3 Sentences and Fragments

Before you read any further, try the exercise below. When you look at its title, you might roll your eyes and think, "Well *duh*, of course I know what a sentence is," but sometimes it isn't nearly as obvious as you might assume. **The ability to distinguish between sentences and fragments is the basis for correctly using the punctuation discussed in the following chapters.** If you have trouble determining when a statement is and is not a sentence, you will find it extremely difficult to know when to use periods, commas, semicolons, and colons.

Is It a Sentence?

For each statement below, circle "Sentence" if it can stand alone as an independent sentence and "Fragment" if it cannot. Once you have read the statement carefully, spend no more than a couple of seconds selecting your answer. Try to complete the full exercise in under two minutes. (Answers p. 201)

1. Louis Armstrong was one of the greatest jazz musicians of the twentieth century.

   Sentence Fragment

2. He was one of the greatest jazz musicians of the twentieth century.

   Sentence Fragment

3. Louis Armstrong, who was one of the greatest jazz musicians of the twentieth century.

   Sentence Fragment

4. Who was one of the greatest jazz musicians of the twentieth century.

   Sentence Fragment

5. Louis Armstrong, who was one of the greatest jazz musicians of the twentieth century, was a vocalist as well as a trumpet player.

   Sentence Fragment

6. Today, he is considered one of the greatest jazz musicians of the twentieth century.

   Sentence Fragment

7. He is, however, considered one of the greatest jazz musicians of the twentieth century.

   Sentence Fragment

8. He is now considered one of the greatest jazz musicians of the twentieth century.

   Sentence Fragment

9. Because of his virtuosic trumpet skills, Louis Armstrong is considered one of the greatest jazz musicians of the twentieth century.

   Sentence Fragment

10. Although he was one of the most virtuosic trumpet players of his generation.

    Sentence Fragment

11. Many people considering Louis Armstrong the greatest jazz musician of all time.

    Sentence Fragment

12. Many of them consider him the greatest jazz musician of all time.

    Sentence Fragment

13. Many consider him the greatest jazz musician of all time.

    Sentence Fragment

14. Many of whom consider him the greatest jazz musician of all time.

    Sentence Fragment

15. Having shown an unusual gift for music early in his childhood, Louis Armstrong, who was born in New Orleans on August 4, 1901.

    Sentence Fragment

16. Having shown an unusual gift for music early in his childhood, Louis Armstrong, who was born in New Orleans on August 4, 1901, went on to become one of the greatest jazz musicians of the twentieth century.

    Sentence Fragment

17. Moreover, Armstrong, who spent much of his early life in poverty, went on to become one of the greatest jazz musicians of the twentieth century.

    Sentence Fragment

18. Nicknamed "Satchmo," Louis Armstrong, who was born in New Orleans on August 4, 1901, grew up to become one of the greatest jazz musicians of the twentieth century and, perhaps, one of the greatest musicians of all time.

    Sentence Fragment

To reiterate: Although SAT questions—in contrast to the sentences above—always appear in short passages, the ability to quickly identify a statement as either a sentence or a non-sentence is crucial. Without that knowledge you won't know what sort of punctuation to use when separating it from other statements. In fact, dealing with sentences like the ones on the previous page in context can often make things *harder*, not easier, because there is all sorts of other information present to distract you.

For example, let's say you weren't sure about #13 (*Many consider him the greatest jazz musician of all time*). If you saw the following question, you might get stuck.

In the decades after the legendary trumpeter Louis Armstrong retired from performing, his fame continued to grow. Jazz fans and scholars now unanimously celebrate him as one of the greatest jazz musicians of the twentieth _____him to be among the greatest jazz musicians of all time.

1 Mark for Review

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

Ⓐ	century, many consider
Ⓑ	century many consider
Ⓒ	century. Many consider
Ⓓ	century; many considering

Unfortunately, there's no way to answer this question for sure without knowing whether you're dealing with one sentence or two. You might eliminate B) and D) because they sound awkward, but then you're stuck between (A) and (C). If you think the second clause is a sentence, you'll want to put in a period and choose (C). But if it isn't a sentence, then the comma must be all right, and the answer must be (A).

You stare at the question for a while, thinking it over. *Many consider him to be among the greatest jazz musicians of all time...* That sounds kind of weird. Besides, what sort of sentence would just say *many*, without saying many of *what*? You can say *many people*, that's fine, but not just *many*. It just sounds wrong. You don't even know who the sentence is talking about. You can't start a sentence like that. Unless it's some kind of trick... But (C) is just too weird. No way can that be the answer.

So you pick (A).

But actually, the answer *is* (C).

You've just fallen into a classic trap: you thought that because *Many consider him the greatest jazz musician of all time* didn't make sense out of context, it couldn't be a sentence. But guess what: **whether a statement is or is not a sentence has absolutely nothing to do with its meaning.**

Beginning on the next page, we're going to take a very simple sentence and look at the various elements that can get added onto it without changing the fact that it's a sentence. We're also going to look at some common types of fragments and how they get formed.

Building a Sentence

Every sentence must contain two things:

1) A **subject**

2) A **conjugated verb** that corresponds to the subject.

A sentence can contain only one word (*Go!* is a sentence because the subject, *you*, is implied) or consist of many complex clauses, but provided it contains a subject and a verb, it can be considered grammatically complete *regardless of whether it makes sense outside of any context.*

A. Simple Sentence

Sentence: The tomato grows.

This is known as a simple sentence because it contains only a subject (*the tomato*) and a verb (*grows*), which tells us what the subject does. Because it can stand on its own as a sentence, it can also be called an **independent clause**.

B. Prepositional Phrase(s)

If we want to make our sentence a little longer, we can add a **prepositional phrase**. A prepositional phrase is a phrase that begins with a preposition, a **time** or **location** word that comes **before a noun**. Common prepositions include *in, to, with, from, for, at, by,* and *on.* (For an extended list, see p. 41.)

Sentence: The tomato grows **around the world.**

Sentences can contain many prepositional phrases, sometimes one after the other.

Sentence: The tomato grows **in many shapes and varieties in greenhouses around the world**.

A prepositional phrase can also be placed between the subject and the verb. When that is the case, the prepositional phrase starts at the preposition and ends right before the verb.

Sentence: The tomatoes **in the greenhouse** grow in many varieties and colors.

A prepositional phrase can also be placed at the **beginning** of a sentence.

Sentence: **In the greenhouse,** the tomatoes grow in many varieties and colors.

A prepositional phrase **cannot**, however, stand alone as a complete sentence.

Fragment: **In** the greenhouse

Fragment: **In** many shapes and varieties in greenhouses around the world

C. Pronoun as Subject

Nouns can also be replaced by **pronouns**: words such as *it*, *she*, and *they*. For example, in the sentence *The tomato grows*, we can replace the subject, *tomato*, with the singular pronoun *it*:

Sentence: It grows.

This is actually still a sentence because it has a subject (*it*) and a verb that corresponds to the subject (*grows*). The only difference between this version and the version with the noun is that here we don't know what the subject, *it*, refers to.

This is where a lot of students run into trouble. They assume that if a statement doesn't make sense out of context, then it can't be a sentence. But again, those two things are not necessarily related.

As is true for the original version, we can rewrite the longer versions of our sentence using pronouns.

Sentence: **It** grows around the world.

Sentence: **It** grows in many shapes and varieties in greenhouses around the world.

If we wanted to make the subject plural, we could replace it with the plural pronoun *they*.

Sentence: Tomatoes grow.

Sentence: **They** grow.

Sentence: **They** grow in many shapes and varieties in greenhouses around the world.

It and *they* are the most common **subject pronouns** (pronouns that can replace nouns as the subject of a sentence), but many other pronouns can also be used as subjects. Some of them can refer only to people; some can refer only to things; and some can refer to both people and things.

People	Things	People or Things
I	It	None
You	This	One
S/he	That	Each
We		Every
No one	Nothing	Any
	Anything	Few
Anyone	Everything	Both
Anybody	Something	Some
		Several
Someone		Many
Somebody		More
		Most
Everyone		Other(s)
Everybody		All
		They

"Group" Pronouns

One very common point of confusion often involves **"group" pronouns** such as *some, several, few, many,* and *others*. These pronouns can be used to begin clauses in two different ways, one of which creates an independent clause and the other of which creates a dependent clause.

Let's start with these two sentences:

Sentence: Many tomatoes are grown in greenhouses around the world.

Sentence: Most people believe that the tomato is a vegetable.

People generally don't have too much trouble recognizing that these are sentences. They have pretty clear subjects (*many tomatoes, most people*) and verbs (*are, believe*), and they make sense by themselves. The problem arises when we take away the nouns, *tomatoes* and *people,* and start to deal with the pronouns on their own.

Pronoun (of them) = sentence

In this usage, the pronoun simply acts as a subject and is used to replace a noun. It is often followed by the phrase *of them,* but it can be used by itself as well.

Sentence: **Many (of them)** are grown in greenhouses around the world.

Sentence: **Most (of them)** believe that the tomato is a vegetable.

Taken out of any context, the above examples don't make much sense, nor do they provide any real information. Regardless of how odd you find these examples, however, **they are still sentences** because each one contains a subject (*many, most*) and a verb (*are, believe*) that corresponds to it.

Pronoun + of which / whom = fragment

When an indefinite pronoun is followed by *of which* or *of whom,* it creates a **dependent clause,** which by definition cannot stand alone as a full sentence.

Fragment: **Many of which** are grown in greenhouses around the world

Fragment: **Most of whom** believe that the tomato is a vegetable

Which means:

Incorrect: The tomato is used by cooks around the **world, most of them** believe that it is a vegetable rather than a fruit.

Correct: The tomato is used by cooks around the **world. Most of them** believe that it is a vegetable rather than a fruit.

Correct: The tomato is used by cooks around the **world, most of whom** believe that it is a vegetable rather than a fruit.

D. Adverbs

Adverbs **modify verbs** and **clauses**. Most adverbs are created by adding *-ly* onto adjectives.

Slow	→	Slowly
Current	→	Currently
Important	→	Importantly

A second type of adverb, however, does not end in *-ly*.

Some of these adverbs are **adverbs of time**, which tell you **when** or **how often** something occurs. Others are **transitions** that indicate relationships between ideas.

Again	Meanwhile	Next	Often	Then
Consequently	Moreover	Never	Still	Today
Furthermore	Nevertheless	Now	Sometimes	Yesterday

Important: Adverbs have no grammatical effect whatsoever on a sentence. A sentence to which an adverb is added will continue to be a sentence, regardless of where the adverb is placed.

Sentence: **Now**, the tomato grows in many shapes and varieties in greenhouses around the world.

Sentence: The tomato **currently** grows in many shapes and varieties in greenhouses around the world.

Sentence: The tomato grows in many shapes and varieties in greenhouses around the world **today**.

E. Non-Essential Information

Information can be inserted between the subject and the verb in the form of a **non-essential** word or phrase/clause.

Sentence: The tomato**, which is one of the most popular salad ingredients,** grows in many shapes and varieties in greenhouses around the world.

Non-essential clauses describe nouns (usually the subject). They are **surrounded by commas** (one before, one after); often begin with **"w-words"** such as *who* and *which*; and are usually **followed by a verb**.

Sentence: The tomato**, however,** grows in many varieties in greenhouses around the world.

These clauses or words are called "non-essential" because when they are removed, the sentence still makes grammatical sense.

Fragment: The tomato~~, which is one of the most popular salad ingredients,~~ and it grows in many shapes and varieties in greenhouses around the world.

Sentence: The tomato~~, which is one of the most popular salad ingredients,~~ grows in many shapes and varieties in greenhouses around the world.

Appositives

Although non-essential clauses frequently begin with "w-words" (also known as **relative pronouns**), they are not required to do so. You could also see a non-essential clause that looks like this:

> The tomato, **one of the most popular salad ingredients,** grows in many shapes and varieties in greenhouses around the world.

A non-essential clause that begins with a noun is known as an **appositive**. Appositives can also appear as descriptions at the beginnings or ends of sentences, as in the examples below.

Beginning: **A popular salad ingredient,** the tomato grows in many shapes and varieties in greenhouses around the world.

End: In greenhouses around the world grow many shapes and varieties of the tomato, **a popular salad ingredient**.

A non-essential clause cannot stand alone as a complete sentence. As a **shortcut**, know that a statement (not a question) beginning with a "w-word" such as *which, who(se)*, or *where* is not a complete sentence.*

Fragment: Which is one of the most popular salad ingredients

Fragment: Who think that the tomato is a vegetable

Sentence: One of the most popular salad ingredients, the tomato grows in many shapes and varieties in greenhouses around the world.

In addition, a sentence **cannot stop** right after a non-essential clause. If it does, it is no longer a complete sentence but rather a fragment, and it should not have a period or semicolon placed after it.

Fragment: The tomato, which is one of the most popular salad ingredients

Fragment: The tomato, one of the most popular salad ingredients

Although the first version does contain the verb *is*, that verb does not correspond to the subject, *the tomato*. Instead, it corresponds to the pronoun *which* at the beginning of the new clause. In order to create a sentence, we can remove *which*, restoring the verb to its proper subject, *the tomato*.

Sentence: The tomato **is** one of the most popular salad ingredients.

Alternately, we can place a main verb after the non-essential clause and complete the sentence with additional information.

Sentence: The tomato, (which is) one of the most popular salad ingredients, **grows** in many shapes and varieties in greenhouses around the world.

*The only exception to this rule involves cases in which a "w-word" functions as a subject, e.g., *Where the meeting would be located was a subject of intense debate.* Although this usage is rare, you should be aware that it is acceptable.

F. Participles and Gerunds

Every verb has two **participles**:

1) Present participle

The present participle is formed by adding *-ing* to the verb

Talk → talking
Paint → painting
Throw → throwing

2) Past participle

The past participle is usually formed by adding *-ed* or *-n* to the verb

Talk → talked
Paint → painted
Throw → thrown

A **participial phrase begins with a participle** and can be in either the **present** or the **past**.

Let's get back to our sentence. Now we're going to add a participial phrase at the beginning, using the present participle *originating*.

Sentence: **Originating in South America**, the tomato, one of the most popular salad ingredients, grows in many shapes and varieties in greenhouses around the world.

To form the past tense, we can use the present participle *having* + past participle of the main verb (*originated*).

Sentence: **Having originated in South America**, the tomato, one of the most popular salad ingredients, grows in many shapes and varieties in greenhouses around the world.

We can also use the past participle of the verb *grow*.

Sentence: **Grown originally in South America**, the tomato, one of the most popular salad ingredients, is now produced in many shapes and varieties in greenhouses around the world.

Participial phrases can appear in the beginning (as in the above examples), middle, or end of a sentence.

Middle: The tomato, **cultivated initially in South America during the first millennium B.C.,** is now grown in many shapes and varieties in greenhouses around the world.

End: The tomato is now grown in greenhouses around the world, **having first been cultivated in South America in the first millennium B.C.**

Participial phrases **cannot** stand alone as sentences, however.

Fragment: Originating in South America.

Fragment: Having first been cultivated in South America in the first millennium B.C.

Fragment: Grown originally in South America.

Fragment: Grown originally in South America, the tomato, one of the most popular salad ingredients.

Gerunds are identical in appearance to present participles: they are created by adding *-ing* to verbs. Whereas participles act as modifiers, gerunds act as nouns. They typically follow pronouns, e.g., *I was irritated by his whistling*, or prepositions, e.g., *The gannet is a bird that catches fish by diving from heights of up to 100 feet.*

At this point, however, the **most important** thing to understand is a word that ends in *-ing* is **not a verb**. A clause that contains a subject and an *-ing* word rather than a conjugated verb is a **fragment**.

Fragment: Tomatoes **growing** in many shapes and varieties in greenhouses around the world

In order to turn the fragment into a sentence, we must eliminate the gerund by **conjugating** the verb.

Sentence: Tomatoes **grow** in many shapes and varieties in greenhouses around the world.

Important: Answer choices that contain BEING (gerund of *to be*), are usually wrong. In addition to creating fragments, the use of *being* often leads to wordy and awkward constructions.

Being is also **irregular**—the conjugated forms of the verb look completely different from the gerund form. In order to easily correct errors with *being*, you should make sure to know all of the conjugated (third person) forms of the verb *to be*.

	Present	Past
Singular	is	was
Plural	are	were

Present

Fragment: Today, the tomato **being** grown in greenhouses around the world

Sentence: Today, the tomato **is** grown in greenhouses around the world.

Past

Fragment: Originally, tomatoes **being** cultivated only in South America

Sentence: Originally, tomatoes **were** cultivated only in South America.

G. Conjunctions

There are two main types of conjunctions:

1) **Coordinating conjunctions** join two independent clauses.

2) **Subordinating conjunctions** join an independent clause and a dependent clause.

Coordinating Conjunctions

There are seven coordinating conjunctions, collectively known by the acronym **FANBOYS**.

For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So

The most common FANBOYS conjunctions are *and, but,* and *so,* which should be your primary focus. We'll talk a lot more about FANBOYS in the next chapter, but for now you should know that a single clause beginning with one of these conjunctions is not a complete sentence.

Fragment: **And** today, tomatoes are cultivated in greenhouses around the world

Sentence: **Today**, tomatoes are cultivated in greenhouses around the world.

Subordinating Conjunctions

Somewhere around third grade, you may have learned that you should never start a sentence with *because*. While this rule is taught with the best of intentions, it's unfortunately only half right. In reality, it's perfectly acceptable to begin a sentence with *because*—sometimes.

Here's the rule: *Because* is a type of conjunction known as a **subordinating conjunction**. A clause that begins with a subordinating conjunction **cannot stand on its own as a sentence** and is therefore **dependent**.

Fragment: **Because** tomatoes are colorful and full of flavor

If, however, an independent clause is placed after the dependent clause, the whole sentence can correctly begin with a subordinating conjunction.

Sentence: **Because** tomatoes are colorful and full of flavor, they are one of the most popular salad ingredients.

Other common subordinating conjunctions include the following:

After	Before	Since	When
Although	Despite	Though	Whenever
As	Even though	Unless	Whereas
Because	If	Until	While

In the examples below, the incorrect version of each sentence contains only a dependent clause, while the correct version that follows contains a dependent clause followed by an independent clause.

Fragment: **Although** tomatoes have been cultivated since the first millennium B.C.

Sentence: **Although** tomatoes have been cultivated since the first millennium B.C., they did not become popular in the United States until the mid-nineteenth century.

Fragment: **When** tomatoes were first brought to Europe from South America

Sentence: **When** tomatoes were first brought to Europe from South America, many people believed that the small yellow fruits were poisonous.

Note that when a clause begun by a subordinating conjunction contains a subject (underlined below), that clause must contain a conjugated verb rather than an *-ing* word.

Fragment: Most tomatoes grown today have smooth surfaces, although some older plants and most modern beefsteaks **showing** pronounced ribbing

Sentence: Most tomatoes grown today have smooth surfaces, although some older plants and most modern beefsteaks **show** pronounced ribbing.

When no subject is present, however, an *-ing* word can acceptably appear in the same phrase as some subordinating conjunctions, primarily ones indicating time (e.g., *while, when, before, after, since*).

Sentence: Since **becoming** a central ingredient in Italian cooking during the nineteenth century, the tomato has grown in popularity worldwide.

Exercise: Sentences and Fragments (answers p. 202)

Label each of the following phrases as either a sentence or a fragment. Rewrite all fragments as sentences by changing, adding, or eliminating one word only.

1.	Since 2009, physicists having been intrigued by possible evidence of dark matter in the center of the Milky Way galaxy.
2.	Only around 25 percent of the variation in the human life span is influenced by genes, with the rest depending on other factors, including accidents, injuries, and exposure to substances that accelerate aging.
3.	When they catch sight of their prey, and peregrine falcons drop into a steep, swift dive at more than 200 miles an hour.
4.	The observational branch of astronomy relies on the collection of data from celestial bodies, whereas the theoretical branch using computers to analyze their movements.
5.	Each spring, students who gather from around the world for the FIRST Robotics Competition, an experience that can change lives.
6.	Many forms of meditation, a practice that has been examined by researchers over the last several decades, and have been deemed ineffective.
7.	They enjoy national popularity, with the average person in the United States consuming over 25 pounds of them each year.
8.	Although findings from one recent study about meteorites suggest that water has been present on Earth since the planet was formed.
9.	Usually structured differently from autobiographies, but memoirs follow the development of an author's personality rather than the writing of his or her works.

10.	Chicago's metropolitan area, sometimes called Chicagoland, which is home to 9.5 million people and is the third largest in the United States.
11.	She began adding elements of gospel music into her songs in early 1961, releasing her first gospel-influenced album later that year.
12.	According to author Nadine Gordimer, the process of writing fiction is largely unconscious, emerging from what people learn and how they live.
13.	In the nineteenth century, the Great Lakes being a major highway for transportation, migration, and trade, as well as home to a large number of aquatic species.
14.	Amelia Griffiths—one of the most prominent amateur scientists of the early nineteenth century—was a beachcomber who compiled many important collections of algae specimens.
15.	Most of which have now been replaced by more modern forms of transportation, including cars, subways, and trams.