

SENTENCE FRAGMENTS

Fragment: An utterance that is **not a complete sentence** (in the sense that it does not constitute an independent clause). So, a phrase such as 'A new dress' used in reply to a question such as 'What did you buy?' would be a sentence-fragment (By contrast, a sentence such as 'I bought a new dress' would not be a sentence fragment, since it contains a complete clause.)

Sentence fragments never have independent clauses, but instead are dependent clauses or phrases.

Where to Find Sentence Fragments

Sentence fragments usually appear *before or after* the independent clauses to which they belong. For example:

When we got in the car. We rolled down the windows.

'When we got in the car' is a sentence fragment and a dependent clause. It clearly belongs to the independent clause that follows it and should be rewritten like this:

When we got in the car, we rolled down the windows.

Or like this:

We rolled down the windows when we got in the car.

Subordinators

The sentence fragment 'When we got in the car' also has the subordinator 'when'. Some other **examples of subordinators** are: 'after', 'although', 'before', 'if', 'since', 'until', 'when', 'where', 'while', and 'why'.

Clauses with subordinators can be called either dependent clauses or subordinating clauses, but when those clauses appear at the beginning of a sentence, they should be followed by a comma.

Fragment Phrases

Phrases are groups of words that are missing a subject or verb, or both. Phrases can also masquerade as sentences, like dependent clauses can. Here are some examples.

Here's an example **missing subject and verb**:

From morning until night.

This fragment can be made a complete sentence by changing it to: *I worked from morning until night.*

***Adding 'I' as the subject and 'worked' as the verb corrects this fragment and makes it an independent clause and a complete thought.

Here's an example of a **missing subject**:

Start after the weekend.

This fragment can be made a complete sentence by changing it to: *Classes start after the weekend.*

***Adding the subject 'classes' corrects this fragment and makes it an independent clause and a complete thought.

Finally, here's an example of a **missing verb**:

Some girls in the class.

This fragment can be changed to:

Some girls in the class study together.

***Adding the verb 'study' corrects this fragment and makes it an independent clause and a complete thought.

Fragment Temptations

Certain words and expressions make it easy to fall into the sentence fragment habit. Some of these words include 'also', 'for example', 'and', 'but', 'for instance', 'mainly', 'or', and 'that'.

Here's how they appear in a sentence:

Harris claims that men and women have different ideas about dating. For example, that men should pay for dinner on a date.

Exercise A Decide whether each of the following word groups is a sentence or a sentence fragment. *Remember:* A sentence contains a subject and a verb and expresses a complete thought. If the word group is a sentence, write **S** on the line provided. If it is a sentence fragment, write **F**.

EXAMPLES 1. Because canoeing can be dangerous. F

2. A canoeist should learn proper technique and safety rules. S

_____ 1. Taking a canoe trip in Canada.

_____ 2. Sufficient food for a week's journey.

- _____ 3. Others had camped there before us.
- _____ 4. Ashes indicated the place.
- _____ 5. Where their fire had been.
- _____ 6. How clearly was the trail marked?
- _____ 7. An Ojibwa village at the end of the trail.
- _____ 8. The group spent the morning together.
- _____ 9. Talking over plans for the afternoon.
- _____ 10. As we rounded a bend in the river.
- _____ 11. Could you hear the noise of the waterfall?
- _____ 12. Before you could see it.
- _____ 13. We could not paddle against the wind unless the guide helped us.
- _____ 14. The wind blowing spray over us.
- _____ 15. Drenched to the skin.
- _____ 16. The rapids in the river were occasional hazards.
- _____ 17. The excitement of shooting the rapids.
- _____ 18. We steered and balanced carefully.
- _____ 19. Around boulders in the stream.
- _____ 20. Deciding whether to go through the rapids or portage the canoe aroundthem.
- _____ 21. On our knees in the canoe, we became painfully cramped.
- _____ 22. There was no chance, however, to stretch our legs.
- _____ 23. From the beginning of the rapids to the end.

NPs functioning as Subject

- (1) [NP The hedgehog] ate the cream cake.
- (2) [NP A rat] bit my toe.
- (3) [NP This shoe] hurts me.
- (4) [NP Academics] never lie.

However, Subjects can also be realised by other phrase types. Take the set of sentences in (5)–(8) where the Subjects are realised as Prepositional Phrases:

PPs functioning as Subject

- (5) [PP Under the stairs] was a safe area to be during the war.
- (6) [PP Outside the fridge] is not a good place to keep milk