

# AVOIDING SENTENCE FRAGMENTS

## WHAT ARE THEY?

Sentence fragments are *incomplete* sentences. Complete sentences state complete thoughts and contain both a subject and a verb expressing an action done by or to that subject. Fragments confuse readers because the lack of a subject, verb, or both makes your meaning incomplete and unclear. Although sentence fragments appear in creative and informal writing, avoid them in academic and professional writing.

## EXAMPLES

### INCOMPLETE SENTENCES/SENTENCE FRAGMENTS

*What I really need.* (incomplete thought—what do you need? when? from where? from who?)

*Earning a passing grade on the exam.* (incomplete thought—who is earning the grade? when? why?)

### COMPLETE SENTENCE

*I (subject) really need (verb) to earn a passing grade on the exam.* (complete thought/complete sentence)

### IN THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES, THE SENTENCE FRAGMENTS ARE UNDERLINED.

Incorrect: *I need to go to the Writing Center. Because I need tips on writing an essay exam!*

This fragment begins with a subordinating word. Remove the period and connect the fragment to the main clause.

Corrected: *I need to go to the Writing Center because I need tips on writing an essay exam!*

Incorrect: *Biked to campus as usual. I was worried I would be late to my exam.*

This fragment has no subject. Rewrite by adding a subordinating word (if) and a noun (I) to clarify the action (rode).

Corrected: *I was worried that I would be late to my exam if I biked to campus as usual.*

Incorrect: *Nervous and completely stressed-out students visible throughout the hallways.*

This fragment lacks a verb. Change the verb form (from visible to were visible) to make a complete sentence.

Corrected: *Nervous and completely stressed-out students were visible throughout the hallways.*

Incorrect: *Walking into the room on exam day. I was concerned when my professor laughed maniacally.*

This fragment has no subject. Create an introductory phrase with a preposition (after) and a comma.

Corrected: *After walking into the room on exam day, I was concerned when my professor laughed maniacally.*

Incorrect: *I got an “A” on my essay exam. Which isn’t surprising considering how calm I was.*

This fragment lacks a subject. Make the fragment a non-essential phrase by using a comma.

Corrected: *I got an “A” on my essay exam, which isn’t surprising considering how calm I was.*

## TIPS FOR AVOIDING SENTENCE FRAGMENTS

- Be aware that fragments are harder to identify when they are close to related sentences.
- Check to see if a group of words is a fragment by locating the subject and its verb.
- Check that the group of words expresses a complete thought: Ask yourself, “If someone walked up to me and said these words, would I be waiting for them to provide more information before responding?”
- Correct fragments by attaching them to other sentences or by revising them to include appropriate subjects and verbs.