Fragments
Table of Contents

Definition and Examples – 2
Common Types of Fragments – 3
Missing a Subject – 3
How to Correct Fragments That Are Missing a Subject – 4
Exercise 1 – page 5
Missing a Verb – 6
Exercise 2 – page 7
Missing a Subject and Verb – 8
Exercise 3 – page 9
Missing a Complete Thought – 10
Exercise 4 – page 11
What Is a Fragment?

A sentence fragment is a group of words that cannot stand alone as a complete sentence. To be a sentence, a word group must consist of at least one full independent clause. An independent clause has a subject and a verb, and it should be able to stand alone as a complete thought.

You can test whether a word group is a fragment by asking the following questions:

a. Does it have a subject?
b. Does it have a verb?
c. Does it have a complete thought?

If the answer to any of the above questions is no, then the word group is a fragment.

Look at the following word groups and test whether they are fragments.

1. Gave the book to his brother
   
   Missing a subject (We don’t know who gave the book.)

2. John wishing for an easier test
   
   Missing a part of the verb (“Wishing” needs a helping verb)

3. After she gave him the cookies
   
   Incomplete thought (Although it has a subject (she) and a verb (gave), the word “after” makes this word group a fragment because the clause is dependent.)
Common Types of Fragments

Much of the information and examples in this section comes from chapter 24 of *College Writing Skills with Readings* by John Langan, which lists the following common types of fragments and describes how to correct them.

1. **Fragments that are missing a subject**
2. **Fragments that are missing a verb**
3. **Fragments that are missing a subject and verb**
4. **Fragments that are missing a complete thought**

By recognizing each of the common types of fragments and knowing how to correct them, you should be able to avoid them.

**Missing a Subject**

1. The following example shows two word groups, and one of the word groups is a fragment.

   My brother swims one mile every other day. And runs at least two miles a day.

   The second word group is missing a subject. The writer implies that the brother is the subject, but because he is not in the word group, it is a fragment.

2. Another example of a missing-subject fragment is the word group that starts with *ing*. The following shows two word groups, and one of them is a fragment.

   I spent all day in the library. Trying to find a book that suited me.

   In this example, the writer might think the subject in the opening sentence will also serve as the subject for "Trying to find a book that suited me." However, the subject must actually be *in* the sentence.

3. The final example of a missing-subject fragment is the word group that starts with *to*. The following shows two word groups, and one of them is a fragment.

   To remind employees about their responsibilities. The manager leaves handwritten notes in their lockers.

   In this example, the writer implies that the manager is the subject of the first word group, but, because the manager is not in the first word group, it is a fragment.
How to Correct Fragments That Are Missing a Subject

1. Attach the fragment to the sentence that comes before it or after it, whichever makes sense.

   Example 1 could read:
   
   My brother swims one mile every other day and runs at least two miles a day.

   Example 2 could read:

   I spent all day in the library, trying to find a book that suited me.

   Example 3 could read:

   To remind employees about their responsibilities, the manager leaves handwritten notes in their lockers.

2. Add a subject (which can often be a pronoun standing for the subject in the preceding sentence).

   My brother swims one mile every other day. He runs at least two miles a day.

3. Add a subject and change the -ing verb part to a different form of the verb.

   I spent all day in the library. I was trying to find a book that suited me.
Exercise 1

Make the following fragments sentences by rewriting them. Use the methods described above.

1. John bought many lottery tickets. Hoping to win a fortune.

2. Mary politely rejected the offer to attend the concert. And decided to stay home and study.

3. To make a good impression on her new boss. Sue worked through her lunch hour.

4. Hiking through the woods. The group saw many kinds of wildlife.

5. Beth looked through the library catalog. And checked the Internet. Trying to find material for her paper.

The answers can be found at the end of the module.
**Missing a Verb**

The following example shows two word groups, and one of the word groups is a fragment.

**Mike, a baseball player. He plays first base.**

In this example, the first word group is a fragment because it is missing a verb.

The following example shows three word groups, and one of the word groups is a missing-verb fragment.

**Alice forgot about the rolls in the oven. She stirring the sauce. She was daydreaming about an upcoming concert.**

In this example, the second word-group is a fragment because it is missing a helping verb.

**How to Correct Fragments That Are Missing a Verb**

1. Add the verb.

The first example from above could read:

**Mike is a baseball player. He plays first base.**

Here, simply taking out the comma and adding the verb “is” completes the sentence.

The second example from above could read:

**Alice forgot about the rolls in the oven. She was stirring the sauce. She was daydreaming about an upcoming concert.**
Exercise 2

Make the following fragments sentences by rewriting them. Use the methods described above.

1. The college constructing a new technology building.

2. The price of gas rise this summer.

3. Stephen King, a writer, whose novels are very popular.

4. The woman wearing dark sunglasses.

5. The car, two years old.

The answers can be found at the end of the module.
**Missing a Subject and a Verb**

Some word groups are missing both a subject and a verb. They often begin with one of the following words or phrases.

also  except  including  especially  for example  such as

**Example 1**

Tim has trouble accepting help. Except from his father.

**Example 2**

For example, black mold on the ceiling.

**Example 3**

I had many jobs while in school. Warehouseman, painter, and clerk.

As you can see, all of these examples show fragments that add detail. These added-detail fragments may be corrected in the following ways:

1. Attach the fragment to the complete thought that precedes it.

   Example 1 from above could read:

   Tim has trouble accepting help, except from his father.

2. Add a subject and a verb to the fragment to make it a complete sentence.

   Example 2 from above could read:

   My apartment has its drawbacks, for example black mold on the ceiling.

3. Change words as necessary to make the fragment part of the preceding.

   Example 3 from above could read:
I had many jobs while in school, including warehouseman, painter, and clerk.

Exercise 3
Underline the fragment in each selection below. Then make it a sentence by rewriting it, using the methods described above.

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

1. George is very coordinated. For example, managing to juggle three golf balls while riding a unicycle.

2. Teri’s job in the obituary department depressed her. All day, she wrote about dead people. About people who were killed in accidents, who suffered long term illnesses, and who died alone in nursing homes.

3. My mother is always giving me advice. For example, always getting a good night’s sleep. Unfortunately, I never follow it.

4. I put soup in the microwave oven without taking it out of the can. A couple minutes later, there were several loud noises and sparks. With soup splattering all over the walls of the oven.

5. Janet looked forward to seeing her cousins at the reunion. Including the cousin she hadn’t seen for twenty years. She wondered if he had grown fat and bald.
The answers can be found at the end of the module.

**Missing a Complete Thought**

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

**Common Dependent Words**

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

These words are useful to identify subordinate clauses, which cannot stand alone as a complete thought or sentence. If a word group begins with one of these words, you should ask whether it is a complete thought. Consider the following:

After she gave him the cookies. He was happy.

"After she gave him the cookies" is a dependent statement that cannot stand alone. It leaves us hanging. We expect in the same sentence to find out what happened after she gave him the cookies. 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. In this case you can complete the thought by attaching the fragment to the next word group:

After she gave him the cookies, he was happy.

**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:
Exercise 4
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.

1. I went to a movie. After I finished work on Friday.

2. Because the class was canceled. I didn’t have a chance to meet the instructor.

3. When my car stalled on the highway. I sat nervously waiting for help.

4. I will not do well on the test. Unless I study all weekend.

5. Before I left the house. I made sure to lock the door.
Answer Key

Exercise 1
1. Hoping to win a fortune, John bought many lottery tickets.
2. Mary politely rejected the offer to attend the concert and decided to stay home and study.
3. To make a good impression on her new boss, Sue worked through her lunch hour.
4. Hiking through the woods, the group saw many kinds of wildlife.
5. Trying to find material for her paper, Beth looked through the library catalog and checked the Internet.

Exercise 2
1. The college is constructing a new technology building.
2. The price of gas may rise this summer.
3. Stephen King is a writer, whose novels are very popular.
4. The woman was wearing dark sunglasses.
5. The car is two years old.

Exercise 3
1. George is very coordinated. For example, he manages to juggle three golf balls while riding a unicycle.

2. Teri’s job in the obituary department depressed her. All day, she wrote about dead people who were killed in accidents, who suffered long term illnesses, and who died alone in nursing homes.

3. My mother is always giving me advice, for example, always getting a good night’s sleep. Unfortunately, I never follow it.

4. I put soup in the microwave oven without taking it out of the can. A couple minutes later, there were several loud noises and sparks with soup splattering all over the walls of the oven.

5. Janet looked forward to seeing her cousins at the reunion, including the cousin she hadn’t seen for twenty years. She wondered if he had grown fat and bald.
Exercise 4

1. I went to a movie after I finished work on Friday.

2. Because the class was canceled, I didn’t have a chance to meet the instructor.

3. When my car stalled on the highway, I sat nervously waiting for help.

4. I will not do well on the test unless I study all weekend.

5. Before I left the house, I made sure to lock the door.