

10 Fragments

1. DEFINITION

When some students write, they use a capital letter at the beginning of and a period after some word group that is not a complete sentence. Such an incomplete expression is called a fragment. Look at this word group: *Between daylight and dusk.*

The student who wrote those words put them forward as a complete sentence: the capital *B* and the period after *dusk* suggest that. But any reader wants to ask, "Well, what happened between daylight and dusk?" We have no complete information, so we say that the word group is a fragment.

If you place a period at the end of the sentence, it must make sense as a complete thought. It must contain a *verb* (tells what is going on in the sentence) and a *subject* (tells who or what the sentence is about). Often, writers think that a subject and verb in one sentence will work for another word group as well. But that creates the fragment mistake.

Look at this fragment surrounded by sentences: All the events took place one April day. *Between daylight and dusk.* The robbers took all the jewels from the safe.

The words *between daylight and dusk* do not themselves express a complete thought although they follow naturally enough from the sentence that comes before. There is no verb in that word group, nor is there any subject.

2. HOW TO DISCOVER FRAGMENTS IN YOUR WRITING

Read your sentences aloud. Stop after each period and ask if the words you have just read express a complete thought. (If you read from the last sentence to the first, you will be sure to notice incomplete thoughts.)

3. THREE WAYS TO CORRECT FRAGMENTS

- Add the fragment to a sentence that appears right before it. The new sentence must make sense: All the events took place one April day *between daylight and dusk*. The robbers took all the jewels from the safe.
- Add the fragment to a sentence that appears right after it. The new sentence must make sense: All the events took place one April day. *Between daylight and dusk*, the robbers took all the jewels from the safe.
- Add a new subject and verb: All the events took place one April day. *Between daylight and dusk* two *men* *sneaked* into the office. The robbers took all the jewels from the safe.

Hint: To review subjects and verbs, see Card 35.

EXERCISES

A. The following groups of sentences contain fragments. On separate paper, correct each fragment by joining it to

the sentence that comes before or after, depending on the sense. Or you may add your own subject and verb to the fragment.

1. Peg and Al hated to fly. In stormy weather. They weren't even comfortable flying when the weather was fine.
 2. The entire audience waited impatiently. For the speaker to arrive. The air was heavy with anticipation.
 3. I just love rare, juicy steaks anytime. After playing handball. Even Joey likes them.
 4. No one spoke or even whispered. At exactly 4:00 p.m. The curtain went up, and the fans gasped.
 5. Suddenly he whirled on them and screamed. In stumbling confusion. The crowd stepped back on the curb.
- B.** Now that you have learned to avoid fragments, use the following word groups to start or finish complete sentences of your own. *For example:* in the old garden. In the old garden it was always cool and green. *Or:* It was always cool and green in the old garden. Write your answers on separate paper.
1. during the monsoon season
 2. in the still of the night
 3. off the southern coast of California
 4. at the stroke of midnight

4. OTHER KINDS OF FRAGMENTS

- So far you have learned about one kind of sentence fragment, a group of words—without subject or verb or complete thought—mistakenly written as a sentence. Some word groups can be fragments even though they seem to contain a verb: (1) *Running* down the street. (2) *To hear* the Rolling Stones in concert. (3) *Tied* to the stake.
- The word groups above are all fragments because they do not express a complete thought. You may remember two simple verb tests: (1) Use *yesterday*, *today*, *tomorrow* in front of the word you think is a verb. If the word changes in form (tense) it's a verb; (2) Use *I*, *she*, *he*, *it*, *we*, or *you* in front of the word you think is a verb. If the words make sense together you have a verb.
- Let us test *running* in these ways: (1) Yesterday *running* down the street. (Running did not change its form, therefore it is not a verb and the word group is a fragment.) (2) I *running* or he *running*. (Neither of these word groups makes sense so it is a fragment.)
- Now you test the words *to hear* and *tied*. Even though *running*, *to hear*, *tied* all suggest actions, none is a verb. Furthermore, there is no subject in these word groups. Who is *running* or is *to hear* or is *tied*? (See Card 12 for more information on *-ing* words.)

5. MORE WAYS TO CORRECT FRAGMENTS

In order to correct this type of fragment:

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- Add a subject and a helping word which acts as a verb (*is, was, were, am, are*): *I was running down the street.* *Mary was to hear the Rolling Stones in concert.*

- Add a subject and change the form of the word that looks like the verb but is not: *I ran down the street.*

Mary heard the Rolling Stones.

- Add a complete thought with its own subject and verb. This is usually the best method of correction. *Examples:* (1) Running down the street, *I saw Jerry.* (The italicized words form a complete thought.) (2) To hear the Rolling Stones in concert, *she cut classes.* (The italicized words form a complete thought.)

Hint: In a paragraph, you can often add to the fragment the complete thought that comes before or after it.

Suppose the fragment appeared in your writing this way: *I watched that old lady. Running down the street. She looked frightened.* Add the fragment to the complete thought before or after it as in these two examples: (1) *I watched that old lady running down the street, or* (2) *Running down the street, she looked frightened.*

EXERCISES

Four of the following word groups are fragments. Rewrite them on separate paper so that they are correct. In most cases correct the fragment by adding a complete thought to the end.

1. To go to the movies.
2. Studying for my sociology final.
3. Dissatisfied with her job and her lack of advancement.
4. Struggling in the dark, he finally found the light switch.
5. Jumping for joy.

6. FRAGMENTS WITH SUBJECTS AND VERBS

- Here are examples of fragments that contain a subject (italicized) and verb (boldfaced), but are still fragments because they do not express a complete thought:

(1) When *Mary was* sixteen, (2) *Who looked* very tired.

In these fragments we want to know what happened when Mary was sixteen. We want to know who it is who looked very tired. To correct these fragments, add a complete thought to the beginning or the end of the fragment, whichever makes sense. *Examples:* When Mary was sixteen, she worked at Macy's. I saw Carl, who looked very tired.

- Be careful of any sentence that begins with one of these words even if it contains a subject and a verb: because, since, while, before, that, what, if, whenever, although, unless, which, whatever, where, until, how, when, whom, besides, as, so that, though, after, who, whoever. Unless you have a complete thought before or after a word group beginning with one of these words, you are bound to have a fragment.

Hint: Sometimes you can leave out one of the words above. That will correct the error, but it also prevents you from using words that will improve your style. It is usually best, therefore, to correct the errors in the ways explained to you above.

- Just because a word group is long, it is not necessarily complete.

- Read each word group that appears as a sentence slowly. It should make sense—express a complete thought—without having to depend for completeness upon sentences before or after.

EXERCISES

A. On separate paper, correct the following fragments by adding complete thoughts to make them whole sentences.

1. When the identity of Jack the Ripper is known.
2. Before he took a course in weaving.
3. Although the smell of liver and onions was everywhere.
4. Unless David cools off.
5. So that she never has to go through that again.
6. Until he can catch the No. 3 bus.
7. That Laura painted as a child.
8. If I can be of some help.

B. On separate paper, correct the following fragments in any of the ways explained earlier.

1. The group's music echoed off the cracked walls. Even though the room was as big as a barn.
2. Whatever it is. I like it.
3. We all plunge into the future. Unable to see what lies ahead.
4. Wherever there is sunshine. That's where you'll find Tim.
5. Let's take a bigger car. So that Bradley can go.
6. Whenever I see your smiling face. I feel much better.
7. You'd think Adriana could swim. After all those lessons.
8. My toes itch. Every time I see you.

C. Complete the following assignments on separate paper. Write two or three related sentences for each topic.

1. Write about your favorite food. Start your description this way: Making my mouth water.
2. Tell what you would do after winning an important victory. Start this way: After I won the Academy Award.
3. Write about something you would rather be doing than sitting where you are right now. Use this word group to begin: Because I would rather not be here.
4. Explain what you see from where you are sitting. Begin with this: Looking to my left.
5. Describe someone you have not seen in a long time. Start this way: When I last saw him.
6. Tell what you often think of just before you go to sleep. Use this word group to begin: When I start to get drowsy.