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SSC - 245

## Sentence Fragments

**Overview:** A sentence fragment is any group of words that do not form a complete sentence. It is important to avoid fragments not only because they are grammatical errors, but also because they interfere with your reader's ability to understand your writing. In order to maintain clarity and cohesion, ensure that all sentences are complete and learn to avoid sentence fragments. This handout will cover some of the more common causes of sentence fragments.

Sentence fragments can be inadvertently created by leaving out a subject, a verb, or by trying to make a dependent clause stand alone. In order to be a complete sentence, a word group must form an independent clause, meaning it must contain a subject, a verb, and form a complete thought. The correction of a sentence fragment will depend on which element is missing.

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**Simple sentence fragments** can usually be corrected by connecting them to another nearby sentence or by adding the missing subject or verb.

### Example 1:

*Sentence fragment:* **Wrote my paper.**

This fragment, which has a verb but no subject, can be corrected by adding the obvious subject: I.

*Revised version:* I **wrote my paper at my desk.**

### Example 2:

*Sentence fragment:* I wrote my paper. **At my desk.**

This fragment, which has no subject or verb, can be corrected by connecting the fragment to the previous sentence, which already has a subject, a verb, and expresses a complete thought. "At my desk" provides some nice detail, but does not form an independent clause.

*Revised version:* I wrote my paper **at my desk.**

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**Hanging dependent clauses** are another common type of sentence fragment. Because dependent clauses act as adjectives, adverbs, or nouns, they cannot stand alone as sentences. To fix this type of fragment, attach the dependent clause to the independent clause it modifies. The dependent clause can be added either before or after the independent clause.

### Example 1:

*Sentence fragment:* There are still grammatical errors. **Even though I proofread my paper.**

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The subordinating conjunction “even though” creates a dependent clause which cannot stand alone. To correct this, we can insert it before the preceding independent clause and add a comma.

*Revised version 1: **Even though I proofread my paper**, there are still grammatical errors.*

Or we can attach it to the end of the independent clause, using no additional punctuation.

*Revised version 2: There are still grammatical errors **even though I proofread my paper**.*

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**Unattached phrase fragments** also frequently occur in student writing. Like dependent clauses, phrases function as adjectives, adverbs, or nouns, but cannot form a complete sentence on their own. Fragmented phrases can be attached to the appropriate nearby sentences or can be made complete sentences by adding a subject, verb, or both.

Example 1:

*Sentence fragment:* I wrote a comparison and contrast essay. **Analyzing the relationship between Asian and American education systems.**

Remember, words ending with “-ing” cannot function as your verb, so this fragment is missing both a subject and a verb. The fragment can be attached to the previous sentence as follows.

*Revised version 1:* I wrote a comparison and contrast essay analyzing the relationship between Asian and American education systems.

Alternatively, a subject can be added and the verb altered to create a complete sentence.

*Revised version 2:* I wrote a comparison and contrast essay. I analyzed the relationship between Asian and American education systems.

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Occasionally, a fragment will be formed when a **portion of a compound predicate** is left standing alone. Since compound predicates contain verbs that take the same subject, both parts should go in the same sentence.

Example 1:

*Sentence fragment:* Roman does prewriting to gather his ideas. *And then drafts his essay.*

Since Roman is still the subject, this should all be one sentence.

*Revised version:* Roman does prewriting to gather his ideas and then drafts his essay.

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**List fragments** commonly occur with lists and examples introduced by “such as,” “for example,” etc. These fragments can often be attached to a nearby sentence or joined with either a colon or a dash.

Example 1:

*Sentence fragment:* I enjoy many kinds of TV shows. **Such as comedies, dramas, and reality shows.**

The bolded portion has no subject or verb. We can attach the list to the previous sentence.

*Revised version 1:* I enjoy many kinds of TV shows such as comedies, dramas, and reality shows.

We could also use a colon to set off the list but keep it connected to the independent clause.

*Revised version 2:* I enjoy many kinds of TV shows: comedies, dramas, and reality shows.

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**Practice:** As you are editing and proofreading, it is important to test sentences for completeness in order to prevent errors and confusion for the reader. Choose a paragraph from your own writing. Do all of your sentences contain a subject and verb and express a complete thought? If you notice any fragments, try to resolve them using the methods above. This will eliminate errors in your writing and improve clarity.

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