

## Sentence Fragments

SUU Writing Center

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A fragment is a piece of sentence. By itself, a fragment should not have a capital letter at its beginning and a period at its end. Most fragments . . .

- lack a complete subject and/or a complete verb;  
OR
- begin with a “subordinator” that makes the line sound incomplete when read aloud by itself.

Question	Test	Examples
<p><b>Does the line you are wondering about contain a subject and a complete verb?</b></p>	<p>Try introducing the line with “I know that . . .”</p> <p>If the resulting combination sounds incomplete, the line is probably a fragment.</p> <hr/> <p>If the resulting combination sounds right, the questionable line is a sentence.</p>	<p><b>Line to test:</b> Into the house. <b>Combination:</b> I know that into the house.</p> <p><b>Line to test:</b> Who once was my best friend. <b>Combination:</b> I know that who once was my best friend.</p> <p><b>Line to test:</b> Running down the street. <b>Combination:</b> I know that running down the street.</p> <p><i>NOTE: Since all the combinations sound incomplete, they must be fragments.</i></p> <hr/> <p><b>Line to test:</b> He ran into the house. <b>Combination:</b> I know that he ran into the house.</p>
<p><b>Does the line begin with an “ing” verb?</b></p>	<p>“ing” descriptions (called participial phrases) should appear in the same sentence with the person, place or thing they describe—usually right before or right after that noun.</p>	<p><b>WRONG:</b> Running down the street. The woman chased her dog. <b>RIGHT:</b> Running down the street, the woman chased her dog.</p> <p><i>NOTE: Use a comma to connect an “ing” phrase that comes at the start of a sentence to the person, place, or thing it is describing.</i></p> <p><b>WRONG:</b> The woman chased the child. Riding his bike down the street. <b>RIGHT:</b> The woman chased the child riding his bike down the street.</p> <p><i>NOTE: Don’t use a comma when the “ing” phrase comes at the end of the sentence unless the phrase answers the question “which one?” or “what kind?”</i></p>

<p><b>Does the sentence begin with a “preposition”?</b></p>	<p>Watch out for sentences that begin with <b>above, at, except, for, in, of, on, under, with.</b></p>	<p><b>WRONG:</b> Above our heads. Mars glowed yellow.  <b>RIGHT:</b> Above our heads, Mars glowed yellow.</p> <p><b>WRONG:</b> In November. The snow began to fall.  <b>RIGHT:</b> In November, the snow began to fall.</p>
<p><b>Does the sentence begin with a “subordinator”?</b></p>	<p>Watch out for sentences that begin with <b>after, although, as, as though, because, even, even though, if, since, until, when, while, who, which.</b></p>	<p><b>WRONG:</b> After we took the test. We went out to dinner.  <b>RIGHT:</b> After we took the test, we went out to dinner.</p> <p><b>WRONG:</b> He slept restlessly. Because he was worried.  <b>RIGHT:</b> He slept restlessly because he was worried.</p> <p><b>WRONG:</b> If you study. You’ll do well on the test.  <b>RIGHT:</b> If you study, you’ll do well on the test.</p> <p><b>WRONG:</b> He gave it to Pilar. Who is my sister.  <b>RIGHT:</b> He gave it to Pilar, who is my sister.</p>
<p><b>Does the sentence begin with an “and”?</b></p>	<p>Don’t start a sentence with “and” unless that sentence sounds complete when read aloud.</p>	<p><b>WRONG:</b> She gave the dog to her brother. And his children.  <b>RIGHT:</b> She gave the dog to her brother and his children.</p>

**Three major ways to fix a fragment:**

- Connect it to the next or to the previous sentence as shown in the “RIGHT” examples above.
- **Rewrite the line to provide the missing subject or verb.**  
*Fragment:* Sobbing into his pillow.  
*Complete sentence:* The broken-hearted boy sobbed into his pillow.
- **Eliminate the subordinating word.**  
*Fragment:* Because we were tired.  
*Sentence:* We were tired.

*Note: Be careful with this last solution since it can lead to choppy sentences.*