



SENTENCE STRUCTURE

Sentence Fragments

Created by Debra Baxley. Revised by Matt Krucker, South Campus Learning Center, Communications Lab
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SENTENCE FRAGMENTS

Sentence Fragments are common errors. This means that a group of words is not a complete sentence. A group of words must have a **subject** and a **finite verb (with tense)**, and must **express a complete idea**. The group of words must not depend on the sentence before it or after it to provide a complete idea.

SENTENCE FRAGMENT: When working on your term paper, first develop a time table when stages must be turned in. **Usually one month before the due date.** (no subject, no finite verb)

CORRECT: When working on your term paper, first develop a time table for when you must turn in stages. **You (subject) should begin (verb tense)** this one month before the due date.

THREE WAYS TO RECOGNIZE A FRAGMENT:

- 1 ► **Read each of your “sentences” from capital letter to period** and ask yourself if someone would understand if you read just that group of words (not including what comes before or after that group).
- 2 ► **Identify the subject, the verb, and the completer** in each of your “sentences.” NOTE: Sometimes it helps to start with the last sentence in your paper and work your way back to the first sentence.
- 3 ► **Before the group of words, place the question, “Is it true that....?”** If the answer is yes with the affirmative (Yes, it is true that studying will increase your grades.), then you have a complete sentence. If the answer is no (No, it is not true that studying for the test), you have a sentence fragment.

THREE WAYS TO CORRECT A FRAGMENT:

- (1) Add a subject.
- (2) Add a finite verb.
- (3) Complete the thought.

THINGS TO NOTE:

► Verb forms ending in **-ing** or in **-en** and that do not have a helping verb with them cannot be used as the single main verb in a complete sentence. The infinitive forms (**to go, to sleep**) are also not finite tense forms.

FRAGMENT:	The man <u>painting</u> our roof.
CORRECT:	The man was painting our roof. (finite verb)
CORRECT:	The man painting our roof has a dangerous job. (adding finite verb).

► A group of words must not depend on the sentence before or after it to provide a complete thought. It must be able to stand alone as a sentence.

FRAGMENT: He thought that he never would pass the test. That he had taken three times already.

CORRECT: He thought that he never would pass the **test that** he had taken three times already.

HINT: Any time that you have a sentence starting with **that, who, or which**, you need to look very carefully at your sentence structure. If it is not a question, it is probably not a complete thought. EX: Which student left his or her pen on the desk? (One exception: **That** man is staring at us. Notice **that** is defining which man.)

Most of the time, **who, that, and which** signal *dependent clauses*. Although *dependent clauses* have a subject and a verb, they cannot stand alone because they do not express a complete idea. They must be joined with an independent clause to avoid a fragment.

FRAGMENT: Because he wanted to transfer to a major university.

CORRECT: Because he wanted to transfer to a major university, he maintained a 4.0 grade point average.

FRAGMENT EXERCISES

DIRECTIONS: Indicate whether the following sentences are correct by placing **C** in the blank or incorrect by placing **I** in the blank.

PRACTICE EXERCISE:

- _____ 1. Before giving up, first try to explore your options.
- _____ 2. On my way to work today the man jogging along the road.
- _____ 3. The man on the corner discovered he had to cross the street at his own risk. Since there was not a crossing guard or a crossing light.
- _____ 4. During the night in the middle of August on the hottest evening of the season.
- _____ 5. Because he had no one to talk to, Chris sat alone and cried.
- _____ 6. Since there was not a crossing guard or a crossing light.
- _____ 7. Planning the menu, buying and putting up decorations, inviting the guests, and purchasing the gifts.
- _____ 8. Besides the two surprise relatives from Jacksonville; a pretty nine-year old from West Palm Beach will also be attending the party.
- _____ 9. Planted a kiss on top of his head.
- _____ 10. After she finished washing the dishes, vacuuming the rugs, and mopping the floors.

ANSWER KEY (answers can vary for corrections)

1. Correct
2. I Missing a finite verb for man
On my way to work today the man **was jogging** along the road.
3. I "Since. . .light" is a subordinate clause not a sentence
The man on the corner discovered he had to cross the street at his own **risk since** there was not a crossing guard or a crossing light
4. I It is just a string of prepositional phrases; needs subject and verb
We had to work during the night in the middle of August on the hottest evening of the season.
5. Correct
6. I Dependent adverbial "since" clause; needs independent clause or you can remove since
There was not a crossing guard or a crossing light.
Since there was not a crossing guard or a crossing light, **he had difficulty seeing.**
7. I A string of participial phrases; needs finite tense verb
Planning the menu, buying and putting up decorations, inviting the guests, and purchasing the gifts **exhausted the hostess.**
8. I Prepositional phrase separated from independent clause by semicolon
Besides the two surprise relatives from **Jacksonville, a** pretty nine-year old from West Palm Beach will also be attending the party.
9. I Missing a subject
Joan planted a kiss on top of his head.
10. I One dependent adverbial clause with a series of participial direct objects
After she finished washing the dishes, vacuuming the rugs, and mopping the floors,
Sarah fell fast asleep on the sofa.