



Sentence Fragments

What is a Sentence Fragment?

A sentence fragment is basically an incomplete sentence. If read by itself (without the context of surrounding sentences) it would not make much sense.

Here are two common types of Sentence Fragments:

1. A **Fragment** that is **missing either a subject or a verb.**

a. Example:

i. The night when the city experienced the mass blackout.

1. *This is a fragment because there is no verb to tell us what the subject (night) 'did.'*

ii. The night when the city experienced the mass blackout was very windy and rainy.

1. *This is now a complete sentence because there is a verb ("was") that tells us about some action involving "the night."*

b. Example:

i. Which caused some people in the crowd to laugh.

1. *This is a fragment because we do not know what exactly "caused some people to laugh." We don't know what "which" is referring to.*

ii. The speaker stumbled on his way to the podium, which caused some people in the crowd to laugh.

1. *This is now a complete sentence because we now know what exactly "caused some people in the crowd to laugh."*

2. A **Fragment** that is **caused by a misplaced period.**

a. Example:

i. There should be new measures taken to prevent kidnappings. Starting with stronger punishments for offenders.

1. *The second grouping of words ("Starting with stronger punishments for offenders") is a fragment because it is dependent on the first sentence for its meaning. It therefore cannot be detached from the first sentence.*

ii. There should be new measures taken to prevent kidnappings, starting with stronger punishments for offenders.

1. *Joining the incomplete thought to the complete sentence with a comma can remedy this situation.*

TIPS FOR RECOGNIZING FRAGMENTS:

1. Read your paper backwards, sentence by sentence. This forces you to look at each isolated sentence without the context of the surrounding sentences. Fragments will stick out to you much more clearly than if you read the paper from start to finish.

2. Read your paper out loud. This can also help you to recognize fragments more easily because they will sound different from complete thoughts.

The following resource was consulted in the design of this handout: Harris, Muriel. *Prentice Hall Reference Guide to Grammar and Usage*. 5th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003.

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