

## JOHNSON COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

### I. FRAGMENTS

#### Sentence Fragments

Unintentional sentence fragments are among the most serious grammatical errors a writer can make.

By writing an unintentional fragment, an individual shows he or she is unable to recognize what a sentence is. Considering that the sentence is the basic unit of expression in the English language, the individual is not going to make the best possible impression!

Acquiring good sentence sense, however, is not difficult. Once a few basic terms are understood, an individual never has to make a fragment error again.

#### What is a sentence?

Most people would define a sentence as a group of words containing a subject and verb, but what they are actually defining is a clause. Every sentence is made up of one or more clauses.

A CLAUSE IS A GROUP OF WORDS CONTAINING A SUBJECT AND VERB.

There are two types of clauses:

#### **The first type is the independent (or main) clause.**

AN INDEPENDENT CLAUSE (OR MAIN CLAUSE)

- CONSISTS OF A SUBJECT AND VERB,
- STANDS ALONE AS A COMPLETE SENTENCE, AND
- EXPRESSES A COMPLETE THOUGHT.

Subject verb

ex. You can borrow money from me.

Verb

ex. Give him some assistance. (Subject you is implied.)

The above examples can stand alone as complete sentences.

#### **The second type of clause is the dependent (or subordinate) clause.**

A DEPENDENT CLAUSE

- CONTAINS A SUBJECT AND VERB,
- CANNOT STAND ALONE AS A COMPLETE SENTENCE, AND
- DEPENDS ON MORE INFORMATION TO MAKE IT COMPLETE.

Subject Verb

ex. If the need arises.

Subject Verb

ex. Since he has a bad back.

These two examples are fragments--not complete sentences. They are dependent clauses. Each contains a subject and verb, but neither clause is able to stand alone and make complete sense without additional information.

MISTAKING DEPENDENT CLAUSES FOR COMPLETE SENTENCES IS A COMMON FRAGMENT ERROR.

### Correcting the Dependent Clause Fragment Error

A dependent clause can be joined to an independent clause to form a complete sentence.

ex. You can borrow money from me if the need arises.

or

ex. If the need arises, you can borrow money from me.

ex. Give him some assistance since he has a bad back.

or

ex. Since he has a bad back, give him some assistance.

One way of recognizing when you may have mistaken a dependent clause for a complete sentence is to check any sentences that begin with a subordinating conjunction. The most common subordinating conjunctions are as follows:

after	provided	until	whether
although	since	when	while
as	than	where	as if
because	that	whereas	why
how	though	except that	such as
if	unless	in order that	whenever

ex. He will not report us if he sees us come in late.

ex. Although-he knew his chances of winning were small, Paul was disappointed.

### Verbal Phrases Mistaken for Complete Sentences

Another common fragment error occurs when a verbal phrase is mistaken for a complete sentence. A verbal phrase most commonly begins with an -ing word or an infinitive (to + verb).

ex. To live close to the sea.

Calling his friends, arranging the car pool, and getting to the party on time.

These examples are fragments--they cannot stand alone as complete, meaningful sentences. They are verbals the writer thought were sentences. A verbal is formed from a verb, but is not the verb of a sentence.

### Correcting a Verbal Fragment

A verbal fragment can often be corrected by adding a subject and/or verb or other information to make a complete sentence.

S V

ex. He wanted to live close to the sea.

V

His greatest desire was to live close to the sea.

To live close to the sea, he would have to buy a beach house or a boat.

v

To live close the sea would require a great tolerance for sand in one's food.

ex. Calling his friends, arranging the carpool, and getting to the party on time was easy.

Calling his friends, arranging the carpool, and getting to the party on time required a great deal of organizational ability.

ex. He spent his entire evening calling his friends, arranging the carpool, and getting to the party on time.

### Ending Parenthetical Elements

Ending parenthetical elements are often mistaken for complete sentences. Parenthetical elements are words and phrases that are intrusive and subordinate--they interrupt the normal sentence pattern to supply additional, supplementary information. When such an element is mistaken as capable of existing alone as a complete sentence, the result is a sentence fragment. A parenthetical element should be joined to the sentence it relates to by a comma, dash, or parentheses.

Incorrect: He turned to call an ambulance. His blood running cold at the extent of the man's injuries. (fragment)

Correct: He turned to call an ambulance, his blood running cold at the extent of the man's injuries.

Incorrect: This weapon might well save your life some day. Especially if you learn to use it effectively. (fragment)

Correct: This weapon might well save your life some day, especially if you learn to use it effectively.

Incorrect: He hated all things most people consider of great value. Such as ease, luxury, and social prestige. (fragment)

Correct: He hated all things that most people consider of great value, such as ease, luxury, and social prestige.

Incorrect: Halfway through the speech, I was dozing in my chair. Not a very positive reflection on the speaker. (fragment)

Correct: Halfway through the speech, I was dozing in my chair--not a very positive reflection on the speaker.

Incorrect: Heather has four dogs. Two left behind by her ex-boyfriend. (fragment)

Correct: Heather has four dogs (two left behind by her ex-husband).

## PRACTICE

### Recognizing and Avoiding Fragments

Indicate in the space at the right whether the following groups of words are complete sentences (C) or fragments of sentences (F).

EXAMPLE: **Rice University located in Houston, Texas. (F)**

1. If your editor would contact me by the first of May. ( )
2. Let us not quarrel any more. ( )
3. The author focuses on problems which are pressing. ( )
4. A number of observations indicate that the project will work. ( )
5. Further in the future the possibility of world freedom. ( )
6. Each campus organization establishes its own criteria for membership. ( )
7. Subjects of their own choice which are related to their field or in which they are interested and have done research. ( )
8. Atlanta is not only a historical city but also a beautiful one. ( )
9. Beverly Sills's performance in The Siege of Corinth, praised in the New Yorker. ( )
10. After reading Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique, which is frequently considered the cornerstone in the women's liberation movement. ( )
11. The professor argued that what most students need to develop are skills in analytical thinking, reading, writing, and calculating. ( )
12. Because most educational institutions are heavily subsidized by the government. ( )
13. The seminar will feature basic and advanced courses in first aid, backpacking, and canoeing. ( )
14. Even though some of the speakers were announced prior to the conference. ( )
15. A plaque commemorating her contributions to the University of Chicago over the past twenty-five years. ( )
16. By enrolling in courses at colleges and universities. ( )
17. The debate over the origin of the moon continues unabated. ( )
18. Flying in bad weather, the passengers who were sitting by the windows. ( )
19. The program's major defects are numerous. ( )
20. Being intrigued by his theory, we were unaware of the lapse of time. ( )

21. Churchill once said, "It is not enough that we do our best; sometimes we have to do what's required." ( )
22. An analysis of the data coming from the subcommittee for consideration. ( )
23. The student government conducted a public relations campaign to increase faculty participation at the ball games. ( )
24. An amendment to the Student Conduct Code, stating that a student has a choice between the Student Court and the Faculty Discipline Committee. ( )
25. The dedication of a new fine arts building will take place on Friday morning. ( )

Some of the following groups of words are fragments. Some are fragments and sentences. Some are complete sentences. Rewrite in such a way as to leave no fragments. If the group of words is already a complete sentence, leave it as it is.

EXAMPLE: I moved to Seattle. Because I was offered a very promising job there.

1. The Norsemen worshipped a group of anthropomorphic gods who lived in Asgard.
2. The Turks were successful in capturing Constantinople in 1453. Keeping a foothold in eastern Europe.
3. The water moccasin eluded its attacker and crawled into the stream. Where it disappeared.
4. San Francisco is one of America's great cities. Known for its cable cars, Nob Hill, Chinatown, and Golden Gate.
5. When the game was over and the team had gone to, the showers.
6. The scholarships established by Cecil J. Rhodes for selected students are called Rhodes Scholarships.
7. During the summer quarter, Kay, who wants to graduate early.
8. Phi Beta Kappa, founded at the College of William and Mary in 1776 as a debating and literary society.
9. Who would undertake the journey which was dangerous and unrewarding?
10. Dr. Irving's sensitive, penetrating, and honest article on higher education.
11. When it was threatened by a powerful enemy.
12. After Lucy had shaken the dirt from her boots and washed her hands.
13. When he was in, high school, Glenn, who is my cousin.
14. Although virtually unknown as a scholar or critic,
15. Voltaire was not a democrat; he said that he would rather be ruled by one lion than by a hundred rats.

Complete or revise the following sentence fragments in such a way as to make complete sentences.

EXAMPLE: After driving over two hundred miles from Brunswick to Columbus in the rain.

1. Monhegan Island, which is nine miles off the coast of Maine, a favorite spot of many artists who come there to paint during the summer months.
2. Lisbon, with its narrow, winding streets, where there is hardly a trickle of sunlight.
3. The police officer, getting off his motorcycle and taking out his pencil and book.
4. Considering all that I attempt to do for you..
5. Professors who are sensitive to the problems of students.
6. When I finished reading the book, turning out the light and going to bed.
7. Because the day was warm and beautiful, the professor, who loved nature.
8. Agreeing or disagreeing with the statements made by the speaker.
9. According to the news report, countless refugees who were stranded at sea.
10. Unfortunately, most of the "Greek" statues which are exhibited in museums and which are really Roman copies.
11. The city of New Orleans, lying between the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain.
12. Before leaving Rome, the students who were Latin majors.
13. If you assumed that the central character was a woman\*
14. Because we wanted to reach our destination before sunset.
15. Having worked the last three weekends on my term paper which is due next week.

## Recognizing and Avoiding Fragments in Paragraphs

When you have written many sentences as part of a paragraph or essay, and fragments are discovered, you may often find that each fragment needs to be joined to the sentence that came before it or the one that comes after it. In each of the following paragraphs, the writer committed several fragment errors that need to be discovered and corrected. See if you can solve each writer's problems.

### Paragraph #1

If for some ungodly reason you are planning to fit into the bizarre 1970's disco nightclub scene. Here are a few hints that can set you right into the crowd of disco groupies. The first thing you need is a pair of skintight slacks. Preferably black with flashy sparkles. To see Saturday Night Fever. A John Travolta-type shirt is a necessity. It must be unbuttoned down at least four buttons to show your gold chains and to get that macho man look. Your hairdo is very important; a Betty Bouffant style is the "in" thing. You're almost ready to go. After you add just a few finishing touches. Like a shiny whistle, and some after shave that smells like a flower shop. At the bar, you must walk and talk like a peacock strutting its stuff. It helps to yell words like "Boogie" and "Get down" So, if you can apply these hints and can withstand the agonizing, monotonous beat of the music. Then you will blend in fine with the cool dudes at the disco.

### Paragraph #2.

At the time I was in Califas, California, the famous cruising spot for low riders was Whitter Boulevard. Every Friday and Saturday night, the "gente" (people) would "get down to the ground" in their radical looking "ranflas"(cars). After checking out all the fine cars. I came upon a 1957 Chevy Bel Aire that was just sitting in a parking lot. I stopped as if a bullet just went through my body. This ranfla blew my mind and definitely caught my attention. The color of the '57's body was black and silver two-tone. There was not a flaw in the paint job at all; even the door jambs had no peeling paint. The wheels gleamed bright as the sun and from the engine extended a three-headed sidepipe that snorted flames as hot as dragons did back in the days of knighthood. As I looked for the door handles. They seemed to have been shaved off, and the doors opened in the opposite direction than the normal factory car. When I looked inside the car's interior, feeling intense excitement. I saw that it was covered in crushed velour in a diamond-tuck style that seemed like it should have been on furniture instead of inside a car. A chrome chain steering wheel sparkled like a diamond and the floor also was covered in velour. When I sat in the passenger seat. I imagined myself in someone's living room instead of in someone's car. The owner came up shortly and put an end to my fantasies of possession. As I watched the '57 creep away down the street, I noticed the license plate. It said "SUEVE" which means "cool," and that car was the coolest ranfla I ever set eyes on!

### Paragraph #3

Simplifying confusing sentences. Sometime we lose our purpose. As we are writing. In our attempt to be clever, sound intelligent, or just explain fully. We may get off the track and lose our original idea. When we do this in our writing. The reader becomes confused. In fact, the writer is probably confused and the intended meaning is lost. It is wise to follow the rules of simplification. Always edit your writing. To make your writing clearer.