Sentence Fragments

A sentence fragment is a group of words that doesn’t state a complete thought. Sometimes a fragment is missing a subject and/or a verb. Other times, a fragment has a subject and a verb, but the thought still isn’t complete.

Identifying the subjects and verbs in the sentence is the first step to being able to recognize any type of sentence fragment. If a sentence is lacking a subject or a verb, then it cannot be a complete sentence.

Identifying a Subject

In the sentences below determine what the subject of each sentence is by asking “who” or “what” is doing the action in the sentence.

1. Pizza is my favorite food.
2. My favorite food is pizza.
3. The child ran quickly down the street.
4. The table by the door must be moved.
5. Pencils are usually located in the top drawer of the file cabinet.

Identifying a Verb

Once you become more able to determine the subject of a sentence, it’s time to move on to verbs. Verbs are either action words like run, jump, scramble, or they can be simple links between two parts of a sentence to make it sound right. (These are called non action verbs.) For example, – is, are, was, were, become, etc.

1. Michael scrambled up the loose shale of the mountain.
2. The accident was the result of drunk driving.
3. Susan is very grouchy in the morning.
4. The trees on the trail scratched her arms.
5. The speedboat leapt into the air over the jump.
Prepositional Phrase Fragments

There are many kinds of errors in sentence recognition. One of the most common is assuming a prepositional phrase is a proper sentence, e.g., "From under the bushes". This sentence lacks a what or a who. This means there is no subject.

Notice the prepositional phrase fragments in the sentences below. They will be in the form of prepositional phrases which can be recognized because they begin with words from the following list:

- of
- in
- by
- to
- up
- from
- about
- at
- behind
- within
- for
- off
- into
- with
- down
- over
- under
- between
- near
- below
- beneath
- around
- above
- along
- before
- amid
- beside
- among
- without
- through
- during
- across

*Examples:*

1. **Under the outcropping of rocks, in the tidal pools.** The sea life can be found.
2. **The child was found wandering on the deserted road. Beside the stands of tall pines.**
3. **Some people appeared at our door. During the hockey playoffs.**
4. **Throughout the entire house.** The echoes of children’s voices could be heard.

Verbal Phrase Fragments

Assuming verbal phrases are sentences is another common error made by writers. Phrases that begin with –ing words are common culprits e.g., “Driving happily down the road in the country." This example is a phrase because it doesn’t answer “who” or “what” is driving. There is no subject or doer of the action in this sentence fragment.

Another common mistake involves the use of the word “to” followed by an action verb. e.g., **She made a major decision. To run for the provincial party nomination.** The phrase “to run” starts this sentence fragment.
Notice the verbal phrase fragments in each of the following sentences, the reader does not know who, or what is doing the action in the second sentence.

**Examples:**

1. Mitchell finally agreed to see the guidance counselor. To ask about entering University in the fall.

2. The Vancouver Winter Olympics were a great accomplishment. Showing the enthusiasm of all Canadians.

### Subordinate Clauses as Fragments

Subordinate clauses are simply incomplete or dependent ideas, and therefore cannot stand as sentences by themselves. E.g., *After the sudden rain shower.* This subordinate clause is a definite fragment. It has left some needed information up in the air. For instance, “what happened after the rain?”

The list below contains subordinate conjunctions. Use them to identify this type of fragment.

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<td>where</td>
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**Examples:**

1. Because we were very late last night. We didn’t wake the children.
2. My favorite salad must contain croutons and Caesar salad dressing. Although I really like spinach salad too.
3. Before you even think of leaving this house. Please go and clean up that bathroom.

### Run-On Sentences

There are basically three reasons for sentences that go on, and on, and on…

1. **The Comma Splice**
   When two main ideas are joined by a comma (,) instead of a coordinating conjunction – and, but, or, for – then a major sentence error has happened.
Example: “Michael went to the store, Susan went for a walk.”

instead, write:

“Michael went to the store and Susan went for a walk.”

or:

“Michael went to the store; Susan went for a walk.”

* Don’t let main ideas run together in your writing.

2. Adverbial Conjunctions or Transitional phrases

The second difficulty that causes a run-on sentence can be caused by adverbial conjunctions or transitional phrases: accordingly, also, consequently, furthermore, however, instead, likewise, nevertheless, otherwise, therefore, moreover…

Phrases such as for example, in fact, on the other hand, can lead a writer to use just a comma (,) instead of the correct semi-colon (;).

Example: “He did very well in school, in fact he studied every day.”

should be:

“He did very well in school; in fact, he studied every day.”

3. Forgetting about punctuation altogether

A third common run-on error is not using any punctuation. The two ideas in the sentence below run together and mess up the meaning of the sentence.

Example: “He gazed upon her still face and his heart was ready to break.”

should be:

a) He gazed upon her still face, and his heart was ready to break.
b) He gazed upon her still face; his heart was ready to break.
c) As he gazed upon her still face, his heart was ready to break.