Recognizing and Repairing Fragmented Sentences

Fragmented sentences *pretend* to be complete sentences. Something is missing from them to make them complete.

Fragmented sentences are easy to spot when they are by themselves, like these:

→ When the cat leaped onto the table.
→ Running for the bus.
→ And immediately popped their flares and life vests.

When fragments appear next to related sentences they are harder to spot.

→ We had just sat down to dinner. When the cat leaped onto the table.
→ I tripped and twisted my ankle. Running for the bus.
→ The pilots ejected from the burning plane, landing in the water not far from the ship. And immediately popped their flares and life vests.

Now the ideas are starting to make sense because they’re right next to each other, but they are still not complete sentences. The ideas are not connected to each other….yet.

Repair most fragments in one of two ways:

1. Pull the fragment into a nearby sentence.
2. Rewrite the fragment as a complete sentence.

→ We just sat down to dinner when the cat leaped onto the table.
→ Running for the bus, I tripped and twisted my ankle.
→ The pilots ejected from the burning plane, landing in the water not far from the ship. They immediately popped their flares and life vests.

Now we have complete sentences with a subject and a verb.

The Writing Center at YVC
One thing that causes fragmented sentences is starting with a subordinating conjunction. A sentence that begins with one of these kinds of words (listed below) is not a complete sentence; it is a subordinating clause.

**These words commonly introduce subordinating clauses**

- before
- although
- as
- as if
- because
- so that
- even though
- how
- if
- since
- until
- than
- that
- though
- unless
- while
- when
- whomever
- who
- whom
- whose
- because
- since
- unless
- while
- who
- whom
- whose
- because
- since
- unless
- while
- who
- whom
- whose
- as if
- if
- though
- whether
- whose
- because
- since
- unless
- while
- who
- whom
- whose
- as if
- if
- though
- whether
- whose
- because
- since
- unless
- while
- who
- whom
- whose
- as if
- if
- though
- whether
- whose
- because
- since
- unless
- while
- who
- whom
- whose

You might ask yourself, What’s a subordinating conjunction and subordinating clause? Who talks like that? No one, really. So let’s break down the expression and think of it like this:

Subordinating Clause = sub (lower in importance) + ordinate (in an ordered manner) + clause (group of words)

So it’s a group of words in a certain order but lower in importance. That makes more sense.

Adapted from: