

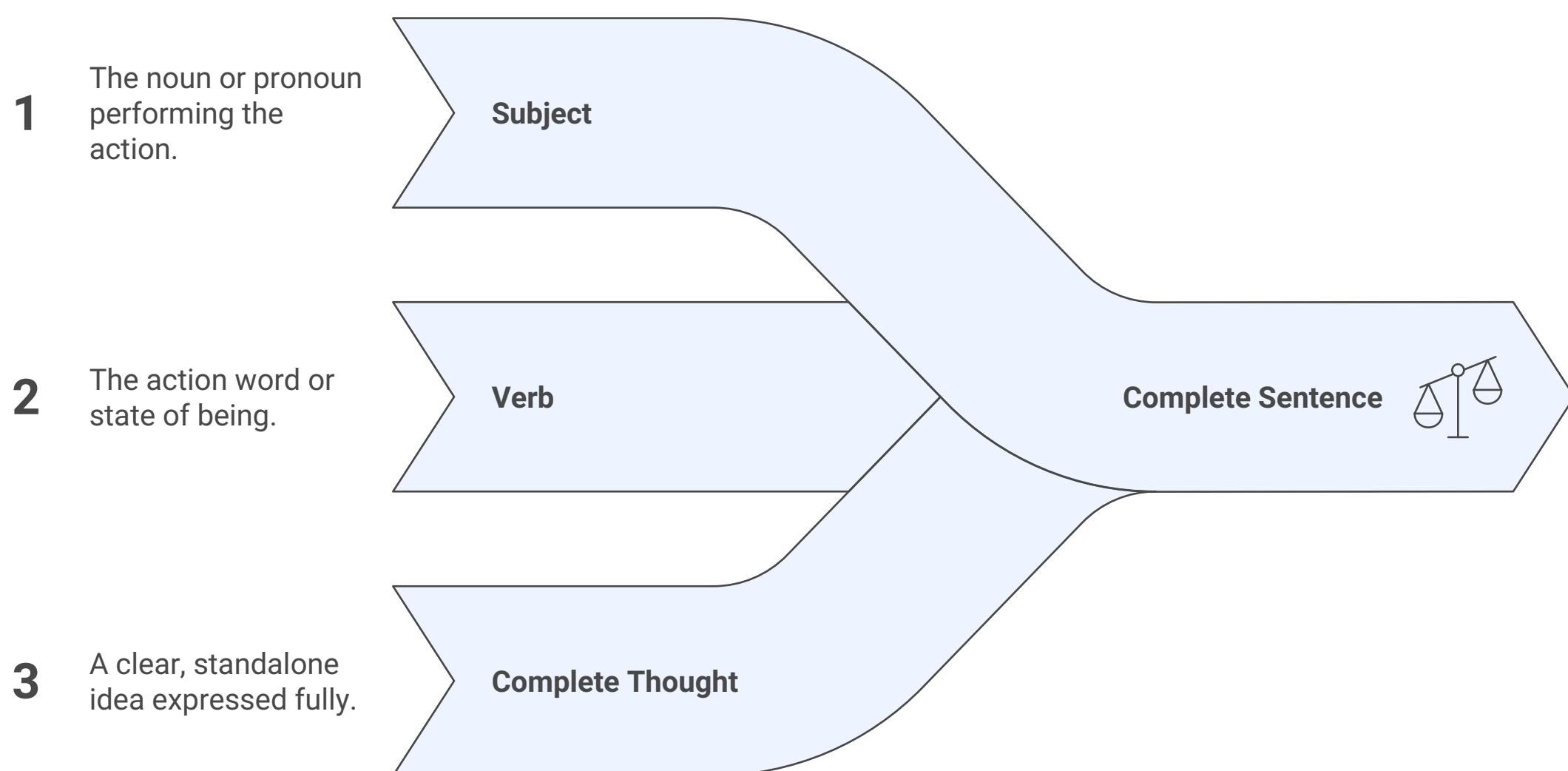
≡ Sentence Fragments: A Comprehensive Guide for Students

This guide provides a comprehensive overview of sentence fragments, a common grammatical error that can weaken writing. We will explore what sentence fragments are, why they occur, how to identify them, and, most importantly, how to correct them to create clear and effective sentences. By understanding and mastering this concept, students can significantly improve the clarity and impact of their written communication.

What is a Sentence Fragment?

A sentence fragment is a group of words that looks like a sentence but is missing one or more essential components. To be a complete sentence, a group of words must have three things:

Building Blocks of a Sentence



Made with Napkin

1. **A Subject:** The subject is the noun or pronoun that performs the action or is being described.
2. **A Verb:** The verb is the action word or state of being.

3. **A Complete Thought:** The group of words must express a complete idea that can stand alone.

If any of these elements are missing, or if the group of words is introduced by a subordinating conjunction without a main clause, it is a sentence fragment.

Why Do Sentence Fragments Occur?

Sentence fragments often occur due to:

- **Carelessness:** Rushing through writing and not carefully checking for completeness.
- **Misunderstanding of Sentence Structure:** Not fully grasping the requirements of a complete sentence.
- **Intentional Use (for stylistic effect):** While generally avoided in formal writing, fragments can be used intentionally in creative writing or informal communication for emphasis or to mimic speech. However, this guide focuses on avoiding unintentional fragments in academic and professional writing.
- **Confusion with Phrases and Clauses:** Mistaking a phrase or a dependent clause for an independent clause.

Identifying Sentence Fragments

Here are some common types of sentence fragments and how to identify them:

1. Missing Subject

These fragments lack the noun or pronoun performing the action.

- **Example:** Went to the store. [Who went?]

* **Correction:** *I* went to the store.

2. Missing Verb

These fragments lack the action word or state of being.

- **Example:** The dog, very fluffy and playful. [What did the dog do or what is the dog?]

* **Correction:** The dog *is* very fluffy and playful.

3. Missing Subject and Verb

These fragments lack both the subject and the verb.

- **Example:** After the long and tiring journey. [What happened after?]

* **Correction:** *We were exhausted* after the long and tiring journey.

4. Subordinate Clause Fragments

These fragments begin with a subordinating conjunction (e.g., *because, although, if, when, since, that, which, who*) but do not have a main clause to complete the thought.

- **Example:** Because it was raining. [What happened because it was raining?]

* **Correction:** *We stayed inside* because it was raining.

* **Alternative Correction:** It was raining.

5. Phrase Fragments

These fragments are phrases (groups of related words) that are punctuated as sentences. Common types include prepositional phrases, participial phrases, and infinitive phrases.

- **Prepositional Phrase Fragment:** *With great enthusiasm.* [What happened with great enthusiasm?]

* **Correction:** She sang *with great enthusiasm*.

- **Participial Phrase Fragment:** *Running down the street.* [Who was running?]

* **Correction:** *The children were* running down the street.

- **Infinitive Phrase Fragment:** *To learn a new language.* [What about learning a new language?]

* **Correction:** *She wants* to learn a new language.

6. "Such As" and "For Example" Fragments

These fragments often introduce examples but do not form a complete sentence on their own.

- **Example:** I enjoy many outdoor activities. Such as hiking and camping.

* **Correction:** I enjoy many outdoor activities, such as hiking and camping.

Correcting Sentence Fragments

There are several ways to correct sentence fragments:

1. Add the Missing Subject or Verb

If the fragment is missing a subject or verb, simply add the missing element to create a complete sentence.

- **Fragment:** Studying for the exam.
- **Correction:** *She is* studying for the exam.

2. Attach the Fragment to a Nearby Sentence

If the fragment is related to a nearby sentence, you can often combine them to form a complete sentence.

- **Fragment:** The movie was exciting. Full of suspense and action.
- **Correction:** The movie was exciting, full of suspense and action.

3. Remove the Subordinating Conjunction

If the fragment is a subordinate clause, you can remove the subordinating conjunction to make it a complete sentence (if the remaining clause can stand alone).

- **Fragment:** Although it was late.
- **Correction:** It was late.

4. Rewrite the Sentence

Sometimes, the best way to correct a fragment is to rewrite the entire sentence to express the intended meaning clearly.

- **Fragment:** After finishing the project.
- **Correction:** After finishing the project, we celebrated our success.

Examples and Practice

Let's look at some more examples and practice correcting sentence fragments:

Example 1:

- **Fragment:** Which made the situation even worse.
- **Correction:** That decision made the situation even worse.

Example 2:

- **Fragment:** Because of the heavy traffic.
- **Correction:** Because of the heavy traffic, we were late for the meeting.

Example 3:

- **Fragment:** A beautiful sunset over the ocean.
- **Correction:** We watched a beautiful sunset over the ocean.

Practice: Identify and correct the sentence fragments in the following sentences:

1. Walking through the park.

2. Although I was tired.
3. Such as apples, bananas, and oranges.
4. The old house, with its peeling paint.
5. Before going to bed.

Answers:

1. *Fragment: Walking through the park. Correction: I was walking through the park.*
2. *Fragment: Although I was tired. Correction: Although I was tired, I finished my work.*
3. *Fragment: Such as apples, bananas, and oranges. Correction: I like fruits such as apples, bananas, and oranges.*
4. *Fragment: The old house, with its peeling paint. Correction: The old house, with its peeling paint, looked abandoned.*
5. *Fragment: Before going to bed. Correction: I brush my teeth before going to bed.*

Conclusion

Mastering the ability to identify and correct sentence fragments is crucial for clear and effective writing. By understanding the components of a complete sentence and practicing the techniques outlined in this guide, students can avoid this common error and improve the overall quality of their written work. Remember to always proofread carefully and ask yourself: Does this group of words have a subject, a verb, and express a complete thought? If the answer is no, it's likely a sentence fragment that needs correction.