

Finding and Fixing Sentence Fragments

What is a Clause?

- A clause is a group of words containing a **subject** and a **verb**.
- Clauses may be either dependent or independent.

Two kinds of Clauses

Independent Clause

Independent clauses can be complete sentences.

Examples

- The **movie** **ended** late.
- Her **advice** **was** not very helpful.

Dependent Clause

Dependent clauses can't be complete sentences because they require more information.

Examples

- Because the **union** **went** on strike...
- When the **pitcher** **threw** his first curveball

Subordinating Conjunctions

- The reason why a dependent clause does not express a complete thought is that a word has been added to it.
- This word is called a **subordinating conjunction**, and it makes the thought of the clause incomplete.
 - **When** the cat sleeps ...
 - **After** John ate ...
 - **While** we ran ...
 - **As** you talk ...

Independent Clauses

On the other hand, an independent clause doesn't have the subordinating conjunction. Consequently, it forms a complete thought all by itself.

- The **cat** **sleeps**.
- **John** **ate**.
- **We** **ran**.
- **You** **talk**.

Sentence or Fragment?

- Since an independent clause expresses a complete thought, it can form a sentence all by itself.

- Good:

I had trouble sleeping.



- Since a dependent clause does NOT express a complete thought, it cannot form a sentence all by itself.

- Bad:

Because I had trouble sleeping . . .



Sentence or Fragment?

- When writers try to make a sentence out of a dependent clause, they form a **sentence fragment** (a no-no that you should avoid in your writing).




- EX: . . . **Because I drank** too much coke . . .
- *What happened because you drank too much coke? Did you have weird dreams? Did you act fidgety? Did you get sugar diabetes? We don't know. This thought needs to be completed.*

How to Fix, Method I

One way that you can fix a dependent clause fragment is by attaching it to an independent clause.

EX:

- **Because I drank** too much coke ...
 - (dependent clause)
- **I had** trouble sleeping.
 - (independent clause)
- **Because I drank** too much coke, **I had** trouble sleeping. 
 - *Ahh – now we know what happens – a complete thought!*

How to Fix, Method II

- Another way to fix a sentence fragment is to chop off the subordinating conjunction.

- **Because** I drank too much coke ...



- I drank too much coke.






Notice

- Notice that both Methods I and II make the sentence contain an independent clause.
- ***In order to be complete, a sentence must have at least one independent clause!***
- The methods I've shown you work because they make the sentence have an independent clause.

The Phrase Fragment

Phrases also result in sentence fragments.

EXs:

- Running down the street. 
- Under the bed. 
- Searching through the toybox. 

Again, the above examples are fragments because they do not express a complete thought. Only independent clauses express a complete thought.




A sentence, in order to be complete, must contain at least one independent clause!

Fixing the Phrase Fragment

- As you've probably guessed already, a phrase fragment can be fixed by combining the phrase with an independent clause.

In the following examples, the phrases from the previous slide have been integrated into an independent clause.

The sentences are now complete:

- Running down the street, I stumbled over a pothole. 
- The toddler hid under the bed. 
- Searching through the toybox, I found the TV remote. 

Remember

Any complete sentence must have an independent clause.

Quiz Time!

Which is an independent clause?

- David rode his bike
- As David rode his bike

Correct Answer:

- David rode his bike.

It can't be "as David rode his bike", because that is not a complete thought – "as" is a subordinating conjunction, and makes the clause dependent on another piece of information.

Which is a dependent clause?

- Carmen likes baking
- Because Carmen bakes

Correct Answer:

- Because Carmen bakes.

The word “because” is a subordinating conjunction, and makes this clause dependent on the information in the rest of the sentence. “because Carmen bakes” is not a logical sentence on its own.

Fix the dependent clause fragments either by eliminating the subordinating conjunction or by adding an independent clause

- **Although** I missed my friends ...
- **Because** I ran out of gas ...
- **Even though** I didn't know the correct answer ...
- ... **because** I said so!
- ... **even if** you don't believe it.

Possible Answers

- I missed my friends.
- **Because** I ran out of gas, I had to walk to work.
- **Even though** I didn't know the correct answer, I made a lucky guess.
- You're going to eat your spinach **because** I said so!
- Summer will return **even if** you don't believe it.