

Sentence Fragments

Fragments are incomplete sentences. Usually, fragments are pieces of sentences that have become disconnected from the main clause. One of the easiest ways to correct them is to remove the period between the fragment and the main clause. Other kinds of punctuation may be needed for the newly combined sentence.

Below are some examples with the fragments shown in *italics*. Punctuation and/or words added to make corrections appear in **bold**. Notice that the fragment is frequently a dependent clause or long phrase that follows the main clause.

<u>Fragment</u> (phrase or dependent clause)	<u>Possible Revision</u>
Purdue offers many majors in engineering. <i>Such as electrical, chemical, and industrial engineering.</i>	Purdue offers many majors in engineering, such as electrical, chemical, and industrial engineering.
Coach Dietz exemplified this behavior by walking off the field in the middle of a game. <i>Leaving her team at a time when we needed her.</i>	Coach Dietz exemplified this behavior by walking off the field in the middle of a game, leaving her team at a time when we needed her.
I need to find a new roommate. <i>Because the one I have now isn't working out too well.</i>	I need to find a new roommate because the one I have now isn't working out too well.
The current city policy on housing is incomplete as it stands. <i>Which is why we believe the proposed amendments should be passed.</i>	Because the current city policy on housing is incomplete as it stands, we believe the proposed amendments should be passed.

You may have noticed that newspaper and magazine journalists often use a dependent clause as a separate sentence when it follows clearly from the preceding main clause, as in the last example above. This is a conventional **journalistic** practice, often used for emphasis. For **academic** writing and other more formal writing situations, however, you should avoid such journalistic fragment sentences.

Some fragments are not clearly pieces of sentences that have been left unattached to the main clause; they are written as main clauses but lack a subject or main verb.

<u>Fragment</u> (incomplete main clause)	<u>Possible Revisions</u>
<p><i>No main verb</i> <i>A story with deep thoughts and emotions.</i></p>	<p><i>Appositive:</i> Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," a story with deep thoughts and emotions, has impressed critics for decades. <i>Direct object:</i> She told a story with deep thoughts and emotions.</p>
<p><i>Toys of all kinds thrown everywhere.</i></p>	<p><i>Complete verb:</i> Toys of all kinds were thrown everywhere. <i>Direct object:</i> They found toys of all kinds thrown everywhere.</p>
<p><i>A record of accomplishment beginning when you were first hired.</i></p>	<p><i>Direct object:</i> I've noticed a record of accomplishment beginning when you were first hired. <i>Main verb:</i> A record of accomplishment began when you were first hired.</p>
<p><i>No subject</i> <i>With the ultimate effect of all advertising is to sell the product.</i></p>	<p><i>Remove preposition:</i> The ultimate effect of all advertising is to sell the product.</p>
<p><i>By paying too much attention to polls can make a political leader unwilling to propose innovative policies.</i></p>	<p><i>Remove preposition:</i> Paying too much attention to polls can make a political leader unwilling to propose innovative policies.</p>
<p><i>For doing freelance work for a competitor got Phil fired.</i></p>	<p><i>Remove preposition:</i> Doing freelance work for a competitor got Phil fired. <i>Rearrange:</i> Phil got fired for doing freelance work for a competitor.</p>

These last three examples of fragments with no subjects are also known as *mixed constructions*, that is, sentences constructed out of mixed parts. They start one way (often with a long prepositional phrase) but end with a regular predicate. Usually the object of the preposition (often a [gerund](#), as in the last two examples) is intended as the subject of the sentence, so removing the preposition at the beginning is usually the easiest way to edit such errors.

Sentence Fragment Exercises—#1

The sentences below appeared in papers written by students. Act as their editor, marking a C if the sentences in the group are all complete and an F if any of the sentences in the group is a fragment. Could you tell these writers why the fragments are incomplete sentences?

- ___ 1. Then I attended Morris Junior High. A junior high that was a bad experience.
- ___ 2. The scene was filled with beauty. Such as the sun sending its brilliant rays to the earth and the leaves of various shades of red, yellow, and brown moving slowly in the wind.
- ___ 3. He talked for fifty minutes without taking his eyes off his notes. Like other teachers in that department, he did not encourage students' questions.
- ___ 4. Within each group, a wide range of features to choose from. It was difficult to distinguish between them.
- ___ 5. A few of the less serious fellows would go into a bar for a steak dinner and a few glasses of beer. After this meal, they were ready for anything.
- ___ 6. It can be really embarrassing to be so emotional. Especially when you are on your first date, you feel that you should be in control.
- ___ 7. The magazine has a reputation for a sophisticated, prestigious, and elite group of readers. Although that is a value judgment and in circumstances not a true premise.
- ___ 8. In the seventh grade every young boy goes out for football. To prove to himself and his parents that he is a man.
- ___ 9. She opened the door and let us into her home. Not realizing at the time that we would never enter that door in her home again.
- ___ 10. As Christmas grows near, I find myself looking back into my childhood days at fun-filled times of snowball fights. To think about this makes me happy.
- ___ 11. Making up his mind quickly. Jim ordered two dozen red roses for his wife. Hoping she would accept his apology.
- ___ 12. They were all having a good time. Until one of Joe's oldest and best friends had a little too much to drink.

___13. Although it only attained a speed of about twelve miles an hour. My old rowboat with its three-horsepower motor seemed like a high-speed job to me.

___14. With my brother standing by my side, I reached for the pot handle. Tilting the pot way too much caused the boiling water to spill.

___15. The small, one-story houses are all the same size and style. With no difference except the color.

___16. Being a friend of mine like he was when we first joined the soccer team. Together we learned a lot.

Sentence Fragments: Answer Key to Exercise #1

F1. Then I attended Morris Junior High. **A junior high that was a bad experience.** (*dependent clause*)

F2. The scene was filled with beauty. **Such as the sun sending its brilliant rays to the earth and the leaves of various shades of red, yellow, and brown moving slowly in the wind.** (*dependent clause*)

C3. He talked for fifty minutes without taking his eyes off his notes. Like other teachers in that department, he did not encourage students' questions.

F4. **Within each group, a wide range of features to choose from.** It was difficult to distinguish between them. (*no main verb*)

C5. A few of the less serious fellows would go into a bar for a steak dinner and a few glasses of beer. After this meal, they were ready for anything.

C6. It can be really embarrassing to be so emotional. Especially when you are on your first date, you feel that you should be in control.

F 7. The magazine has a reputation for a sophisticated, prestigious, and elite group of readers. **Although that is a value judgment and in circumstances not a true premise.** (*dependent clause*)

F 8. In the seventh grade every young boy goes out for football. **To prove to himself and his parents that he is a man.** (*dependent clause*)

F 9. She opened the door and let us into her home. **Not realizing at the time that we would never enter that door in her home again.** (*dependent clause*)

C 10. As Christmas grows near, I find myself looking back into my childhood days at fun-filled times of snowball fights. To think about this makes me happy.

F 11. **Making up his mind quickly.** Jim ordered two dozen red roses for his wife. Hoping she would accept his apology. (*dependent clause*)

F 12. They were all having a good time. **Until one of Joe's oldest and best friends had a little too much to drink.** (*dependent clause*)

F 13. Although it only attained a speed of about twelve miles an hour. My old rowboat with its three-horsepower motor seemed like a high-speed job to me.

C 14. With my brother standing by my side, I reached for the pot handle. Tilting the pot way too much caused the boiling water to spill.

F 15. The small, one-story houses are all the same size and style. **With no difference except the color.** (*dependent clause*)

F 16. **Being a friend of mine like he was when we first joined the soccer team.** Together we learned a lot. (*dependent clause*)