

1. Sentence Fragments

In order to punctuate sentences correctly and avoid fragments, we need to know the difference between two kinds of word groups: **phrases and clauses**.

We can see the difference in the following two groups of words:

1. birds from the big tree
2. birds fly from the big tree

In the second group of words, we can identify a subject-verb unit, while in the first we cannot.

To find the subject-verb units in sentences, follow these two steps:

1. First find the verb by applying the time test: change the time or tense of the sentence; the word you change is the verb.

In number 2, we can change

- Birds *fly* from the big tree.
to: Birds *flew* from the big tree. (yesterday)
or: Birds *will fly* from the big tree. (tomorrow)

When we change the time, we have to change *fly* to *flew* or to *will fly*, so *fly* is the verb.

2. To find the subject, ask "Who or what does the action of the verb?" Who "fly?" The answer is birds, so birds is the subject of the verb. Alternatively, one can ask what is the first noun in the sentence, and that is almost always going to be the subject of the sentence.

A **clause** is a group of words with a subject-verb unit; the 2nd group of words contains the subject-verb unit *birds fly*, so it is a clause.

A **phrase** is a group of words without a subject-verb unit. If we try to change the time or tense of the 1st group of words, we cannot, because it contains no word that changes to show time or tense. It has no verb, so it can't have a subject-verb unit. It is a phrase.

Proofreading for Fragments:

1. Read your writing out loud, stopping at each period. Often you can hear that something is incomplete.
2. Proofread by looking at every group of words that begins with a capital letter and ends with a period.

If a subordinator begins a sentence, check to make sure that the subordinate or dependent clause is joined to an independent clause. Subordinators must join two logically-related ideas into one sentence.

If there is no subordinator in the sentence, check to make sure the sentence has a subject-verb unit. If it doesn't, it is a phrase and should most likely be joined to either the previous sentence or the next sentence.

Exercise 1

Which of the following groups of words are phrases? Which are clauses? Following the guidelines for finding subject-verb units in sentences, label each one.

Example: my cousin in Virginia phrase

 my cousin lives in Virginia clause

1. a long, unpleasant trip
2. we took a long, unpleasant trip
3. some teachers have no sense of humor at all
4. teachers with no sense of humor at all
5. the creep in my psychology class
6. a small town near Half Moon Bay
7. he lives in El Granada, a small town near Half Moon Bay
8. he forgot his wallet
9. we share our money with our friends
10. rooms full of old paper, rusty kitchen equipment, and broken furniture
11. the first day of the month
12. many cats in my neighborhood are strays

Special Kinds of Phrases:

- 1) **-ing phrases:** When you look for verbs in sentences, remember that the *-ing* form of a word cannot be a verb all by itself, so the group of words

the sweat dripping from his forehead

is a phrase, not a clause. To make this phrase into a clause, we need to complete the verb by adding a form of the verb *be*:

The sweat *was dripping* from his forehead.

We can make sure that an *-ing* word is part of a verb, by checking to see if the *-ing* word follows a form of the verb *to be* (*am, is, are, was, were, will be, has been, have been, had been, will have been*).

Examples: Trevor is *working* in a bank.

Trevor *was working* in a bank last year.

Trevor *has been working* in a bank for three years.

2) **another kind of phrase:** It's obvious that "happy people" is a phrase. But so is "people who are happy." A special kind of phrase follows this pattern:

noun + who	people who are happy
noun + which	habits which annoy me
noun + that	dog that lives next door

Even though these structures contain a verb, they are still considered phrases because the noun before the *who*, *which*, or *that* does not have its own verb. These phrases modify nouns in sentences:

People *who are happy* often have creative hobbies.

My brother has many habits *which annoy me*.

The dog *that lives next door* is friendly to everyone.

Exercise 2

Which of the following groups of words are phrases? Which are clauses? Label each one. Review the previous page if you have difficulty.

Examples:	hoping to catch the bus	phrase
	she ran down the street, hoping to catch the bus	clause
	the man who lives next door	phrase
	she met the man who lives next door	clause

1. thinking about how to pass the course
2. he stayed up all night, thinking about how to pass the course
3. students were lying all over the grass
4. my girlfriend loves me
5. the girl who loves me
6. rear tires spinning and engine roaring
7. a trait that I share with many others
8. the desk near the window
9. he has a favorite place to study, the desk near the window
10. she was waiting by the café
11. her friend standing in the corner
12. the book that I bought yesterday
13. cruising down Market Street in his Porsche
14. the man that I married
15. he is my best friend, the man that I married

16. her hair blowing in the wind

17. she cruised down Market Street in her convertible, her hair blowing in the wind

18. a world in which no one listens to anybody else

Two Kinds of Clauses

You now know what a clause is, but there are two kinds of clauses you need to know about: **dependent and independent**. To see the difference between the two kinds, read the examples below:

1. Mary likes the clown. (independent clause)

2. *because* Mary likes the clown (dependent clause)

Words like *because* are called **subordinators**. When we use a subordinator at the beginning of a clause, the clause becomes dependent (or subordinate) and can no longer stand alone as a sentence. Dependent clauses (subordinate clauses) should always be attached to independent clauses.

Examples: *Because* Mary likes the clown, she goes to the circus often. = sentence
dependent clause + independent clause

Mary goes to the circus often *because* she likes the clown. = sentence
independent clause + dependent clause

Some Common Subordinators

as	wherever	as if
as long as	while	as though
as soon as	though	because
after	although	since
before	even though	so that
by the time	even if	that
until	if	who/whom
when	unless	whose
whenever	whether	which

Remember: When we join two logically-related ideas with subordinators, the two ideas must be in the same sentence.

Exercise 3

Identify the following as independent or dependent clauses.

Examples: although the issue is complicated D (Dependent)

 people have strong opinions I (Independent)

1. whenever I feel bored
2. she proposed to me
3. although I am her cousin
4. Charles says he loves me
5. because I was tired
6. before the semester began
7. while I was sitting on the park bench
8. my roommate intends to finish college
9. after Arlene left for Chicago
10. wherever you may go
11. since Mary and Jack got married
12. many people hate to write
13. unless you stop doing that right now
14. even though Sherry knows

Fragments

Sentence fragments are phrases or dependent clauses punctuated as if they were complete sentences.

Exercise 4

In the exercise below, all of the groups of words are punctuated as complete sentences, but some are dependent clauses, so they are fragments. Identify each group of words as a sentence or a fragment.

Examples: When I went to the bookstore. fragment

 I went to the bookstore. sentence

1. Since I had nothing else for lunch today except a hamburger.

2. If I could be alone to work on my homework.
3. She has been a nurse for ten years.
4. Because she's a wonderful person with all kinds of unusual talents.
5. While Mary loves chocolate.
6. Success comes to people who work hard.
7. Although I do not enjoy hard work.
8. When exams are just around the corner.
9. Because the afternoon was cold enough for a sweater.
10. I wish you would begin at the beginning of the story.

Exercise 5

In the following exercise, all of the groups of words are punctuated as sentences, but some are phrases, so they are fragments. Identify each group of words as a sentence or fragment.

Examples: The man in the checkered suit. fragment

The man is wearing a checkered suit. sentence

1. Before the darkest part of the evening.
2. A laboratory for the study of animal life in the South Pacific.
3. We all worked on making the lunch for the whole group.
4. Many times in the past, I have gone to his parties.
5. Enjoyable, crowded parties with good music, many people, and wonderful food and wine.
6. Such as snakes, rats, and insects.
7. For example, the ugly car that he drives.
8. He became bored during the lecture.
9. His eyes staring vacantly ahead.
10. Good friends all the way through college, both in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Exercise 6

In each of the following pairs, underline the fragment.

Examples: Marian bought a lottery ticket. Hoping to win a million dollars.

Marian bought a lottery ticket. Because she wanted to win a million dollars.

1. College is much more difficult than high school. Even though students spend fewer hours in class every day.
2. I dislike teachers who grade unfairly. Especially those who give higher grades to their favorite students.
3. Helen studies at least five hours every day. Always trying to keep up her g.p.a.
4. Because most people who watch MTV on a regular basis are very young. Performers such as Frank Sinatra and Peggy Lee do not appear on this music channel.
5. I study on weekends. Because on weekdays, I work at a cafe after school.
6. I am taking a number of difficult courses this semester. For example, Spanish, economics, and microbiology.
7. I only sleep four hours a night. Which is not enough sleep for me to feel rested the next day.
8. I am majoring in business. A very difficult and time-consuming major.

What do you notice about the position of most of the fragments in relation to the sentences? Most fragments follow the sentences to which they should be attached. Some people automatically put a period at the end of each sentence. Without waiting until they decide whether they want to add more to the sentence. In doing so, they often create a fragment—as I just did. Can you spot it? Identify it by underlining it.

Because most fragments follow the sentences to which they should be attached, they are easy to correct. Simply join them to the sentences they follow.

Exercise 7

Now go back and correct the sentences in Exercise 6.

Examples: Marion often goes to Las Vegas, hoping to win a million dollars.

Marion often goes to Las Vegas because she wants to win a million dollars.