



Fragments

When we use the word “fragment” in everyday conversation, we’re usually referring to a piece of something, a part that has been broken or has splintered off from the whole.

Examples: I heard fragments of the students’ conversation.
She cut her finger on a fragment of metal.

The same concept applies to sentences. When a phrase contains a “broken” idea, or only part of a complete idea, it becomes a fragment. Fragments are also called dependent phrases or clauses because they depend on an added phrase to be complete.

While length is sometimes an indicator, you can’t rely on it alone to identify fragments.

Examples: She sings. (complete sentence)
Which is why lobbyists are so prevalent in Washington and are eager to meet with members of Congress. (fragment)

If you suspect a sentence is incomplete, check for two things: a subject and a predicate. The subject is a noun (person, place, or thing) that does the action in the sentence. The predicate is the action (verb) that the subject is doing. To be complete, a sentence must contain both.

Sentence	Subject	Predicate	Comment
She sings.	she	sings	She is a noun, and she is doing the action of singing.
Minnesota holds its caucus on Super Tuesday.	Minnesota	holds its caucus on Super Tuesday	Minnesota is a noun, and it is doing the action of holding its caucus on Super Tuesday.
The sun is shining brightly today.	sun	is shining brightly today	The sun is a noun, and it is doing the action of shining brightly today.

Fragment	Subject	Predicate	Comment
Singing in the rain.	--	singing in the rain	Rain is a noun, but it is not singing.
The paper sprinkled with glitter.	paper	--	Sprinkled is a verb, but the paper is not doing the sprinkling.
Which is the wooden roller coaster at Worlds of Fun.	--	is the wooden roller coaster at Worlds of Fun	Is is a verb, but we don’t know what it refers to. There is no subject.

Such as dogs, cats, and fish.	--	--	Dogs, cats, and fish are nouns, but they are not doing any action. There is no predicate.
-------------------------------	----	----	---

Another way to check for completeness is to turn the phrase into a question and see if it answers itself.

Phrase	Question	Answer	Complete?
Which is why lobbyists are so prevalent in Washington and are eager to meet with members of Congress.	Why are lobbyists so prevalent in Washington and eager to meet with members of Congress?	?	No, it's a fragment.
Leaving in the middle of the movie.	Who is leaving in the middle of the movie?	?	No, it's a fragment.
Because of the rain, officials cancelled the game.	Why was the game cancelled? Who cancelled it?	rain, the officials	Yes, it's a complete sentence
Occasionally, Marcie likes to sprinkle her valentines with glitter.	Who sprinkles her valentines with glitter?	Marcie	Yes, it's a complete sentence

Possible solutions to the fragmented sentences above:

Fragment	Sentence
Singing in the rain.	Singing in the rain is delightful if it is not too cold.
Such as dogs, cats, and fish.	House pets, such as dogs, cats, and fish, can be a comfort.
Which is the wooden roller coaster at Worlds of Fun.	We have tickets for the Timber Wolf, which is the wooden roller coaster at Worlds of Fun.
Which is why lobbyists are so prevalent in Washington and are eager to meet with members of Congress.	Lobbyists are so prevalent in Washington and are eager to meet with members of Congress because the cat food industry is so profitable.
Leaving in the middle of the movie.	Theater employees frown on people leaving in the middle of a movie.
The paper sprinkled with glitter.	The paper was sprinkled with glitter.

There are many websites with practice exercises; type "fragment exercises" in a search engine to find them.