

# fragments



This chapter will explain how to avoid the most common types of fragments. A fragment is a word group that lacks a subject or a verb and/or one that does not express a complete thought.

## FRAGMENT:

*Whenever I go to school.*

"Whenever," a dependent word, cannot introduce a complete thought, so it cannot stand alone.

## CORRECT SENTENCE:

*Whenever I go to school, I take the bus.*

The fragment introduces a complete thought.

Every sentence must have a subject and a verb and must express a complete thought. A word group that lacks a subject or a verb and does not express a complete thought is a *fragment*. Following are the most common types of fragments that you might write:

1. Dependent-word fragments
2. -ing and to fragments
3. Added-detail fragments
4. Missing-subject fragments

Once you understand what specific kinds of fragments you might write, you will be able to eliminate them from your writing. The following pages explain each type.

## Dependent-Word Fragments

Some word groups that begin with a dependent word are fragments. Following is a list of common dependent words. Whenever you start a sentence with one of these words, you must be careful that a fragment does not result.

### Dependent Words

after	if, even if	when, whenever
although, though	in order that	where, wherever
as	since	whether
because	that, so that	which, whichever
before	unless	while
even though	until	who
how	what, whatever	whose

In the example below, the word group beginning with the dependent word *After* is a fragment:

After I cashed my paycheck. I treated myself to dinner.

A *dependent statement*—one starting with a dependent word like *after*—cannot stand alone. It depends on another statement to complete the thought. *After I cashed my paycheck* is a dependent statement. It leaves us hanging. We expect to find out the same sentence, *what happened after* the writer cashed the check. When a writer does not follow through and complete a thought, a fragment results.

To correct the fragment, simply follow through and complete the thought:

After I cashed my paycheck, I treated myself to dinner.

Remember, then, that *dependent statements by themselves are fragments*. They must be attached to a statement that makes sense standing alone.

Here are two other examples of dependent-word fragments:

I won't leave the house. Until I hear from you.

Rick finally picked up the socks. That he had thrown on the floor days ago.

*Until I hear from you* is a fragment; it does not make sense standing by itself. We want to know in the same statement *what cannot happen* until I hear from you. The writer must complete the thought. Likewise, *That he had thrown on the floor days ago* is not in itself a complete thought. We want to know in the same statement what *that* refers to.

### How to Correct a Dependent-Word Fragment

In most cases you can correct a dependent-word fragment by attaching it to the sentence that comes after it or to the sentence that comes before it. Look at how the fragments above have been converted:

I cashed my paycheck, I treated myself to dinner.

(The fragment has been attached to the sentence that comes after it.)

I won't leave the house until I hear from you.

(The fragment has been attached to the sentence that comes before it.)

Rick finally picked up the socks that he had thrown on the floor days ago.

(The fragment has been attached to the sentence that comes before it.)

Another way of connecting a dependent-word fragment is simply to eliminate the dependent word by rewriting the sentence:

I cashed my paycheck and then treated myself to dinner.

I will wait to hear from you.

He had thrown them on the floor days ago.

### TIPS

- Use a comma if a dependent-word group comes at the *beginning* of a sentence (see also page 567):

After I cashed my paycheck, I treated myself to dinner.

However, do not generally use a comma if the dependent word group comes at the *end* of a sentence.

I won't leave the house until I hear from you.

Rick finally picked up the socks that he had thrown on the floor days ago.

*(continued)*

- b. Sometimes the dependent words *who*, *that*, *which*, or *where* appear at the very start but *near* the start of a word group. A fragment often results:

I drove slowly past the old brick house. The place where I grew up.

*The place where I grew up* is not in itself a complete thought. We want to know in the same statement *where was the place* the writer grew up. The fragment can be corrected by attaching it to the sentence that comes before it:

I drove slowly past the old brick house, the place where I grew up.

## Activity

1

Turn each of the following dependent-word groups into a sentence by adding a word that starts the sentence. Note the examples.

### EXAMPLES

Although I felt miserable

Although I felt miserable, I tried to smile for the photographer.

The man who found my wallet

The man who found my wallet returned it the next day.

1. If I don't get a raise soon

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2. Because it was raining

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3. When I heard the news

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4. Because I couldn't find the car keys

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#### 4. The restaurant that we tried

Chapter 24 Fragments

Underline the dependent-word fragment in each item. Then rewrite the items, connecting each fragment by attaching it to the sentence that comes before or the sentence that comes after it—whichever sounds more natural. Use a comma after the dependent-word group if it starts the sentence.

#### Activity

2

1. Whenever I spray deodorant. My cat arches her back. She thinks she is hearing a hissing enemy.
2. My father, a salesman, was on the road all week. We had a great time playing football in the house. Until he came home for the weekend.
3. If Kim takes too long saying good-bye to her boyfriend. Her father will start flicking the porch light. Then he will come out with a flashlight.
4. Scientists are studying mummified remains. That are thousands of years old. Most of the people were killed by parasites.
5. After I got to class. I realized my report was still on the kitchen table. I had been working there the night before.

## -ing and to Fragments

When an -ing word appears at or near the start of a word group, a fragment may result. Such fragments often lack a subject and part of the verb. In the items on the following page, underline the word groups that contain -ing words. Each is a fragment.

1. Ellen walked all over the neighborhood yesterday. Trying to find her dog Bo. Several people claimed they had seen him only hours before.
2. We sat back to watch the movie. Not expecting anything special. To our surprise, we clapped, cheered, and cried for the next two hours.
3. I telephoned the balloon store. It being the day before our wedding anniversary. I knew my wife would be surprised to receive a dozen heart-shaped balloons.

People sometimes write *-ing* fragments because they think that the subject of one sentence will work for the next word group as well. Thus, in item 1 the writer thinks that the subject *Ellen* in the opening sentence will also serve as the subject for *Trying to find her dog Bo*. But the subject must be in the same sentence.

### How to Correct *-ing* Fragments

1. Attach the fragment to the sentence that comes before it or the sentence that comes after it, whichever makes sense. Item 1 could read "Ellen walked all over the neighborhood yesterday trying to find her dog Bo."
2. Add a subject and change the *-ing* verb part to the correct form of the verb. Item 2 could read "We didn't expect anything special."
3. Change *being* to the correct form of the verb *be* (*am*, *are*, *is*, *was*, *were*). Item 3 could read "It was the day before our wedding anniversary."

### How to Correct to Fragments

When *to* appears at or near the start of a word group, a fragment sometimes results.

At the Chinese restaurant, Tim used chopsticks. To impress his date. He spent one hour eating a small bowl of rice.

The second word group is a fragment and can be corrected by adding it to the preceding sentence:

At the Chinese restaurant, Tim used chopsticks to impress his date.

## Activity

Underline the *-ing* fragment in each of the following items. Then correct them by using the method described in parentheses.

3

### EXAMPLE

Stepping hard on the accelerator. Armon tried to beat the truck to the intersection. He lost by a hood.

(Add the fragment to the sentence that comes after it.)

Stepping hard on the accelerator, Armon tried to beat the truck to the intersection.

1. Marble-sized hailstones fell from the sky. Flattening the young plants in the cornfield. A year's work was lost in an hour.  
 (Add the fragment to the preceding sentence.)

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2. A noisy fire truck suddenly raced down the street. Coming to a stop at my house. My home security system had sent a false alarm.  
 (Correct the fragment by adding the subject *it* and changing *coming* to the proper form of the verb, *came*.)

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3. My phone doesn't ring. Instead, a light on it blinks. The reason for this being that I am partially deaf.  
 (Correct the fragment by changing *being* to the proper form of the verb, *is*.)

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Underline the *-ing* or *to* fragment in each item. Then rewrite each item, correcting the fragment by using one of the three methods described above.

Looking at the worm on the table. Shelby groaned. She knew she wouldn't like what the biology teacher said next.

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I put a box of baking soda in the freezer. To get rid of the musty smell. However, my ice cubes still taste like old socks.

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Staring at the clock on the far wall. I nervously began my speech. I was afraid to look at any of the people in the room.

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## Activity

4

4. Jerome sat quietly at his desk. Fantasizing about the upcoming weekend, he might meet the girl of his dreams at Saturday night's party.
5. To get to the bus station from here. You have to walk two blocks out of your way. The sidewalk is torn up because of construction work.

## Added-Detail Fragments

Added-detail fragments lack a subject and a verb. They often begin with one or more of the following words:

also	especially	except	for example
like	including	such as	

Underline the one added-detail fragment in each of the following items:

1. Before a race, I eat starch foods. Such as bread and spaghetti. The carbohydrates provide quick energy.
2. Bob is taking a night course in auto mechanics. Also, one in plumbing. He wants to save money on household repairs.
3. My son keeps several pets in his room. Including hamsters and mice.

People often write added-detail fragments for much the same reason they write -ing fragments. They think the subject and verb in one sentence will serve for the next word group. But the subject and verb must be in *each* word group.

## How to Correct Added-Detail Fragments

1. Attach the fragment to the complete thought that precedes it. Item 1 could read "Before a race, I eat starch foods such as bread and spaghetti."
2. Add a subject and a verb to the fragment to make it a complete sentence. Item 2 could read "Bob is taking a night course in auto mechanics. Also, he is taking one in plumbing."
3. Insert the fragment within the preceding sentence. Item 3 could read "My son keeps several pets, including hamsters and mice, in his room."

Underline the fragment in each of the following items. Then make it a sentence by rewriting it, using the method described in parentheses.

**EXAMPLE**

My mother likes watching daytime television shows. Especially old movies and soap operas. She says that daytime television is less violent.  
(Add the fragment to the preceding sentence.)

My mother likes watching daytime television shows, especially old movies and soap operas.

1. Luis works evenings in a video store. He enjoys the fringe benefits. For example, seeing the new movies first.  
(Correct the fragment by adding the subject and verb *he sees*.)

2. Bob's fingernails are ragged from years of working as a mechanic. And his fingertips are always black. Like ink pads.  
(Attach the fragment to the preceding sentence.)

3. Electronic devices keep getting smaller. Such as video cameras and cell phones. Some are so tiny they look like toys.  
(Correct the fragment by inserting it in the preceding sentence.)

Underline the added-detail fragment in each item. Then rewrite to correct the fragment. Use one of the three methods described on the previous page.

Left-handed students face problems. For example, right-handed desks. Spiral notebooks can also be uncomfortable to use.

Mrs. Fields always wears her lucky clothes to bingo. Such as a sweater printed with four-leaf clovers. She also carries a rhinestone horseshoe.

**Activity**

5

**Activity**

6

3. Hundreds of moths were swarming around the stadium lights like large flecks of snow. However, I knew they couldn't be snow—it was eighty degrees outside.
4. Trevor buys and sells paper collectors' items. For instance, comic books and movie posters. He sets up a display at local flea markets and carnivals.
5. I wonder now why I had to learn certain subjects. Such as geometry. No one has ever asked me about the hypotenuse of a triangle.

## Missing-Subject Fragments

In each item below, underline the word group in which the subject is missing:

1. Alicia loved getting wedding presents. But hated writing thank-you notes.
2. Mickey has orange soda and potato chips for breakfast. Then eats more junk food, like root beer and cookies, for lunch.

## How to Correct Missing-Subject Fragments

1. Attach the fragment to the preceding sentence. Item 1 could read "Alicia loved getting wedding presents but hated writing thank-you notes."
2. Add a subject (which can often be a pronoun standing for the subject in the preceding sentence). Item 2 could read "Then he eats more junk food, like root beer and cookies, for lunch."

## Activity

7

Underline the missing-subject fragment in each item. Then rewrite that part of the item needed to correct the fragment. Use one of the two methods of correction described above.

1. Every other day, Kara runs two miles. Then does fifty sit-ups. She hasn't lost weight, but she looks trimmer and more muscular.

## Review: How to Check for Sentence Errors

Read your paper aloud from the last sentence to the first. You will be better able to see and hear whether each sentence is a complete thought.

If you think a word group may be a fragment, check to see if it contains a subject and a verb and expresses a complete thought.

More specifically, be on the lookout for:

- Dependent-word fragments (starting with who, whom, which, that, since, when, and before)
- ing and to fragments (-ing and to)

- Added-detail fragments (as, also, and especially)
- Missing-subject fragments

I like all kinds of fresh pizza. But refuse to eat frozen pizza. The cheese is always dried out, and the crust tastes like leather.

Many people are allergic to seafood. They break out in hives when they eat it. And can even have trouble breathing.

To distract me, the dentist tugged at a corner of my mouth. Then jabbed a needle into my gums and injected a painkiller. I hardly felt it.

Last semester, I took six courses. And worked part-time in a discount drug store. Now that the term is all over, I don't know how I did it.

### A Review: How to Check for Sentence Fragments

1. Read your paper aloud from the *last* sentence to the *first*. You will be better able to see and hear whether each word group you read is a complete thought.
2. If you think a word group may be a fragment, ask yourself, Does this contain a subject and a verb and express a complete thought?
3. More specifically, be on the lookout for the most common fragments:
  - Dependent-word fragments (starting with words like *after, because, since, when, and before*)
  - -ing and to fragments (-ing and to at or near the start of a word group)
  - Added-detail fragments (starting with words like *for example, such as, also, and especially*)
  - Missing-subject fragments (a verb is present but not the subject)



**Review Test**

1

Each word group in the following student paragraph is numbered. In the space provided, write C if a word group is a complete sentence; write F if it is a fragment. You will find eight fragments in the paragraph.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. I'm starting to think that there is no safe place left. <sup>2</sup>To ride
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. a bicycle. <sup>3</sup>When I try to ride on the highway, to
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. go school. <sup>4</sup>I feel like a rabbit being pursued by predators.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. <sup>5</sup>Drivers whip past me at high speeds. <sup>6</sup>And try to see how
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. close they can get to my bike without actually killing me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. <sup>7</sup>When they pull onto the shoulder of the road or make a
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. right turn. <sup>8</sup>Drivers completely ignore my vehicle. <sup>9</sup>On city
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. streets, I feel more like a cockroach than a rabbit. <sup>10</sup>Drivers
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. in the city despise bicycles. <sup>11</sup>Regardless of an approaching
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. bike rider. <sup>12</sup>Street-side car doors will unexpectedly open.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. <sup>13</sup>Frustrated drivers who are stuck in traffic will make nasty
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. comments. <sup>14</sup>Or shout out obscene propositions. <sup>15</sup>Even
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. pedestrians in the city show their disregard for me. <sup>16</sup>While
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. jaywalking across the street. <sup>17</sup>The pedestrian will treat
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. me, a law-abiding bicyclist, to a withering look of disdain.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. <sup>18</sup>Pedestrians may even cross my path deliberately. <sup>19</sup>As if to
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. prove their higher position in the pecking order of the city
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. streets. <sup>20</sup>Today, bicycling can be hazardous to the rider's
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. health.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20.

Now (on separate paper) correct the fragments you have found. Attach the fragments to sentences that come before or after them or make whatever other changes needed to turn each fragment into a sentence.

## Review Test

2

Chapter 14 Fragments

Underline the two fragments in each item below. Then make whatever changes are needed to turn the fragments into sentences.

EXAMPLE

Sharon was going to charge her new suit.<sup>b</sup> But then decided to pay cash instead. She remembered her New Year's resolution.<sup>t</sup> To cut down on her use of credit cards.

1. We both began to tire. As we passed the halfway mark in the race. But whenever I'd hear Reggie's footsteps behind me. I would pump my legs faster.
2. I have a few phobias. Such as fear of heights and fear of dogs. My nightmare is to be trapped in a hot-air balloon. With three German shepherds.
3. Punching all the buttons on his radio in sequence. Phil kept looking for a good song. He was in the mood to cruise down the highway. And sing at the top of his voice.
4. My children joke that we celebrate "Hanumas." With our Jewish neighbors. We share Hanukkah and Christmas activities. Including making potato pancakes at their house and decorating our tree.
5. I noticed two cartons of cigarettes. Sticking up out of my neighbor's trash bag. I realized he had made up his mind. To give up smoking for the fifth time this year.
6. I've decided to leave home. And rent an apartment. By being away from home and on my own. I will get along better with my parents.
7. The alley behind our house was flat. Except for a wide groove in the center. We used to sail paper boats down the groove. Whenever it rained hard enough to create a "river" there.
8. Don passed the computer school's aptitude test. Which qualifies him for nine months of training. Don kidded that anyone could be accepted. If he or she had \$4,000.

**Review Test****3**

Turn each of the following word groups into a complete sentence.

**EXAMPLES**

With trembling hands

With trembling hands, I headed for the front of the classroom.

As the race wore on

Some runners dropped out as the race wore on.

1. After the storm passed

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2. Such as fresh fruits and vegetables

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3. During the mystery movie

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4. Unless I study harder

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5. Enrique, who works at his uncle's restaurant

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6. Knocking over the table

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7. To get to class on time

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8. Hurrying to get dressed

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9. Up in the attic

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10. Losing my temper

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**Run-Ons**

Run-ons are two complete sentences joined together by a single punctuation sign given to mark the boundary between them. It refers to both comma splice and fused sentences.

**KEY TERMS**

**clause:** a group of words that can stand alone

**comma splice:** a run-on sentence formed by joining two clauses together by a comma instead of a period or semicolon

Comma splice

Correct sentence

**dependent clause:** a clause that does not express a complete thought; also called a subordinating clause

**fused sentence:** a run-on sentence formed by joining two clauses together without any punctuation between them

Fused sentence

Correct sentence

**independent clause:** a clause that expresses a complete thought