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CHAPTER

Fragments

CHAPTER PREVIEW

What Fragments Are

Dependent-Word
Fragments

-ing and to Fragments

Added-Detail Fragments

Missing-Subject
Fragments

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY

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*.

What follows are a number of fragments and sentences. See if you can complete the statement that explains each fragment.

1. Telephones. *Fragment*

Telephones ring. *Sentence*

“Telephones” is a fragment because, although it has a subject (*Telephones*), it lacks a _____ (*ring*) and so does not express a complete thought.

2. Explains. *Fragment*

Darrell explains. *Sentence*

“Explains” is a fragment because, although it has a verb (*Explains*), it lacks a _____ (*Darrell*) and does not express a complete thought.

3. Scribbling notes in class. *Fragment*

Jayne was scribbling notes in class. *Sentence*

“Scribbling notes in class” is a fragment because it lacks a _____ (*Jayne*) and also part of the _____ (*was*). As a result, it does not express a complete thought.

4. When the dentist began drilling. *Fragment*

When the dentist began drilling, I closed my eyes. *Sentence*

“When the dentist began drilling” is a fragment because we want to know *what happened when* the dentist began drilling. The word group does not follow through and _____.

Answers are on page 620.

What Fragments Are

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 people write:

- Dependent-word fragments
- *-ing* and *to* fragments
- Added-detail fragments
- Missing-subject fragments

Once you understand the specific kind or kinds of fragments that you might write, you should be able to eliminate them from your writing. The following pages explain all four types of fragments.

Dependent-Word Fragments

Some word groups that begin with a dependent word are fragments. Here is a list of common dependent words:

Common Dependent Words

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

Whenever you start a sentence with one of these dependent words, you must be careful that a dependent-word fragment does not result. The word group beginning with the dependent word *After* in the following selection is a fragment.

After I stopped drinking coffee, I began sleeping better at night.

A *dependent statement*—one starting with a dependent word such as *After*—cannot stand alone. It depends on another statement to complete the thought. “After I stopped drinking coffee” is a dependent statement. It leaves us hanging. We expect in the same sentence to find out *what happened after* the writer stopped drinking coffee. When a writer does not follow through and complete a thought, a fragment results.



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She's filling out an accident report form after slipping on the wet floor at a café. Her explanation needs to be as accurate and clear as possible, so she's jotted down her ideas first. Lauren's always had trouble with fragments, and after reading over her draft, she realizes she has some editing to do. Help Lauren find and revise the fragments in her draft.

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

After I stopped drinking coffee, I began sleeping better at night.

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 that need to be corrected.

Brian sat nervously in the dental clinic. While waiting to have his wisdom tooth pulled.

Maria decided to throw away the boxes. That had accumulated for years in the basement.

EXPLANATION: “While waiting to have his wisdom tooth pulled” is a fragment; it does not make sense standing by itself. We want to know in the same statement *what Brian did* while waiting to have his tooth pulled. The writer must complete the thought. Likewise, “That had accumulated for years in the basement” is not in itself a complete thought. We want to know in the same statement *what that refers to*.

How to Correct Dependent-Word Fragments

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:

After I stopped drinking coffee, I began sleeping better at night.

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

Brian sat nervously in the dental clinic while waiting to have his wisdom tooth pulled.

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

Maria decided to throw away the boxes that had accumulated for years in the basement.

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

Another way of correcting a dependent-word fragment is to eliminate the dependent word and make a new sentence:

I stopped drinking coffee.

He was waiting to have his wisdom tooth pulled.

They had accumulated for years in the basement.

Do not use this second method of correction too frequently, however, because it may cut down on interest and variety in your writing style.

Use a comma if a dependent-word group comes at the *beginning* of a sentence:

After I stopped drinking coffee, I began sleeping better at night.

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

Brian sat nervously in the dental clinic while waiting to have his wisdom tooth pulled.

Maria decided to throw away the boxes that had accumulated for years in the basement.

Sometimes the dependent words *who*, *that*, *which*, or *where* appear not at the very start but *near* the start of a word group. A fragment often results.

Today I visited Melissa Cooper. A friend who is in the hospital.

“A friend who is in the hospital” is not in itself a complete thought. We want to know in the same statement *who* the friend is. The fragment can be corrected by attaching it to the sentence that comes before it:

Today I visited Melissa Cooper, a friend who is in the hospital.

EXPLANATION: Here a comma is used to set off “a friend who is in the hospital,” which is extra material placed at the end of the sentence.

TIP

Some instructors refer to a dependent-word fragment as a dependent clause. A clause is simply a group of words having a subject and a verb. A clause may be independent (expressing a complete thought and able to stand alone) or dependent (not expressing a complete thought and not able to stand alone). A dependent clause by itself is a fragment. It can be corrected simply by adding an independent clause.

Correcting Dependent-Word Fragments

ACTIVITY 1

Turn each of the dependent-word groups into a sentence by adding a complete thought. Put a comma after the dependent-word group if a dependent word starts the sentence.

EXAMPLES

Before I begin college

Before I begin college, I want to brush up on my math and English skills.

The horoscope forecast that I read

The horoscope forecast that I read predicted new love, but I am happily married.

HINT

For item 1, describe something you do before you log off from the computer.

1. Before I log off from the computer

2. Even though I cheated

3. Although my parents never went to college

4. The pills that the doctor prescribed

5. If I remember correctly

ACTIVITY 2

Combining Sentences to Correct Dependent-Word Fragments

Underline the dependent-word fragment (or fragments) in each selection. Then correct each fragment by attaching it to the sentence that comes before or the sentence that comes after—whichever sounds more natural. Put a comma after the dependent-word group if it starts the sentence.

HINT

In item 1, which word group begins with a dependent word?

1. When the waitress coughed in his food. Frank lost his appetite. He didn't even take home a doggy bag.

2. Our power went out. During a thunderstorm. I lost the paper I was writing on the computer.

3. Tony doesn't like going to the ballpark. If he misses an exciting play. There's no instant replay.

4. After the mail carrier comes. I run to our mailbox. I love to get mail.
Even if it is only junk mail.
-
-

5. Even though she can't read. My little daughter likes to go to the library. She chooses books with pretty covers. While I look at the latest magazines.
-
-

-ing and to Fragments

When a word ending in *-ing* or the word *to* 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.

Underline the word groups in the following examples that contain *-ing* words. Each of these is an *-ing* fragment.

EXAMPLE 1

I spent all day in the employment office. Trying to find a job that suited me. The prospects looked bleak.

EXAMPLE 2

Danielle surprised Brian on the nature hike. Picking blobs of resin off pine trees. Then she chewed them like bubble gum.

EXAMPLE 3

Eric took an aisle seat on the bus. His reason being that he had more legroom.

TIP

People sometimes write *-ing* fragments because they think the subject in one sentence will work for the next word group as well. In Example 1, they might think the subject *I* in the opening sentence will also serve as the subject for “*Trying to find a job that suited me.*” But the subject must actually be *in* the 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. Example 1 could read, “I spent all day in the employment office, trying to find a job that suited me.” (Note that here a comma is used to set off “trying to find a job that suited me,” which is extra material placed at the end of the sentence.)

» OR «

2. Add a subject and change the *-ing* verb part to the correct form of the verb. Example 2 could read, "She picked blobs of resin off pine trees."
» OR «
3. Change *being* to the correct form of the verb *be* (*am, are, is, was, were*). Example 3 could read, "His reason was that he had more legroom."

How to Correct *to* Fragments

As previously noted, when *to* appears at or near the start of a word group, a fragment sometimes results.

Fragment: To remind people of their selfishness. Otis leaves handwritten notes on cars that take up two parking spaces.

The first word group in the preceding example is a *to* fragment. It can be corrected by adding it to the sentence that comes after it.

Correct: To remind people of their selfishness, Otis leaves handwritten notes on cars that take up two parking spaces.

EXPLANATION: Here a comma is used to set off "To remind people of their selfishness," which is introductory material in the sentence.

ACTIVITY 3

Correcting *-ing* Fragments

Underline the *-ing* fragment in each of the three items that follow. Then make the fragment a sentence by rewriting it, using the method described in parentheses.

EXAMPLE

Everyone at the meeting heard Tina's stomach growl. Not having eaten breakfast. She tried to satiate her hunger with a breath mint.

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

Not having eaten breakfast, she tried to satiate her hunger with a breath mint.

1. Desmond looked anxiously at his cell phone. Waiting for his supervisor to return his call. He needed to call in sick to work.

(Add the *-ing* fragment to the preceding sentence.)

2. Using one of the computers at the library. Hari could not access several Web sites, which he later learned were blocked.

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

3. A virus infected my computer. As a result, destroying data.

(Add the subject *it* and change the verb *destroying* to the correct form, *destroyed*.)

Correcting -ing or to Fragments

ACTIVITY 4

Underline the *-ing* or *to* fragment in each selection. Then rewrite each selection correctly, using one of the methods of correction described on pages 167–168.

HINT

In item 1, add the *-ing* fragment to the preceding sentence.

1. Some workers dug up the street near our house. Causing frequent vibrations inside. By evening, all the pictures on our walls were crooked.

2. I had heard about the surprise party for me. I therefore walked slowly into the darkened living room. Preparing to look shocked.

3. Dribbling skillfully up the court. Luis looked for a teammate who was open. Then he passed the ball.

4. As I was dreaming of a sunny day at the beach, the alarm clock rang. Wanting to finish the dream. I pushed the Snooze button.

5. To get back my term paper. I went to see my English instructor from last semester. I also wanted some career advice.

Added-Detail Fragments

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

also
especially

except
for example

including
such as

See if you can underline the one added-detail fragment in each of these examples:

EXAMPLE 1

Tony has trouble accepting criticism. Except from Lola. She has a knack for tact.

EXAMPLE 2

My apartment has its drawbacks. For example, no hot water in the morning.

EXAMPLE 3

I had many jobs while in school. Among them, busboy, painter, and security guard.

TIP

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 as well. 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. Example 1 could read: "Tony has trouble accepting criticism, except from Lola." (Note that here a comma is used to set off "except from Lola," which is extra material placed at the end of the sentence.)

» OR «

2. Add a subject and a verb to the fragment to make it a complete sentence. Example 2 could read: "My apartment has its drawbacks. For example, there is no hot water in the morning."

» OR «

3. Change words as necessary to make the fragment part of the preceding sentence. Example 3 could read: "Among the many jobs I had while in school have been busboy, painter, and security guard."

Identifying and Correcting Fragments**ACTIVITY 5**

Underline the fragment in each selection that follows. Then make it a sentence by rewriting it, using the method described in parentheses.

EXAMPLE

My husband and I share the household chores. Including meals. I do the cooking and he does the eating.

(Add the fragment to the preceding sentence.)

My husband and I share the household chores, including meals.

- Denise puts things off until the last minute. For example, waiting until the night before a test to begin studying.

(Add the subject *she* and change *waiting* to the proper form of the verb, *waits.*)

- My eleventh-grade English teacher picked on everybody. Except the athletes. They could do no wrong.

(Add the fragment to the preceding sentence.)

- Bernardo always buys things out of season. For example, an air conditioner in December. He saves a lot of money this way.

(Add the subject and verb *he bought.*)

Identifying and Correcting Added-Detail Fragments**ACTIVITY 6**

Underline the added-detail fragment in each selection. Then rewrite that part of the selection needed to correct the fragment. Use one of the three methods of correction described on page 170.

HINT

In item 1, attach the added-detail fragment to the preceding sentence.

- My daughter faithfully watches the programs on the Disney Channel. Including *Hannah Montana*, *Wizards of Waverly Place*, and *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody*. She has never missed a single episode.

2. There are certain snacks I love to eat when I watch TV. Especially microwave popcorn. So I always try to keep several bags in the cupboard.
-
-

3. Some of the printers in the computer lab are unreliable. The ink-jet one, for instance. It often needs a new printer cartridge.
-
-

4. By noon, the stadium parking lot was packed with tailgaters. With some of them grilling barbecue ribs and drinking ice-cold beer.
-
-

5. Some Web sites contain annoying pop-up advertisements. For example, free online game Web sites. These sites are filled with distracting marketing messages.
-
-

Missing-Subject Fragments

In each example, underline the word group in which the subject is missing.

EXAMPLE 1

One example of my grandfather's generosity is that he visits sick friends in the hospital. And takes along get-well cards with a few dollars folded in them.

EXAMPLE 2

The weight lifter grunted as he heaved the barbells into the air. Then, with a loud groan, dropped them.

TIP

People write missing-subject fragments because they think the subject in one sentence will apply to the next word group as well. But the subject, as well as the verb, must be in *each* word group to make a sentence.

How to Correct Missing-Subject Fragments

1. Attach the fragment to the preceding sentence. Example 1 could read: "One example of my grandfather's generosity is that he visits sick friends in the hospital and takes along get-well cards with a few dollars folded in them."

» OR «

2. Add a subject (which can often be a pronoun standing for the subject in the preceding sentence). Example 2 could read: "Then, with a loud groan, he dropped them."

Correcting Missing-Subject Fragments

ACTIVITY 7

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

HINT

In item 1, the missing subject is *he*.

1. Jack tripped on his shoelace. Then looked around to see if anyone had noticed.
-
-

2. I started the car. And quickly turned down the blaring radio.
-
-

3. The fire in the fireplace crackled merrily. Its orange-red flames shot high in the air. And made strange shadows all around the dark room.
-
-

4. The receptionist at that office is not very well trained. She was chewing gum and talking with a coworker at the same time she took my call. And forgot to take my name.
-
-

5. My elderly aunt never stands for long on a bus ride. She places herself in front of a seated young man. And stands on his feet until he gets up.
-
-

TIP

How to Check for 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 any word group is 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 such as *after*, *because*, *since*, *when*, and *before*)
 - *-ing* and *to* fragments (*-ing* or *to* at or near the start of a word group)
 - Added-detail fragments (starting with words such as *for example*, *such as*, *also*, and *especially*)
 - Missing-subject fragments (a verb is present but not the subject)

ACTIVITY 8**Editing and Rewriting**

Working with a partner, read the following short paragraph and underline the five fragments. Then use the space provided to correct the fragments. Feel free to discuss the rewrite quietly with your partner and refer back to the chapter when necessary.

1Did you know that one in every five children is overweight? **2**If you think that these kids will simply outgrow their “baby fat.” **3**You’re wrong. **4**The number of overweight children in this country has doubled in the past twenty years. **5**Creating a health epidemic. **6**Too many children spend hours watching television. **7**And playing video games when they should be outside playing. **8**They consume sugary, high-calorie snacks. **9**When they should be eating fresh fruits and low-fat yogurt. **10**These children are at a higher risk for high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and type 2 diabetes. **11**They are also more likely to be teased at school, miss school, and develop low self-esteem. **12**These problems often follow them through adolescence and into adulthood. **13**Sadly, overweight kids have a 70 percent greater chance of becoming overweight adults. **14**Everyone, however, can make a difference. **15**For example, being a positive role model. **16**So, live a healthy life. **17**Turn off your television and take a twenty-minute walk.

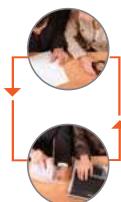
1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

ACTIVITY 9**Creating Sentences**

Working with a partner, make up your own short fragments test as directed.

1. Write a dependent-word fragment in the space below. Then correct the fragment by making it into a complete sentence. You may want to begin your fragment with the word *before*, *after*, *when*, *because*, or *if*.

Fragment _____

Sentence _____

2. In the space below, write a fragment that begins with a word that has an *-ing* ending. Then correct the fragment by making it into a complete sentence. You may want to begin your fragment with the word *laughing, walking, shopping, or talking*.

Fragment _____

Sentence _____

3. Write an added-detail fragment in the space below. Then correct the fragment by making it into a complete sentence. You may want to begin your fragment with the word *also, especially, except, or including*.

Fragment _____

Sentence _____

REFLECTIVE ACTIVITY

1. Look at the paragraph that you revised in Activity 8. How has correcting fragments improved the paragraph? Is it clearer? Easier to read? Explain.
2. Explain what it is about fragments that you find most difficult to remember and apply. Use an example to make your point clear. Feel free to refer to anything in this chapter.



REVIEW TEST 1

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

EXAMPLES

Wanting to impress everyone

Wanting to impress everyone, I told a white lie.

Until the semester begins

Until the semester begins, I plan to work forty hours a week.

- 1 After we left the classroom

- 2 Whenever the weather is bad

- 3 Behind the TV stand

- 4 If I am late for my class

5. Tyler, who is extremely successful

6. To get to trust each other better

7. Which was surprising

8. Will see me tomorrow

9. Texting a message on my phone

10. Guessing the answer

REVIEW TEST 2

Underline the fragment in each item that follows. Then correct the fragment in the space provided.

EXAMPLE

Sam received all kinds of junk mail. Then complained to the post office. Eventually, some of the mail stopped coming.
Then he complained to the post office.

1. Fascinated, Nina stared at the stranger. Who was standing in the doorway. She wondered if she could convince him they had met before.

2. Trees can survive on a steep mountain slope if they obey two rules. They must grow low to the ground. And bend with the wind.

3. While waiting in line at the supermarket. I look in people's baskets. Their food choices give hints about their personalities.

4. I saw spectacular twin rainbows through the kitchen window. So I rushed to get my camera. To take a picture before they vanished.

5. Whenever you buy cotton clothes, get them one size too large. By allowing for shrinkage. You will get a longer life out of them.

6. My nutty cousin cuts the address labels off his magazines. Then pastes them on envelopes. This way, he doesn't have to write his return address.

7. Marian never has to buy ketchup or mustard. Because she saves the extra packets that come with fast-food orders.

8. The soccer players were amazing. Using their feet as well as most people use their hands.

9. My husband climbed his first mountain yesterday. Now he's calling all our friends. To tell them about his peak experience.

10. The trivia book listed some interesting facts about Babe Ruth. For instance, he spoke German fluently. Also, kept cool on hot days by putting wet cabbage leaves under his cap.

REVIEW TEST 3

In the space provided, write *C* if a word group is a complete sentence; write *frag* if it is a fragment. The first two are done for you.

frag

1. When the bus drivers went on strike.

C

2. I saw many people giving rides to strangers.

3. Some even drove out of their way for others.

- _____ 4. Especially when the weather was bad.
- _____ 5. One rainy day, I saw an elderly woman pull her cab over to the curb.
- _____ 6. Yelling and waving for five shivering students to get into her car.
- _____ 7. Until the strike finally ended.
- _____ 8. Scenes like that were not uncommon.
- _____ 9. It seems that community problems bring people together.
- _____ 10. By weakening the feeling that we live very separate lives.

Now correct the *fragments* you have found. Attach each fragment to the sentence that comes before or after it, or make whatever other change is needed to turn the fragment into a sentence. Use the space provided. The first one is corrected for you.

1. *When the bus drivers went on strike, I saw many people giving rides to strangers.*

 2. _____

 3. _____

 4. _____

 5. _____

-

REVIEW TEST 4

On separate paper, write quickly for five minutes about the town or city where you live. Don't worry about spelling, punctuation, finding exact words, or organizing your thoughts. Just focus on writing as many words as you can without stopping.

After you have finished, go back and make whatever changes are needed to correct any fragments in your writing.



For additional materials on Chapter 7, visit www.mhhe.com/langan.