

Fixing Sentence Fragments

Type 1: Missing Subjects and Verbs

A fragment is a word group that pretends to be a sentence. Fragments are easy to spot when they are by themselves, like these:

- Running for the bus.
- And immediately popped their flares and life vests.

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

- 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.

To be a sentence, a word group must consist of at least one full independent clause. An independent clause includes a subject and a verb, and it either stands alone or could stand alone. "Running for the bus" is a fragment because it lacks a subject and a verb. "And immediately popped their flares and life vests" is a fragment because it lacks a subject.

Knowing what a sentence is, you can repair most fragments in one of two ways: either pull the fragment into a nearby sentence, or rewrite the fragment as a complete sentence.

- 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 only complete sentences, each one containing a subject and a verb.



Type 2: Dependent Clauses

If a group of words has a subject and a verb but starts with a dependent word, it is still not a complete sentence. It is a dependent clause and will be a fragment unless it is attached to an independent clause (a.k.a. a complete sentence: a subject, a verb, and no dependent word). Here are some common dependent words:

because	until	after	whatever	why
if	unless	although	where	how
as	whether	that	wherever	however
since	even	who	when	which
while	before	what	whenever	whichever

Let's see what happens when we attach a dependent word to a sentence. First, here are some complete sentences (independent clauses) to start with:

- I smelled the delicious pizza.
- She lost her car keys.

Both make sense, right? Now, by adding dependent words, we turn the sentences into fragments. Notice how each fragment leaves you asking, "What happened?"

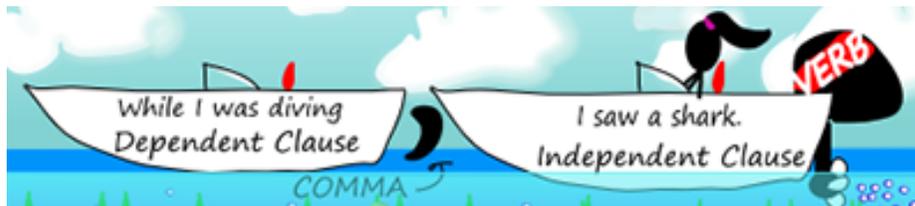
- When I smelled the delicious pizza.
- Because she lost her car keys.

There are two ways to fix these fragments. First, we could remove their dependent words and make them independent clauses again. Second, we could attach the fragments to independent clauses, such as "I sneezed" and "She took the bus." Independent clauses can answer that "What happened?" question because they are already complete thoughts.

- When I smelled the delicious pizza, I sneezed.
- She took the bus because she lost her car keys.

Now we have some complex (but correct!) sentences, each made of an independent clause telling us what happened and a dependent clause providing some extra info about the event.

Note: If you place a dependent clause before an independent clause, put a comma between them. If the order is reversed, no comma is needed.



Reminder: Remember that a group of words can be a fragment because it lacks a subject or a verb, but even groups of words with both can become fragments if they begin with a dependent word and aren't connected to a complete sentence.

The content for section "Type 1" was adapted with changes from the following source:
Hacker, Diana and Nancy Sommers. *A Writer's Reference*, 7th ed., Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011.

All pictures were adapted with changes from the following source:
Wahl, Randi. *Sentence Fragment Comic*. 7 Aug. 2014, *Behance*, www.behance.net/gallery/18901413/Sentence-Fragment-Comic?tracking_source=search%257CSentence.

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