

# *Proofreading Skills Tutorial*

## **Tutorial 1:**

### **Sentence Fragments**

#### **Identifying Sentence Fragments**

#### **Correcting Sentence Fragments**

#### **Proofreading for Sentence Fragments**



This Tutorial includes two files:

- **Lesson (1a\_Sentence\_Fragments\_Lesson)**

In order to learn the material presented in this tutorial more effectively, as you read you should take notes in a place that you can reference later. If it is convenient, you could print the tutorial and annotate it so you can keep it for future reference.

- **Exercises (1b\_Sentence\_Fragments\_Exercises)** – located in the same area as the lesson)

- It has highlighted areas for you to answer the exercises using an application such as Adobe Acrobat Reader.
- Download and save this file as your own; you will share it with an instructor after you complete the lesson and exercises.

Please contact the Writing Center with any questions or difficulties:

[csmtwc@smccd.edu](mailto:csmtwc@smccd.edu) or 650-574-6436.



## **Sentence Fragments**

Before you begin this tutorial, we recommend that you complete the *Introductory Tutorial: Recognizing Verbs and Subjects*. This tutorial on sentence fragments will demonstrate strategies for:

1. **identifying sentence fragments (incomplete sentences)**
2. **correcting sentence fragments**
3. **proofreading for sentence fragments.**

As you do this tutorial and learn about different types of sentence fragments, be sure to notice the kinds of fragments that your teacher has pointed out in your writing. That way, you can learn how to proofread your own essays more effectively.

Before we describe sentence fragments and how to fix them, let's review some information that is so basic you might have forgotten it.

### **What is a sentence?**

Sentences are the building blocks of writing. To improve your writing, you must understand the sentence and its two main parts, the verb and the subject.\*

A complete sentence is not only a group of words with a capital letter at the beginning and a period at the end. A **complete sentence** must also always:

- have a subject
- have a verb
- be a complete idea. (That is, it can stand alone and makes sense by itself.)

Some sentences can be very short, with only a few words expressing a complete idea, like this:

Julia wants a new car.

This is a complete sentence because it meets all three requirements—it has a subject (“Julia”), it has a verb (“wants”), and it is a complete idea (that is, “Julia wants a new car.”).

A **sentence fragment** is missing one or more of these three requirements; it is a group of words that is incorrectly punctuated as a complete sentence.

*\*Note:* If you need to review how to identify a verb and subject, see the *Introductory Tutorial: Recognizing Verbs and Subjects*.



## **Part One: Identifying Sentence Fragments (Incomplete Sentences)**

Consider the two groups of words below:

Students in the Writing Center.

Students work in the Writing Center.

In your own words, explain the difference between these two groups of words.

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As you have probably noticed, the first group of words is not a complete idea or sentence. That is, we don't know who the students are or what they are doing. The second group of words, however, is different. We know that the students in the Writing Center are working. This group of words has a subject ("Students"), a verb ("work"), and a complete idea.

To find out if a group of words is a complete sentence, you can use this trick. Add ***Is it true that*** before the words. If the question does not make sense, the group of words is a sentence fragment. If the question does make sense, the group of words is a complete sentence.

Consider the examples below.

***Is it true that*** students in the Writing Center?

***Is it true that*** students work in the Writing Center?

The first question above does not make sense. It does have a subject ("students"). But it does not have a verb, and it is not a complete idea. It is a **sentence fragment**.

However, the second question *does* make sense. It has a subject and a verb and *is* a complete idea. Therefore, "Students work in the Writing Center." is a **complete sentence**.

<p><b>Principle I.</b> To find out if a group of words is a complete sentence, add <b><i>Is it true that</i></b> before the words. If the question makes sense, the group of words is a complete sentence.</p>
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**Please open your 1b exercises file and complete Exercises 1 and 2.**



## **Part Two: Correcting Sentence Fragments**

Look back at the groups of words that you underlined in the paragraph above. As you may have noticed, the writer sometimes just added a period too soon, before the idea was completely finished. In fact, many sentence fragments follow the complete sentences to which they logically belong.

**Principle II.**     **To correct a sentence fragment, connect it to the complete sentence to which it logically belongs. Note that most fragments come after the sentences to which they should be attached.**

Consider the following sentence and sentence fragment:

Everyone has some kind of bad habit. Even those who think they are perfect.

“Even those who think they are perfect” (sentence fragment) is a logical part of the previous complete sentence “Everyone has some kind of bad habit” since it gives more information about everyone.

To correct this sentence fragment, you can connect it to the previous complete sentence because they have a logical relationship. That is, the fragment simply provides additional detail about people and their bad habits:

Everyone has some kind of bad habit, even those who think they are perfect.

Now consider another sentence and sentence fragment:

Some habits can get you into trouble. While others simply annoy other people.

“While others simply annoy other people” (sentence fragment) is a logical part of the previous complete sentence, “Some habits can get you into trouble.”

To correct this sentence fragment, you can connect it to the previous sentence because they have a logical relationship. That is, the fragment provides additional detail about different types of “habits”:

Some habits can get you into trouble while others simply annoy other people.

**Please open your 1b exercises file and complete Exercise 3.**



### **Part Three: Proofreading for Sentence Fragments**

Here are some strategies for identifying and correcting sentence fragments, techniques that will help you proofread your essays more effectively.

- In proofreading your essays or paragraphs, look at every group of words that begins with a capital letter and ends with a period. After you add ***Is it true that***, do the words make sense? If they do, the group of words is a complete sentence.
- If the group of words is a sentence fragment, look at the sentence that comes before it AND the one that follows. The sentence fragment should be attached to one of them. To which complete sentence does the fragment logically belong? Attach the fragment to that sentence.
- In general, when you are proofreading, be sure to look for only one type of error at a time. Otherwise, it is easy to miss your mistakes. It always helps to read your writing out loud when looking for sentence fragments. When you do this, you can often recognize when a group of words sounds incomplete. Some people also feel that it is easier to spot fragments if they read the passage aloud starting backwards: first, the last sentence; then, the next-to-last; and so on.

Now that you know how to proofread for sentence fragments, you can practice these strategies in the final exercises.

**Please open your 1b exercises file and complete Exercise 4.**



### **Final Activity**

**Instructions:**

1. Review an essay where your teacher has graded and marked your sentence fragments (or FRAGs). Are there any similarities in your fragments? For example, fragments often begin with the words *which*, *who*, *that*, or *where*. Knowing what to look for during proofreading can make it easier to find your sentence fragments.
2. Make an appointment for a conference with an instructor working in the Writing Center. To make this appointment, sign up using the same method you use to make essay conference appointments. Be sure to include a comment or note that you are meeting about a tutorial.
3. During this appointment, the instructor will make sure you understand the concepts covered in this tutorial, answer any questions that you might have, review your answers to the exercises, and check to see if you can incorporate the skill into your writing.