself, so it should be attached to a sentence:

"We are going to play tennis outside today, unless it rains." or "Unless it rains, we will play tennis today."

Google search the following: Sentence Fragments and Complete Sentences and click printable version.

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