

Converting Fragments to Full Sentences

A “sentence fragment” is a group of words that has been punctuated as a full sentence, but that does not actually meet the requirements for a full sentence. The sentences below are examples of fragments:

- * *Although the office closes at 4:30 p.m.*
- * *Because nearly every student brings a laptop or other device to class.*
- * *Meaning this essay will focus on recent developments in classroom technology.*
- * *Which indicates a significant increase in performance.*

Fragments can be confusing if readers cannot determine whether the fragment's meaning is meant to connect to the sentence that precedes or follows it, as in this example:

A strong, reliable wireless network on campus is important. Because nearly every student brings a laptop or other device to class. The university should have a policy to guide internet use during tests.

This handout will help you learn how to recognize sentence fragments in your writing and convert those fragments to full sentences.

Understanding What a Sentence Fragment Is

To be a full sentence, a group of words must include an *independent clause*, which consists of a subject, its verb, and any remaining elements. In the examples of independent clauses below, the subject is in **boldface**; the verb is underlined, and the remaining elements of the sentence are in regular type:

- The artist** is painting a beautiful landscape.
- They** can distort our understanding of freedom.
- The committee** will vote to hire the candidate.
- Tens of thousands of incidents** remain undiscovered.

Most sentence fragments occur when a *dependent clause* is punctuated as a full sentence. Independent clauses and dependent clauses look and sound a lot alike, which is why sentence fragments occur. Like an independent clause, a dependent clause also includes a subject and its verb. The difference is that a dependent clause begins with a subordinating word or phrase like “although,” “if,” “when,” or “which.” This subordinating word suggests that the clause’s meaning is not complete, and it makes the clause *dependent*.

Such a clause cannot be a complete sentence, as the term “dependent” suggests. It should be connected to an independent clause, usually with a comma.

The examples below are dependent clauses. The subordinating word or phrase appears in *italics*:

- If the network* can support additional devices
- Because they* distort our understanding of freedom
- When the committee* will vote to hire the candidate
- Meaning that* **tens of thousands of incidents** remain undiscovered

While each of these clauses does include a subject and its verb, it begins with a subordinating word or phrase. As such, each is a dependent clause. If a dependent clause is punctuated as a full sentence, it is called a sentence fragment.

Converting Fragments

You can use two strategies for converting sentence fragments:

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| 1) Join the fragment to the sentence it logically belongs to.
This is usually done by replacing the period that separates the fragment from the sentence with a comma. | Use this strategy if the fragment and the sentence it will join are not very lengthy. |
| 2) Revise the fragment into an independent clause. | Use this strategy if joining the fragment to the sentence will create a very long sentence. |

The example below illustrates both approaches for converting a sentence fragment. The sample passage includes two independent clauses plus one sentence fragment (marked with an asterisk):

Reporting cyber incidents by contractors and agencies is a crucial first step in stopping a cyberattack. However, OMB has found that on average, agencies detect only sixty-three percent of cybersecurity incidents. *Meaning that tens of thousands of incidents go undiscovered.

Option 1: Join the fragment to the independent clause it belongs to:	Reporting cyber incidents by contractors and agencies is a crucial first step in stopping a cyberattack. However, OMB has found that on average, agencies detect only sixty-three percent of cybersecurity incidents, meaning that tens of thousands of incidents go undiscovered.
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Option 2: Revise the fragment into an independent clause:	Reporting cyber incidents by contractors and agencies is a crucial first step in stopping a cyberattack. However, OMB has found that on average, agencies detect only sixty-three percent of cybersecurity incidents. This means that tens of thousands of incidents go undiscovered.
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Identifying Fragments

As discussed above, most fragments occur when a dependent clause is punctuated as a full sentence. To spot fragments in your own writing, it can be helpful to know which words signal the presence of a dependent clause. There are three types of such words: subordinating conjunctions, relative pronouns, and participial phrases. They are listed below:

Types of Subordinating Words & Phrases		
Subordinating Conjunction	after, although, as, because, before, even though, if, once, since, though, unless, whereas, while	After it stops raining, we should go for a walk. I draft the body paragraphs before I write my introduction.
Relative Pronoun	that, which, who, whom, whoever, whomever, whose	I can't wait to drive my new car, which I'm buying later today. We reached out to her brother, who is a teacher for Fairfax County schools.
Participial Phrase	meaning that, being that, indicating that, resulting in	The forecast is for snow tomorrow, meaning that campus could be closed.

To spot sentence fragments in your writing, look for dependent clauses (clauses that begin with one of the types of words above) that have not been joined to a full sentence.

Practice

Use the strategies described above to identify fragments in the passage below and convert them to full sentences.

1. This vision of human life is difficult to attain in a consumerist society that shapes our beliefs about what, in humans, is true, good, or beautiful. The undercurrents of this consumer culture need further critical reflection. Because they so frequently distort our understanding of liberty and freedom. By the age of 20, average Americans will have seen some one million television commercials, and before they die they will have spent in sum an entire year of their lives watching commercials.
2. Table 4 shows that students in the smaller sections of the course significantly improved the average score on managerial finance. Although students in the large sections improved marginally. The table also shows that students in small sections expressed greater satisfaction with the course.
3. As higher education enters a period of tremendous growth and change. It is important to have a national understanding of the mission, goals and accomplishments of many institutions and the academy in its entirety. If no adjustments are made, American higher education will fall victim to much scrutiny and criticism, and our nation will be divided on one of our most important and prized possessions.
4. Fortunately, we have highly educated leaders at the helm of our institutions in America. Their combined knowledge, experience and understanding of this nation's system of higher education unique and immeasurable. Which results in a powerful team to guide academe during periods of insecurity. One group, the Commission on the Future of Higher Education, has such members.

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